



# **LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**

Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY**

## **Community Livelihood Enhancement and Resilience “CLEAR” Project (P178545)**

### **RAPID ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL ASSESSMENT**

**Draft Version for Public Consultation**

14 March 2023

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Rapid Environmental and Social Assessment (RESA) is to identify and assess environmental and social contexts, risks and impacts of the investment activities proposed under the Community Livelihood Enhancement And Resilience (CLEAR) project, as well as to promote equal opportunity and inclusion through design of the CLEAR project. Based on the assessment, mitigation measures and development enhancement approach will be proposed and integrated into the design and implementation of the CLEAR project's activities, and E&S instrumentss include ESMF, SEP, LMP, PRF, and ESCP will be developed and implemented.

The CLEAR project is being built on the results of PRF III. To leverage the secondary data that are available from PRF III, the Rapid ESA will be based on the review, the data collection/field work and meetings/consultations with key stakeholders (including the design teams and the consultants carrying out other assessments) to assess the achievements and challenges made under PRF III, meanwhile examining the E&S risks and impacts associated with the new investment activities under the CLEAR project.

Consultation was conducted as part of RESA exercise to collect data and information for preparation of E&S instrumentss.

The purpose of consultation for the ESA is to a) solicit feedback from some selected key project stakeholders who have been participating in PRF III on the management of ES risk and impact; C) use such feedback as lessons learned/ opportunities for enhanced project design under CLEAR through the promotion of equal opportunities for participation and inclusion by all target project beneficiaries as well as to be more effective and practical on ways to avoid and manage the risk related to environment, health, and safety especially those related to UXO and different types and locations of civil works. The Rapid ESA also looked in the contexts (i.e. how risks/opportunities apply to different groups of people – vulnerable including ethnic minorities; different priorities, how different groups (i.e. ethnic minorities) are socially structured etc. Key group of stakeholders to be consulted are presented under the Methods section.

Feedback (as primary data) are collected through this consultation includes the following key aspects:

- Aspects of PRF III ESMF implementation that have worked well, especially those related to safety of workers and wastes management.
- Aspects that could be further improved (through lessons learned from PRF III), including those related to environment, health, and safety
- Opportunities and challenges under CLEAR (considering also new province), including those related to natural disaster, risk related to awareness and practices on covid-19, risk related to UXO and others disaster (fire, forest fire, etc.), knowledge and use of pesticides/fertilizer,

## 2. METHODS

This RESA was conducted based on a combination of review of relevant literature (secondary data) and consultation with stakeholders of the project (primary data). Meetings were hold with beneficiaries who are members of village authorities, self-help groups (SHG), mothers with children under two, village facilitators, community mobilizers. Meetings were also conducted with project staff at district level and subsequently with national level to share preliminary feedback of both beneficiariies and project staff based in the project sites. Consultation was also held with stakeholders from ministry of planning and investment and ministry of health to share feedback from the the field and project staff based in Xiengkhouang province and additional telephone interviews with village facilitators in Huaphan and Sekong Provinces for validation, and for double checking if the feedback/observations

from Xiengkhouang have similarities with beneficiaries and project staff in other three project provinces.

**Key group of stakeholders:**

The consultation under CLEAR covered both affected stakeholder and interested stakeholders.

Project affected stakeholders include individuals, groups, communities and local organizations (department of agriculture and forestry, department finance and planning)

**Project beneficiaries:**

- Beneficiary households selected for consultation (Nutrition, Livelihood, Community Development, Producers (who members are from Self-Help Group)
- Households with voluntary contributions, land replacements and cash compensations<sup>1</sup>

**Project implementation team**

- Nutrition and Community Development team, and Livelihood work team
- Local authorities

**Data collection techniques:**

Techniques used for the consultation include: 1) Key informant interview, 2) Focus group discussion, 3) Field observation, as well as data collected through desk review of existing documents available under PRF.

**Key Informant Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with selected project key stakeholders at district and village levels, including:

- DAFO and existing PRF III district teams (Nutrition, Community Development, Livelihood, Technical Assistance/Engineering)
- Representative of village authority including village women union and ethnic groups representatives.
- HH with voluntary contributions, land replacements and cash compensations<sup>2</sup>

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** Groups of men and group of women from Ethnic Minorities

- Group of Women (from Self-Help Groups) who benefit from Pro-Nutrition Activities, Financial Literacy, Nutrition practices, etc.
- Group of Men (from Producer Groups) who benefit from project support (e.g. business plan, producer business management, use of production tools...)
- Targeted Self-Help Groups (SHG)

**Field Observation:** While carrying out assessment process, the team also recorded what they've seen by taking notes, video recording and photos of the existing social and natural environments, which also provided sufficient, relevant and updated information on the physical, biological, economic,

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the Technical Assessment and Outcomes Survey 2022: Around 20% or 18 of sub-projects reported social impacts on personal property which were satisfactorily resolved through voluntary contributions, land replacements and cash compensations

<sup>2</sup> Based on the Technical Assessment and Outcomes Survey 2022: Around 20% or 18 of sub-projects reported social impacts on personal property which were satisfactorily resolved through voluntary contributions, land replacements and cash compensations

social, cultural and visual components. This also included geographical and socio-economic context of the district and village. Prior permission, by verbally asking for consent before each interview/consultation, was sought by the assessment team on whether they are fine with having photos taken, or their video recorded. All of the people consulted agreed to this request and happy for the assessment to take their pictures and videos.

### **Section of Study site**

- Due to time constraint and because the other teams already conducted information in other parts of the project areas, the result of the study from the other teams is used as secondary data to complement this ESA. And only one province (Xiengkhoang Province, Nonghet District) is selected for the RESA. Two villages of Nonghet District were selected (including Pha-Lin village (a poorer village where PRF provided them with gravity-fed water supply under PRF II and rural access road under PRF III, the village also established a nutrition groups and SHGs) and Nong-Lae village (PGs village).
- It is noted that some villages in Nonghet District are likely to be included under CLEAR.

## **3. FINDINGS**

### **3.1 Poverty Profile in Laos PDR**

This section (3.1) is drawn from the WB report published in 2020, namely, Lao PDR Poverty Profile – Poverty Report for the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018-2019. The information in Section 3.1 provide a snapshot of the poverty of Laos (six project provinces are marked with yellow bar).

#### **3.1.1 Overview of Poverty in Laos and in Project Provinces**

According the WB 2020 (WB - 2020 - Lao PDR Poverty Profile), the national poverty headcount rate in 2018/19, estimated using the revised poverty methodology, was 18.3 percent. This indicates that almost a fifth of the Lao PDR population were living on less than LAK 9,364 a day (approximately USD 1.10, or 2.40 per person per day in 2011 PPP USD). Although Poverty in Lao PDR continues to decline, the impact of growth on poverty reduction was low. Between 2012/13 and 2018/19, the annual GDP growth rate averaged about 7 percent, and GDP per capita grew at an annual rate of 5.6 percent. But a one-percent increase in GDP per capita during this period was associated with a mere 0.67 percent decline in the poverty rate. Average consumption grew by only 3.3 percent, falling behind the rate of economic growth.

Poverty has fallen more rapidly in rural areas than in urban areas The depth and severity of poverty followed a similar trend, declining markedly in rural areas while remaining largely unchanged in urban areas. Poverty depth, as measured by the poverty gap, is the extent to which individuals fall below the poverty line. The larger the poverty gap, the poorer on average people below the poverty line are, **and the more resources are needed to lift them out of poverty.**

According to the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS) that was implemented between June 2018 and May 2019, the following key findings are important:

- Poverty declined from 24.6 percent in 2012/13 to 18.3 percent in 2018/19. The rate of poverty reduction has been rapid in rural areas, while urban poverty reduction has stagnated.
- The incidence of poverty is typically higher among agricultural households, Hmong-lumien households and households headed by a person who has not completed lower secondary education or an unemployed person, and such gaps have widened.
- Multidimensional poverty declined between 2012/13 and 2018/19, especially in rural areas, the northern region and the southern region, mirroring a decline in monetary poverty.

- Notwithstanding improvements in monetary indicators of poverty and non-monetary aspects of household welfare, food insecurity remains a pressing problem among low-income households in rural areas.

In project provinces, poverty remains among the highest compared to other provinces. Project provinces are marked in yellow shade below.

**Table 1 - Poverty and Distribution of The Poor by Province (2012/13–2018/19)**

	Poverty Headcount Rate			Poverty Gap			Squared Poverty Gap		
	2013	2019	Change	2013	2019	Change	2013	2019	Change
Lao PDR	24.6	18.3	-6.3	5.9	3.9	-2.0	2.1	1.3	-0.8
Vientiane Capital	2.5	5.0	2.5	0.3	1.0	0.7	0.1	0.3	0.3
<b>North</b>									
Phongsaly	19.9	8.1	-11.8	3.4	1.2	-2.2	0.9	0.3	-0.6
Luangnamtha	25.0	10.5	-14.4	4.5	1.9	-2.6	1.2	0.6	-0.6
Oudomxay	36.6	29.2	-7.5	8.9	6.4	-2.5	2.9	2.0	-1.0
Bokeo	51.8	19.4	-32.4	15.0	4.2	-10.8	5.9	1.3	-4.5
Luangprabang	30.0	20.4	-9.6	6.8	3.1	-3.7	2.1	0.7	-1.4
Huaphanh	45.4	26.6	-18.8	13.3	5.8	-7.5	5.3	1.8	-3.5
Xayabury	15.7	21.1	5.4	2.7	4.5	1.8	0.7	1.5	0.8
<b>Central</b>									
Xiengkhuang	34.3	26.0	-8.2	8.6	6.2	-2.3	3.1	2.2	-0.9
Vientiane	10.9	5.3	-5.6	1.6	1.0	-0.6	0.3	0.3	-0.1
Borikhamxay	14.7	20.6	5.9	2.9	5.1	2.2	0.9	1.8	0.9
Khammuane	25.2	25.5	0.3	6.6	5.1	-1.5	2.3	1.5	-0.8
Savannakhet	29.1	27.5	-1.5	6.2	6.5	0.3	2.0	2.3	0.3
Xaysomboun		8.2			1.3			0.3	
<b>South</b>									
Saravane	52.1	24.9	-27.2	16.8	5.6	-11.2	6.8	1.9	-4.9
Sekong	44.4	30.6	-13.8	13.3	6.2	-7.1	5.7	1.9	-3.8
Champasack	19.6	8.7	-10.9	4.0	1.8	-2.3	1.2	0.5	-0.7
Attapeu	9.1	27.8	18.8	1.4	5.7	4.4	0.3	2.0	1.7

Source World Bank, 2020, Poverty Profile in Lao PDR.

### 3.1.2 Vulnerable and poor groups

Households headed by an agricultural self-employed person and an unemployed or economically inactive person have the highest poverty rates. It was noted, in particular, that **poverty rate among people living in households headed by an unemployed or economically inactive person is 21.3 percent**. About 90 percent of unemployed household heads were previously engaged in agricultural activities but have **become unemployed due to seasonality**, while economically inactive persons are mostly the elderly. Poverty remains high and persistent among households headed by an agricultural

self-employed person (24.6 percent in 2018/19) albeit falling by 7.3 percentage points over the previous six years. These households together with households headed by a seasonally unemployed person constitute 75 percent of the poor. Conversely, the poverty rate of households headed by wage workers and nonfarm self-employed workers is low, with each estimated to be around 5 percent in 2018/19, a marked decline from 9 percent in 2012/13.

**Remittances from migrants have become an important source of income.** In 2018/19, **14 percent of the population lived in households that received remittances**, up from 11 percent in 2012/13. The poverty rate among remittance-receiving households has fallen from 13.8 percent in 2012/13 to 10.2 percent in 2018/19: almost half the poverty rate than those without remittances.

It is noted that the **incidence of poverty is higher among households headed by the non-secondary educated, the unemployed, the Hmong-lumien persons and individuals self-employed in farming.** The Hmong-lumien group has also experienced the slowest pace of poverty reduction, with gaps between them and other ethnic groups widening as a result.

### 3.1.3 Key Ethnic Groups in Project Areas

There are various ethnic groups present in the project provinces (as in table below). However, key ethnic groups that are included as current beneficiaries include two groups: Lao, Tai, Phong, Thai, Lue, Yuan, Yang, Aesk, Thai Nue, Khmu, and Pair.

No.	Province	No. of ethnic groups	Some of the identified main ethnic groups
1	Phongsaly	28	Khmu, Hmong, Yao, Akha, Phounoy Tai Lue, Hor, Sylu, Hayi, Lolo
2	Oudomxay	20	Khmu, Hmong, Yao, Akha, Lahu, Lanten, Tai Daeng,
3	Huaphan	22	Khmu, Hmong, Yao, Tai Dam, Tai Daeng, Tai Phuan
4	Xiangkhouang	5	Khmu, Hmong, Yao, Tai (Tai Phuan, Tai Dam, Tai Daeng)
5	Salavan	14	Alak, Katou, Lavene, Yae, Pako, Phuthai, Souay, Ta-Oy, and Tong
6	Sekong	N/A	Triang, Yae, Katu and Ha Luk, Brou, Broa

Of the ten ethnic groups who are currently beneficiaries, Hmong, Khmu, Akha, Phong, Phounoi, Lao are the major beneficiary groups. General characteristics of these groups are described below:

#### ▪ Hmong

There are 376 HHs living in the project area, primarily in Xayabouly (257 households in Phieng and Xienghonne districts, 106 hhs in Bolikhamxay).

Hmong Khao (“White” Hmong) is one of five Hmong sub-groups present in Lao PDR. After Khmu, Hmong has the largest population of all ethnic groups in the country. The Hmong trace their origins in Lao PDR to waves of migration from China in the early years of the 19th century. Causes for this migration attributed by both Hmong respondents and research sources include historical conflict between Hmong and Han Chinese, population growth, unacceptable burden of taxation and refusal to integrate with Han Chinese. Migrated Hmong are now found throughout the northern provinces of Lao PDR, southern Yunnan, northern Viet Nam and northern Thailand.

Typically, Hmong have settled in the highest areas of the upland, even preferring to be buried on mountain tops. They have a reputation of being both hard working and more recently, assertive in Oudomxay Province over acquiring land and property. Hmong Khao are also structured by clans, or seng (e.g., Toe, Veu, Tsiong, Moa, Lee, Va, Ya, Ha, Ja, and Keu). The seng determines the boundaries

of land and property rights, and protects the role of men as transmitters of those rights by constraining women's choices, particularly as to who and when a woman may marry.

The Hmong are an Asian ethnic group from the mountainous regions of China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. Hmong are also one of the sub-groups of the Miao ethnicity in Southern China. Historically, Hmong society is patriarchal. The Hmong culture usually consists of a dominant hierarchy within the family. Males hold dominance over females and thus, a father is considered the head in each household. Hmong are generally group oriented, so the interests of the group come before the interests of individuals. They belong to the Hmong-luMien ethno-linguistic group and either speak the "Hmong Der" (White Hmong) or "Mong Leng" (Green Hmong) dialect. Hmong are skilled at hunting, mixing herbal medicines and raising animals, particularly horses. Hmong believe in a variety of natural, ancestral and supernatural spirits and their religious practices incorporate elements of ancestor worship. Intricate embroidery and heavy silver jewelry adorn their clothes. The Hmong constitute about 8% of the Lao PDR population. In the past, the Hmong used to be called the Miao or Lao Soung. Lao Soung means "Lao of the mountaintops." The expression refers to where the Hmong traditionally liked to live. These names are no longer considered appropriate, and the Hmong prefer to be called by their ethnic group name. The Hmong are a proud ethnic group, maintaining their distinctive culture and traditions. They cannot marry within their clan, or even a person of their own family name. This means that men and women often have to find a spouse from outside of their village. Traditionally after marriage, a woman will then follow her husband and sever ties with her parents. The Hmong practiced shifting cultivation of unirrigated upland crops; buckwheat, barley, and millet were grown at the highest altitudes, and rice and corn (maize) at lower elevations. Virgin forest was cleared and burnt off for the planting of new fields; when soil fertility declined (usually after several decades), the entire village would relocate. New villages could be a considerable distance away from a group's previous locale. In the late 19th century the opium poppy was introduced into the highlands by outside traders, and the Hmong began to cultivate it in an integrated cycle together with corn and dry rice. They sold opium to itinerant traders, usually Chinese, in return for silver. By the late 20th century, shifting cultivation had become impracticable except in a few remote areas. In response to government programs in Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, the Hmong have now largely abandoned shifting cultivation and opium production. They have instead turned to the permanent-field cultivation of crops such as rice and corn or the gardening of flowers, fruits, and vegetables, which they sell in lowland markets.

#### ▪ **Khmu**

The Khmu people are the oldest inhabitants of northern Lao PDR, and are now settled throughout all Northern provinces and as far as Bolikhamxay Province. Next to the Lao Loum, they are numerically the largest ethnic group in the country. They have eight sub-groups which co-reside, for example Khmu-Rok, Khmu-Lue, Khmu-Ou, and Khmu-Khlong. Khmu are strongly governed by spirits, both benevolent and dangerous, which influence foundations of customary law. The world of the spirits consistently influences gender relations, land use and property rights, and change disturbs the relationship between the Khmu and the external world. Different levels of spirits govern different choices made by men and women – some spirits are territorial, associated with particular places or locations, others are associated with the village and under the authority of the territorial spirit. The belief in spirits can influence the choices made by men and women in their daily routine, seasonal activities, property rights and relationships between the sexes. Other spirits govern the structure of the household and are normally ancestral who continue to protect the well-being of families. Lastly, there are individual spirits, linked to the household.

Each sub-group may be composed of several patrilineal clans called "ta". Ta names are totemic, meaning they are taken from a natural object, or animal, or bird, to which the clan considers itself closely related and usually has prohibitions associated with the totem. Among Khmu Lue in Oudomxay, ta may include Teu Mong (a kind of civet cat), Teu va (a kind of fern), Teu Kok (a species of bird), etc.



The totem is the household spirit, and membership of a “ta” depends in which house a child is born. Ta membership determines marriage choices and by association, property rights.

The Khmu are an ethnic group of Southeast Asia. The majority (88%) live in northern Laos where they constitute one of the largest ethnic groups, comprising eleven percent of the total population. The Khmu were the indigenous inhabitants of northern Laos. It is generally believed that the Khmu once inhabited a much larger area but after the influx of Thai/Lao peoples into the lowlands of Southeast Asia, the Khmu were forced to higher ground (Lao Theung), above the rice-growing lowland Lao but below the Hmong/Mien groups (Lao Sung) that inhabit the highest regions, where they practiced swidden agriculture. The Khmu of Laos resides mainly in the North, ranging across 10 provinces including Luang Prabang, Phongsaly, Oudomxay, Bokeo and Lung Namtha Provinces. The Khmu language belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language family, in which several closely related languages are grouped together forming the Khmuic branch. The Khmu are an agricultural society, although gathering, hunting, trapping and fishing are parts of the Khmu lifestyle. Khmu crops include rice (especially white and black sticky rice), corn, bananas, sugar cane, cucumbers, beans, sesame and a variety of vegetables. Most of the agricultural work in Khmu villages is done communally, so as to combine the strength and finish the work quickly. Harvesting of wild rice is generally performed by the village women. Rice is stored outside the village in elevated structures to protect from mice and rats. Khmu elders are traditionally the most important people of the village, and are responsible for resolving all village disputes. Village leaders included the shaman (knowledgeable in spiritual medicine), the medicine man (knowledgeable in herbal medicine), the priest (based on family lineage of priesthood), and the village headman (in modern times chosen by the Laotian government). Laotian Khmu communities generally have localized justice systems administered by the village elders. Although the Khmu is the second largest ethnic group in Laos, they are also the poorest. Throughout the history of Laos, the Khmu have lacked political power, education and a role in administration. The results of a study on Khmu women show that they experience barriers to participation in project activities. The barriers include language; education; cultural norms; health issues; workload; resettlement; poverty; low self-esteem; staff and project approach; the village administrative structure; fewer opportunities with development projects; and limited formal access and control over assets. To overcome these barriers and to participate in development projects Khmu women would benefit from greater support from project staff such as teacher/trainer; learner; follower; advisor; demonstrator/role model and advocate. To empower women to overcome barriers themselves and participate more fully in community development requires both men and community to provide support and acceptance.

- **Akha**

The Akha consists of about 14-15 subgroups that share similar livelihoods, but then wear different clothing and have a distinct social structure. Akha women are easily recognizable by their traditional hat, covered with coins representing the wealth of the household. Their villages are situated in remote/isolated areas and up until very recently one would not have found two ethnic groups, including the Akha's subgroups, inhabiting the same village due to their remote location and limited access to government services. This factor is one of the main reasons why most of the Akha ethnic group often have very high illiteracy rates and are unable to understand the Lao language. The Akha subgroup called the Muchi in Phongsaly said in an interview that they don't understand the Language of the Akha subgroups called the Kor in Oudomxay and Luang Namtha. Akha language is part of the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic family.

- **Phong**

The Phong only presence in Houaphan, Vientiane and Xiengkhouang provinces and made up only about 0.5% of Lao population, but it's one of the main targeted ethnic groups covered by the project in Houaphan province. There are four subgroups: Phong-Phane, Phong-Lan, Phong-Pieng and Phong-Poung. They live in isolation and have its own language. Due to living in isolation for many years, and

despite a small group, each subgroup has slightly different dialects. Same as the Khmu and other Mon-Khmer groups, the Phong in still preserve their traditional social structure and distinct ethnic characteristics. It is interesting to note that while their livelihoods and the use of land and forest resources are similar to that of the ethnic groups belong to the Mon-Khmer, they share many characteristics with the Tai and the Lao instead of the Mon-Khmer groups. These include their housing designs, waving styles, religion (Buddhism), ritual ceremony and follow matrilineal clan/custom instead of the patrilineal clan.

- **Yao**

The Yao ethnic group has two distinct subgroups within the Yao ethnic group in Lao PDR, which are known as Yao and Lanten respectively. The subgroups speak different languages, although some of the words are the same, but they may be slightly different meanings. The lowland living Yao speak Kim Mun (also known as Lanten) and the highland Yao speak Lumien. Lumien is very distantly related to the Hmong language. Together they form the Hmong-Mien language family. The Yao men and women cover their head with a black or red scarf. Instead of a scarf, some women wear a turban that may have different forms. The traditional suit of women is long and of bright colors. On their shirts they also wear decorations made of metal, copper and/or silver. Although some Yao have converted to Buddhism philosophy and Christian religion, many still remain practicing their traditional beliefs in seven principle spirits representing humans, animals, fields, forests, sky, water, and earth.

- **Trieng**

The Trieng ethnic group is mostly found in Salavan and Yae, Katu and Ha Luk are mostly found in Sekong. These ethnic groups share similar key characteristics including languages, land, ceremony, beliefs (animism), language, and community cohesion. One of the core beliefs of animism is the worship in ancestral spirits and cemeteries. The cemeteries are mostly forested area and are sacred as a burial place of the deceased from the villages. People are prohibited from entering for any kind of activities such as hunting or collecting timber and NTFPs. In the cemeteries, there are usually small huts of the deceased where the local people believe the spirits of the deceased live. Local villagers offer food, tools, and other worshipping materials to the deceased at these small huts. Each year, villagers perform rituals to pay respect to ancestral spirits, forest spirits, land spirits, village spirits, and evil spirits that can make people fallen ill. Poles located in the middle of the villages are used for securing animals and serve as a place for performing animal sacrifice. In some villages, the sacred houses or Salakuan in the middle of villages are used for performing animal sacrifices. Women and outsiders are strictly forbidden from entering Salakuan. The forest is believed to be inhabited by spirits, one of them is a ghost known as Phi Bang Bot who can make people fall ill and/or die for not asking its permission.

The Trieng, Yae, Katu and Ha Luk believe in asking permission from the spirits prior to doing something, this includes prior to getting marriage and/or having children. When a marriage couple have a child (pregnant) without a proper ritual ceremony with a suitable animal type/size and/or a woman is pregnant without a father, it is considered sinful (*pidhid*) and the woman must leave the village during the childbirth for at least about one to three weeks, depending on their committed sin. During this time, the outcasted woman will live and/or stay in the forest where outsiders, other villagers and men are not allowed to go near her and only a sister or a mother is allowed to visit once every few days to check on her. Poverty also plays a critical role in making woman to suffer this custom belief, the more couples cannot effort a suitable animal such as buffalos, cows, and pigs for the marriage ritual, the more women continue to suffer. Other event involves animal sacrificed is funeral, while dying from old-age is considered a normal event, sudden dead caused by an accident and/or sickness is also considered a sin and requires animal sacrificed. The body from a sudden dead caused by an accident outside the village is not allowed to enter village.

### **3.1.4 Food consumption and food security**

The composition of food expenditure changed slightly between 2012/13 and 2018/19. Overall, households spent a slightly smaller share of their food costs on rice and fish and a greater share on milk, cheese and eggs, vegetables and tubers. Urban households devote a larger share of total food expenditure on beverages, restaurants meals and takeaways (12 percent) than rural households (2.5 percent). Conversely, **shares of rice and fish in total expenditure are higher among rural households** than urban households.

Almost 20 percent of the population experienced moderate-to-severe food insecurity in 2018/19. In 2018/19, **10 percent of the population experienced moderate food insecurity**, meaning they reduced the quality or quantity of their food, and were uncertain about their ability to obtain food due to lack of resources. **This increased their likelihood of malnutrition, including the risk of stunting in children.** In addition, **9 percent of the population faced severe food insecurity, meaning they ran out of food altogether and/or went for a day or more without eating.**

Poor households also spend more on vegetables and tubers while non-poor households spend a greater share on meat, beverages, and restaurants/ takeaway meals. Food poverty and food insecurity are regular occurrences. **Almost 20 percent of the population experienced moderate to severe food insecurity in 2018/19, particularly in rural areas and the central region.**

### **3.1.5 Household assets and living conditions**

Poverty reduction across Lao PDR over the past six years has involved significant improvements to household living conditions. Ownership of consumer durables increased significantly between 2012/13 and 2018/19. Among the poor households, possession of a motorbike, a refrigerator, a steam rice cooker, a television and a mobile phone significant increases – as observed between 2012/13 and 2018/19.

Lao households, including the poor, typically invested in more expensive and better-quality housing materials since the last survey. **Between 2012/13 and 2018/19, poor households typically swapped their roofing material from grass, leaves or wood to metal sheets, while non-poor households upgraded from metal sheets to roofing tiles.**

### **3.1.6 Access to services**

There was a remarkable improvement in access to basic services between 2012/13 and 2018/19. In 2018/19, 92.9 percent of households had access to safe water throughout the year, increasing from 83.8 percent in 2012/13, and approximately 82 percent of households had access to improved sanitation facilities. However, access to all services is significantly lower among the poor when compared to the non-poor. **Access to improved sanitation facilities was 74.3 percent among poor households**, well beneath 97 percent access among the non-poor. The gap is narrower for access to safe water and electricity, however.

Table 2 – Household Access to Improved Water, Sanitation Facilities and Electricity by Province (2018/19)

	Poor				Non-poor			
	Gas and electricity for cooking	Improved sanitation facilities	Safe water	Electricity for lighting	Gas and electricity for cooking	Improved sanitation facilities	Safe water	Electricity for lighting
Borikhamxay	0	100	100	100	6.2	99.4	98.6	99.7
Vientiane Capital	8.3	94.6	100	100	34.9	99.7	100	99.7
Xayabury	0	92.9	100	96.8	2.1	98.8	97.8	99.6
Xaysomboun	0	81.8	93.9	100	6.8	95.9	98.4	99.7
Bokeo	0	75.5	78.7	92.2	11.6	97.6	91.9	100
Xiengkhuang	2.1	74.8	98.1	77	12.8	93.3	96.8	96.9
Luangnamtha	4.5	71.6	98.5	70.4	13.6	90.2	96.9	90.9
Champasack	0	65.1	92.4	97.3	2.9	85.9	96	99.4
Huaphanh	14.7	62.1	100	63.8	10.2	93.8	99.7	91
Oudomxay	4.1	51.9	86	63.9	12.1	81.5	90.4	79.5
Luangprabang	3.4	44.3	91	67.1	10.2	80.8	95.9	87.8
Vientiane	3.8	44.2	95.3	96.7	8.9	98.8	99.6	99
Khammuane	10.7	42	79	91.9	15.1	80.1	95	98.1
Sekong	0.9	37.7	81.7	58.6	1.2	73.9	95.8	75.2
Attapeu	7.5	35.5	87	85.4	13.7	70.2	87.2	93.8
Phongsaly	0	29.7	100	42.3	6	67.7	97.7	77.9
Savannakhet	4.5	28.1	51.4	67.3	12.5	69.3	81.7	93.2
Saravane	6.1	22.3	82.8	80	5.5	64.7	83.9	96

### 3.2 Social capital

“Social capital refers to the internal social and cultural coherence of society, the norms and values that govern interactions among people and the institutions in which they are embedded. Social capital is the glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human well-being. Without social capital, society at large will collapse, and today’s world presents some very sad examples of this” (Grootaert 1998, p.iii). Social capital is a concept that “describes circumstances in which individuals can use membership in groups and networks to secure benefits” (Sobel 2002, p.139). It is used to explain how problems of selfish incentives could be overcome to achieve a mutually beneficial cooperative way of getting things done (Ostrom & Ahn 2003, p. xiv). Social capital implies voluntary cooperation, which is self-enforcing based on informal, unwritten institutions. Voluntary organizations among farmers can help lower the costs thanks to informal transactions, which are not formally sanctioned, and it is not necessary to monitor and enforce all the transitions (Svendsen & Svendsen 2004, p.27).

“Social Capital refers to the norms and networks that enable collective action. It encompasses institutions, relationships, and customs that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interactions” (World Bank 2008). “Social capital represents the degree of social cohesion which exists in communities” and that “it refers to the processes between people which establish networks, norms, and social trust, and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. Social capital is created from the myriad of everyday interactions between people, and is embodied in such structures as civic and religious groups, family membership, informal community networks, and in norms of voluntarism, altruism and trust. The stronger these networks and bonds, the more likely it is that members of a community will co-operate for mutual benefit. In this way social capital creates health, and may enhance the benefits of investments for health” (WHO 1998).

Assessing the stock of social capital in Laos, Sounthone Phommasone and Phosy Chanhming (2014) noted that social capital in Lao is still strong, indicative of network mechanism, ritual activities, social trust, norm, value, and livelihood being interwoven into a strong social texture. Social system functions as a pre-requisite for the formal administrative authority. Both informal and formal organizations play very significant roles of strengthening, developing, and passing social capital from generation to generation. In particular, they noted that:

- Mutual support among rural people is still strong. This is Supporting mechanism for social ties
- Mutual help system has been created and passed on from generation to generation (e.g. house building, and other activities that need mental and physical support)
- Communal agriculture work (mutual support albeit) is till practice despite increasing hired of labor among ethnic minorities to rotate the plantation or harvesting from one family to another, particularly in relatives and close acquaintances.
- Seniority support: conflict resolution, mental and physical support.
- Informal social support on birth, death, marriage, illnesses. Strong support from the
- villagers, relatives, friends, and the whole community has been practiced.

### 3.3 Gender

#### 3.3.1 Gender lessons learned from PRF III-AF

Based on the World Bank's 2022 Gender Analysis for Lao PDR's CLEAR project, the following key lessons learned have been drawn:

**Decision-making.** The Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) project, which has been implemented for over twenty years, introduced critical innovations to increase women's participation in economic benefits and engagement in local decision-making. It includes separate village development planning meetings for men and women to facilitate women's communication in settings where they feel more comfortable exchanging views. Larger community meetings require at least one representative of each household (with a minimum representation of 80 percent of households) and at least 50 percent of women participants (two out of 3 hamlet representatives must be women). To ensure women's needs are identified and prioritized in the village development planning process, three of the top five priorities selected for investment are required to come from women groups. Two out of three facilitators hired at the community level were women. However, according to an evaluation of PRF I and II conducted by IEG linguistic and cultural barriers to a fuller engagement of women and especially from ethnic groups remained and limited their participation<sup>3</sup> and was also pointed out by PRF staff.

**Economic opportunities.** Under PRF III (2020-present), women have been mobilized into dedicated Self-Help Groups (SHG) which focus on opportunities for increased household income. More than 972 SHGs have been established, with 12,145 members, most of whom have been women (81 percent). Loans have been used to start pro-nutrition livelihood activities such production of small livestock and horticulture for own consumption and sales. Monthly household income is reported to have increased from USD 8.75 in 2017 to USD 75 in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, under PRF II, a Road Maintenance Group (RMG) program prioritized women's enrolment, allowing to increase women's access to paid work and earnings.<sup>5</sup> Viewing the labor-intensive task of carrying out road maintenance as a way to create jobs for women from vulnerable households and in villages where earning opportunities were limited; women were organized in RMGs. These were trained and provided with basic hand tools with wage payments were paid monthly at a fixed-daily

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<sup>3</sup> Poverty Reduction Fund Project, PPAR, IEG, 2016

<sup>4</sup> PRF III, 2019

<sup>5</sup> The additional income complemented other income sources.

rate. According to an Impact evaluation conducted the program had positive impact on women's decision-making<sup>6</sup> within the household and voice in the community but was found not to impact their ability to influence non-farm investments. Women from and saving; the risk of losing investments and their ability to maintain them; lack of poorer households saw a lower increase in income compared to women from less poor households. Relatively fewer poor RMG women allocated more of their hours to the program while their households as a whole diversified their income. Poorer households may not have been able to reallocate women's labor hours from other pursuits to RMG work.<sup>7</sup> Constraints to women enjoying the full benefits of the RMG program included: the trade-off between using income for consumption versus investing markets and inputs, including labor and land; women's lack of knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

**Endowments. The project also enrolled 1,000-day women into farmer nutrition groups.** In these peer-learning groups the PRF tested innovative ways of learning for women E.g. peer-to-peer learning was tested through multi-media peer learning by having women produce community videos in their local languages, e.g. on new recipes, and new crops they planted. These community videos complemented technical message delivery from the Ministry of Health. Also, fact sheets on nutritious crops were produced as audio materials in local languages, which women could play on their phones. The PRF also found that men change behavior if they see benefits and are given a clear role. For example, men appreciate more diversified and tasty meals as well helping their wives during the 1,000 day window after understanding the risks from too heavy workload. Up until now, the power from spousal communication remains untapped in SBCC delivery.

It is noted that two main gender gaps will be addressed through project activities, through fully-fledged gender results chain and outcome-level indicators:

1. **Inequality in community leadership positions and participation in local decision-making between women and men.** The first gender results chain will be pursued through a phased roll-out of a community-strengthening training program, while strengthening existing participatory processes in community decision-making.
2. **Unequal vulnerabilities in health and nutrition between women and men due to women's biological role in reproduction.** The second will be pursued through strengthened nutrition-related social and behavioral change communication and capacity building on food production and processing.

### 3.3.2 Gender Analysis

**According to the World Bank's 2022 Gender Analysis for Lao PDR's CLEAR project, Lao PDR achieved rapid growth and significant poverty reduction before the COVID-19 pandemic, though inequality widened.** The national poverty rate fell from 24.6 percent in 2012 to 18.3 percent in 2018 and access to basic services, education, and health outcomes improved (World Bank 2022). However, poverty remains high by regional standards and concentrated among subsistence farmers and minority ethno-linguistic groups, who are among the targeted beneficiaries of CLEAR. The CLEAR project area covers Laos' Northern and Southern rural mountainous areas, which are home to many ethnic groups, whose socio-economic status is poorer than for those living in the lower Mekong Corridor. A combination of land tenure insecurity, lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (with additional pressures brought about by climate change), and increased investment by foreign-operated agribusinesses are believed to be additional risk factors in the CLEAR project provinces, particularly for women and girls.

**Gender-based violence remains a significant risk in Laos, which is also perpetuated by child marriage, high adolescent birth rates, and harmful social norms**—and further exacerbated by COVID-

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<sup>6</sup> Increase in decision-making was significant in one dimension: increasing the likelihood that they are final decision-makers in at least on decision.

<sup>7</sup> IE: Maximizing benefits of public workfare programs for the poorest in Laos, EAPGIL, 2020

<sup>8</sup> Ibid



19 lockdowns. In Laos, it was shown that girls who marry before the age of 18 are at increased risk of experiencing violence, as they lack status and bargaining power within the household. They are more likely to be physically and mentally abused by family, their husbands, or in-laws, and more likely to be isolated from the community (World Bank Lao PDR CGAP 2017). Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a priority for the Government of Lao PDR, as indicated in the Fourth Five Year Action Plan on Gender Equality 2021-2025 and the National Action Plan on Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children in for 2021-2025, but the challenge is complex and new risks are increasing. Accelerated regional integration and cross-border movement has brought about increased risk of human trafficking for rural women and girls. The Lao PDR-Thailand is one of the main regional migration corridors. According to the US State Department 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report for Laos, the country “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking”, and there was a lack of progress in the last reporting period. Communities in proximity to large-scale infrastructure projects are at elevated risk of forced labor in relation.

**Education plays a significant role in protecting women and girls from EMAP risk, improving health and nutrition outcomes, and providing girls with better economic opportunities.** Girls and boys are enrolled equally in early childhood education in the Lao PDR (34 percent female and 30 male) and the country has nearly achieved gender parity at the primary school level. However, a lower proportion of girls attend each stage of secondary school, with 91 girls attending upper secondary for every 100 boys. In 2017, 41.8 percent of girls aged 15–17 were in school. Girls—especially those from ethnic minorities and poorer families—leave school early at higher rates than boys at every school level, and girls from the lowest wealth quintile are significantly underrepresented in upper secondary school. Adult literacy is also lower among women than men, with a 10.6 percentage points difference; the gap is more pronounced among ethnic groups and older age groups. These gender differences in educational attainment and literacy affect women’s economic opportunities and participation in decision-making. A lack of off-farm employment opportunities drive young people to migrate to cities.

**Women are active participants in Lao PDR’s labor force; however, wage gaps and occupational segregation by gender persist.** The labor force participation of women has improved but remains slightly lower than men’s, with 76.5 percent among females and 79.8 percent among males. There is also a significant gender wage gap, with female employees earning an average of 20 percent less than men. The relatively high rate of female labor force participation is driven to a large extent by women’s engagement in agriculture, often in subsistence farming. Women are more likely to work in the informal sector, engaged in subsistence-level activities working under precarious working conditions with little to no protection and representation (81.3 percent women and 67.5 percent men). Most of the unpaid workers are women; in 2015, 61 percent of unpaid workers were female compared to 26 percent of men. Men compose the majority of civil servants, professionals, technicians, and other positions that require higher education. Conversely, women are overrepresented in low-skill occupations, comprising 71.8 percent of the workforce in the service sector and 63.36 percent in the retail sector.

**Women play a key role in the agriculture sector in Lao PDR; they comprise a little over half of the agricultural workforce and contribute to all parts of agricultural production.** The majority of agricultural production in Laos is driven by smallholder farmers. In 2019, of all women in the labor force, 63.5 percent were employed in agriculture (versus 59.4 percent of working men). Traditionally, women work in the fields (planting, weeding, and harvesting crops) and look after livestock (mostly animals such as pigs, poultry, and goats, while men tend to larger livestock such as cattle). Lowland or upland, decision-making with regard to irrigation and water resource management is often considered men’s work, even though in most cases women manage water at the household level. Division of labor is also apparent in fisheries: women engage in fish ponds and fish culture in rice fields and play a key role in fish processing and marketing. Even though women play a significant role in agriculture, they have unequal access to micro-level agricultural investments. On average, female-headed households have less household labor and productive assets than male-headed households and have

a less diversified crop base than male-headed households. An agricultural issue that has emerged and which is most pressing for women is the level of toxic chemicals that are being used in commercial agriculture, with severe effects on women's health including reproductive health and on children. This is particularly problematic in highland provinces (for ethnic minorities) due to poor soil quality and mountainous terrain (requiring fertilizers).

**Laos is transitioning from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture, which has brought benefits for some but also exacerbated gender disparities and power imbalances in other communities.** Many rural communities are benefitting, as new opportunities for women to undertake paid employment outside the family farm opened, particularly through participation in 'non-traditional export crop production', as contract farmers or direct wage employees. While some work has been done to ensure that local-level contracts between investors and communities are fair and transparent, efforts to ensure that women are meaningfully included in contract farming negotiations and benefit equally are still nascent. For women in poor rural areas, who have lost access to productive land and have not been able to find employment off-farm, commercialization has increased vulnerability. It has also disadvantaged women in non-Lao Tai ethnic groups, who may have limited Lao language skills and lack experience conducting business in a cash economy.

**The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) faces significant sustainability and environmental challenges that are amplified by climate change; Laos' female farmers are less resilient to climate change.** Laos' limited economic resources create challenges for disaster management and climate change adaptation. Hydrological hazards such as flooding, droughts, and storms frequently impact rural areas, affecting the agricultural livelihoods on which most of the population relies. They also cause disease outbreaks, threaten food security, and force communities to migrate due to concerns for personal safety and the security of their livelihoods. Most of the land in the Lao PDR is degraded due to the impacts of droughts, flooding, and landslides, as well as the unsustainable use of natural resources, which has been accelerated by the marketization of agriculture. Female-headed households tend to have less diversified crop production, rendering them less resilient to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters. Also, their limited mobility and voice in community and household decision-making makes them more vulnerable than men to the effects of climate change.

**Traditional gender norms prescribe women's primary role as carers for children and the household in rural areas, limiting their ability to engage in paid productive activities and affecting their "time poverty".** Traditionally, women carry out most tasks within the private sphere (household chores, child-rearing, subsistence farming, etc.), living a life of drudgery while men have greater opportunities to seek paid work outside the household. Women's access to income-generating labor, when it takes place at all for example as a result from increasing agricultural investment, has not lightened these household burdens, creating an unbalanced division of labor in the household. Women are more likely to carry a triple burden of productive, reproductive, and community work, whether paid or, as in most cases, unpaid. Women devote a disproportionate share of their time on unpaid care work, 1.4 times as much as men. In 2018, rural women spent over four times more time on household chores compared to men (208.6 minutes per day versus men's 44.8 minutes per day), limiting their ability to engage in both formal and informal work at the same level as men's. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the disproportionate burden on women of unpaid care work and agricultural labor, as school closures and reduced remittances from migrant workers redefined household structures.

**Under the law, women, men, boys, and girls have equal rights to own and inherit land, but in practice, unequal customary traditions prevail.** Land titling remains limited to urban and peri-urban areas, leaving most rural land untitled and unregistered. Many rural land users, especially women, lack legal documentation for their tenure security. Women are usually not registered on land titles to marital property. While under Lao law men and women have equal status regarding land ownership and land-use rights, and women have the legal capacity to enter into contracts or sign legal documents, in practice it is often the head of household (usually a man) who signs the tenure



document, whether a temporary certificate or a land title. In the 2003 National Land Law, there was a provision requiring both husband and wife to sign a land title or document. However, in 2019 women's land rights have been weakened in the new Land Law (2019) by the removal of dual names (wife and husband) on land titles (from the 2003 Land Law, Article 43) which is a setback for securing land rights for women. With the loss of land, there is the risk of creating unequal gender stereotypes, e.g. women given lower-valued tasks as a housewife and caregivers than in productive agriculture activities.

**According to national policy, women and men have equal access to markets and finance, yet women face constraints in accessing loans and credit.** In 2021, 36.75 percent of men and 37.85 of percent of women had an account; the lowest in the region. Women are deterred from accessing credit and loans due to reasons that are both self-imposed and external. Lack of education and literacy, and the lack of confidence and access to Banks and information, create constraints that limit women, particularly ethnic women, from accessing loans. Although 41 Banks operate in Laos, 83 percent of these banks only have branches in the Capital Vientiane . Local-level banking mechanisms remain difficult for those in rural areas to access, Bank processes are complex and burdensome, and women, therefore, do not engage. The challenges women face in attaining documentation for land ownership contribute to women's lower levels of access to credit, as they lack collateral and thus have more limited opportunities to invest in agricultural tools, technologies, and climate-smart agricultural practices.

**COVID-19 has created new economic inequalities.** The Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) survey on the impact of COVID-19 found that women respondents are slightly more likely to perceive a high risk of ceasing business operations (52 percent versus 48 percent for men). A World Bank survey from July 2020 suggests 8.4 percent of household businesses (and 15.4 percent of small household businesses) are temporarily or permanently closed and many are experiencing a fall in revenue. The same survey found fewer women are remaining with the same job as compared to men, with more women changing their jobs (4.5 percent versus 3.2 percent for men) or currently not working (12.6 percent versus 9.7 percent for men). Of those who stayed employed (non-farm employees and own account workers), more women had a lower income (35.7 percent versus 26.3 percent men).

**Women in Lao PDR remain underrepresented in decision-making institutions, particularly at the local level and in rural areas.** In terms of women's political representation, Lao PDR ranked 102nd out of 188 countries with a 27.5 percent representation of women in Sapha Heng Xat, its national Parliament, in 2020. Women accounted for 31.5 percent of provincial assemblies in 2018. In 2021, Lao PDR had the first female Vice President in its history and the share of women in the civil service reached 46 percent in 2018. Female civil servants work mainly for the Ministry of Public Health (65 percent of its employees are women) or for the Ministry of Education and Sports (51 percent). Taken together, these ministries make up about half of all civil servant positions for women, suggesting large inequalities in other areas, including the sub-commissions for the Advancement of Women across all ministries.

**Women's engagement in political decision-making on issues of rural development, natural resource management, and livelihoods has been limited.** In rural areas, decisions are taken through a village committee comprising the Nai Ban and elected representatives from the village. In 2013, only 1.7 percent of Nai Ban and only five percent of deputy heads were women. The village chief and council hold the power to make decisions within the community, and fewer than three percent of village chiefs are women, and the remaining majority are men. Villages also have a variety of additional committees, focusing on issues such as trade, agriculture, health, education, and security. The Lao Women's Union (LWU) also has a village-level body, which is the main avenue through which village women participate in the village committees. With the exception of the LWU, other committees are almost exclusively composed of men. Within LWU, staff members who work directly on women's empowerment do not feel confident to speak up at meetings and hesitated to express their voices. In

cases where women were elected to local community or project committees, they often just play a “quota role” but are not given the chance to actively advance rural women’s concerns and aspirations.

**Women’s active participation in local decision-making is hindered by a range of constraints.** First, legal and institutional constraints. Law on Local Administration provides that village meetings must be attended by household heads, who are traditionally men. Also, the land title may be considered a prerequisite for participation in community decision-making and resource management, limiting women’s opportunities to participate and lead. While not universal, perceptions about land ownership rights also influence whether women have their names on a land title - women from ethnic groups are most likely to refuse to have their name on the land title, believing that land management is a man’s role.

**Second, skills and often language skills pose barriers, especially among some non-Lao Tai ethnic groups.** A significant barrier to participating in and influencing decision-making processes is posed by a lack of fluency in the national language. About 70 percent of the population does not speak Lao as their first language. Ethnic minority women face disadvantages stemming from lower education level, high school drop-out rates among girls, and widespread illiteracy. Approximately 41.8 percent of girls aged 15-19 are out of school due to early marriage, preventing them from developing proficiency in the national language and fulfill their social and economic potential [add data by ethnic group]. The Chinese-Tibetan ethnic group is the least literate, 50 percent rate for men and 35 percent rate for women, followed by the Mon-Khmer (67 percent for men and 38 percent for women) and the Hmong-Mien (71 percent for men and 40 percent women), in comparison to Lao-Tais’ 84 percent for men and 76 percent for women.

**Third, traditional culture and engrained gender norms prescribe women vs men’s roles in the community.** These play out in two ways that affect women’s participation in community decisions. On the one hand, women’s responsibilities for childcare and the household, in addition to other livelihood activities, limit the time they have available to engage in other activities. In Laos, women’s share of unpaid care work is four times that of their partners. Engrained social norms discourage women to voice their needs and concerns. At the community level, women are often not trusted that they have the skill set to analyze problems and propose solutions, therefore if not both husband and wife are called for community meetings, it is usually the men who will attend.

### **3.3.3 Gender-Based Violence**

Laos has developed relevant laws on preventing and combating violence against women and children (2014) but levels of conceptual and practical understanding of the issue are low. At the same time cultural tolerance for certain forms of violence against women is high. Several areas of concern are identified: (i) consulted local authorities, village outreach, young graduates and ethnic group communities accept and justify certain forms of gender-based violence and sexual harassment; (ii) despite Lao PDR having substantial legal frameworks to safeguard the rights and interests of women and children, services and help systems are limited; and (iii) the issue is only vaguely understood at all administrative levels and at the individual level.

## **1.1 Key Findings from Mid-term Review of RPF III-AF**

### **1.1.1 Nutrition Status and Maternal Care**

This section is drawn from the key findings of the Mid-term Survey Report (2022) prepared by Indochina Research (Laos) Ltd for the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the World Bank. This report covers the results of the Nutrition Convergence Program that is being carried out by the World Bank and IFAD in four Northern provinces that CLEAR covers.

- **Stunting levels**

Stunting among children under 2 (CU2) and children under 5 (CU5) have remained the same or deteriorated slightly with a total of 35.9% of CU2 and 43.7% of CU5 showing signs of stunting

(compared to 31.8% and 42.5% at baseline, respectively). The increase in children with signs of stunting is highest in Phongsaly province where there was an increase of 7% in the proportion of CU2 stunted and of 3.8% in the proportion of CU5 stunted.

The proportion of stunted CU2 continues to be highest among the Hmong- Lu Mien ethnic group (42.2%) although the increase in the proportion of stunted children was the lowest since baseline (41.8%). The highest increase in the proportion of stunted CU2 was observed among the Lao-Tai ethnic group with an increase of 7.4% from 18.5% at baseline to 25.9% at mid-term. There was also a much higher increase in the proportion of boys under 2 with signs of stunting than among girls.

Among CU5 there was a slight increase in the proportion of children stunted in Xiengkhouang province (1.1%) and in Phongsaly province (3.8%). CU5 from the Lao Tai saw the highest increase in the proportion of stunted children with a 3.3% increase.

The causes for these increases in stunting are not clear and require further investigation, but could include the restrictions in movement imposed to control the spread of COVID-19 which limited the access to health care and markets in many parts of the country, as well as the recent spike in food prices.

- ***Child Growth***

*Growth charts* were available and up to date for over half (59%) of children under two years of age which is a considerable decrease from the almost 80% reported at baseline. All provinces saw a reduction in the proportion of CU2 with a growth chart, but this was particularly stark in Xiengkhouang (33% reduction) and in Phongsaly (21.4% reduction). Hmong-Lu Mien less frequently had a growth chart (45.4%) compared to Lao-Tai children (70.5%).

This could also be related to the restriction on movement and the more limited access to health care staff and health centres during COVID-19.

- ***Exclusive breast feeding***

Exclusive breast feeding is widely practiced, with 83% of mothers of children age 0-5 months of age indicating that they were not providing anything other than breastmilk to their child, but this is a decrease from the 87% reported at baseline. There was no difference observed between provinces, and there is still a lower rate of exclusive breast feeding seen amongst Lao-Tai mothers (80%) compared to mothers from other ethnic groups. The reasons for this need to be further explored and addressed.

- ***Vitamin A supplementation***

Vitamin A supplementation in the past 6 months was done in over 67.5% of children age 6-59 months ranging from a low of 57% of Chinese-Tibetan mothers, to a high of 77% of Lao-Tai mothers. Iron folic acid was taken for at least 90 days by 73% of pregnant women, which is an improvement from the 54.7% of mothers taking iron folic acid at baseline. Most Lao-Tai mothers (87.2%) compared to only 62.6% of Chinese-Tibetan mothers took adequate iron folate during their pregnancy, although the latter saw a notable increase from the 30% of mothers that had taken iron folic acid for at least 90 days at baseline.

- ***Antenatal Care***

Antenatal Care (ANC) attendance at least four times during pregnancy occurred for 79% of mothers of children under two, with a slight improvement from baseline. However, Chinese-Tibetan and Hmong-Lu Mien mothers were still less likely to attend (66%) than Lao-Tai mothers (93%).

- ***Minimum Dietary Diversity***

The minimum dietary diversity (MDD) score was met by 21% of children age 6-23 months, which is a decrease from the 27% of children meeting MDD at baseline<sup>2</sup>. Children from Chinese-Tibetan and Hmong-Lu Mien groups had the lowest dietary diversity, with scores of 18% and 15%, respectively, but with significant improvements from baseline for the latter. Children routinely consumed rice, with

dark green vegetables and occasional flesh meats. Few children ate eggs, fish or organ meats as protein sources and there was a decrease in the proportion of children that did so from baseline. Vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables were rarely consumed. However, for most households in all provinces, except for those on the lowest wealth class, their diets were adequately diverse.

The causes for this deterioration in the dietary diversity of children under 2 years of age is not clear by the survey findings, especially as most other convergence indicators saw an improvement. Likely causes can include the recent spike in food prices or the restriction in movement imposed to control the spread of COVID-19, which limited access to health sector services where children at risk could have been identified and attended and to markets. In-depth research on the causes of this deterioration in dietary diversity is needed.

### 1.1.2 Water and Sanitation

**Improved sanitation levels** are still lower in Phongsaly where 62% of households have access to improved sanitation, compared to over 92% and 86% of households in Houaphanh and Xiengkhouang, respectively. However, there was an improvement from the 55% of households with access to improved sanitation in Phongsaly at baseline. Overall, almost 80% of households have access to improved sanitation. The differences between Chinese-Tibetan households where only 40% have improved sanitation to Lao-Tai household at 96% is still notable.

**Access to clean water** varies from province to province and between ethnic groups. Overall, there was an increase from 87% to 90% in the proportion of households with access to clean water. However, only 86% of households in Phongsaly, and 76% of Chinese-Tibetan households have access to water from a protected source. More households relied on a public tap in Phongsaly than in other provinces. Around 17% of households there continue to rely on surface water for drinking, which is an increase from the 10% seen at baseline.

The treatment of drinking water occurs every time in 79% of households, and sometimes in 12% of households. In Phongsaly, 18% of households do not treat their water, which is an increase from the 16.9% observed at baseline. The most commonly reported method of water treatment was boiling for 99% of households. Households rarely strain water through a cloth (3.2%), or use a ceramic or sand filter (1.3%).

- **Hygiene**

**Handwashing with soap** is reported to be done frequently. However, upon inspection, only 32% of households actually had access to soap and a handwashing station, although this is an improvement from the 27% found at baseline. As observed in the baseline survey, Lao-Tai households more often (46%) had access than Chinese-Tibetan households where only 23% of households actually had soap available, despite the progress made. Handwashing before eating is reported by 77% of households, but less frequently before preparing food, after farming, and even more rarely after defecating or before feeding young children, or after touching an animal.

**Access to bathing facilities** has improved, with 56.2% of households having access to facilities at home. Xiengkhouang still has the highest proportion of homes with access to a bathing facility as part of their toilet with 53%, or more rarely as a separate room. Only 37% of households in Phongsaly have access to a bathing facility, although this is an improvement from the 31% found at baseline. Most households still bathe at community water sources, or in rivers and streams.

**Disposal of children and animal feces** occurred correctly in 37% of households, a small improvement over the 36% reported at baseline. Child feces disposal continues to result in open defecation, particularly in Phongsaly where 23% of mothers still leave child feces in the open, with no progress made in this area since baseline. About one third of children use the toilet or latrine and overall, less than half of the households appropriately dispose of children's feces, except in Houaphanh where 65% of households dispose of child feces appropriately.

### 1.1.3 Household Diet and Food Security

**Household dietary diversity** was high with 78% of households consuming foods from four or more food groups in the past 24 hours, which is the same proportion found at baseline. All ethnic groups and provinces show highly diverse diets. These rates contrast sharply with the dietary diversity of children age 6-23 months which saw a clear deterioration between baseline and mid-term, and suggest that access to a diverse diet is not the limiting factor for child feeding.

**Food availability** was assessed based on the diversity of crops and livestock raised by farmers. Farmers who raised one type of animal, and one type of fruit or vegetable in addition to rice were considered to have food availability. In general, diverse nutritious food was available to 90% of households with no evident wealth gradient and very small differences by ethnic group.

### 1.1.4 Consumption, Savings, Borrowing and Remittances

**Consumption of nutritious food (expenditure per capita)** varies by province and ethnic group, and as would be expected, varied substantially by wealth category. Overall, the consumption of nutritious foods per capita increased by 91%, from 392,075LAK to 749,864LAK which could reflect the high inflation experienced by the country in recent years. The increase is most accentuated in households in Phongsaly where the expenditure on consumption of food doubled from 365,794LAK to 733,734LAK.

### 1.1.5 Land and non-land assets

**Land and home ownership rates** were high with 97% of families owning agricultural land, and 92% owning their home. Only 34.1% of households had title for all their land however, and most owned 2 hectares of land or less.

Most households (68.9%) own 3 plots of land or less with little difference between provinces. The average size of the land owned was 3.5 hectares. In Xiengkhouang, 26.7% of households had more than 4 hectares, with farms as large as 50 hectares reported in Phongsaly, Huaphanh and Oudomxay. On average, each household cultivated 2.2 hectares in the past 12 months.

**Livestock** of some type were raised by most farming households, despite the decrease in livestock raising reported since baseline. Apart from rainfed rice grown by half of households, other common crops are sweet corn, maize and to a lesser degree cardamom and cassava.

### 1.1.6 Women's Workload

**Women's Workload** was assessed based on the time spent carrying water. Since most households have access to water very near, or inside their house, the time spent carrying water was very limited for most women. Most households rely on firewood for cooking, which must be collected in the forest, most often by women, so this aspect of women's work remains unchanged.

### 1.1.7 Saving and Remittance

**Saving** was possible for 23% of households, and decrease from the 26% of households that were reported to be able to save some money at baseline, with the highest proportion of households in Xiengkhouang, and in Lao-Tai households.

**Borrowing** among households increased from only 15.6% of households borrowing at baseline, to almost a fifth of households (19.8%) borrowing money in the last year. Families borrow mainly to buy food.

**Remittances** were received by 13% of households, and increase from the 9.2% of households that reported receiving remittances at baseline. Households in Xiengkhouang and Lao-Tai households were more likely to receive remittances than in Phongsaly or from Chinese-Tibetans ethnic groups. Overall, the results of this mid-line survey suggest that despite the progress made in some areas, a multifaceted, convergent approach remains necessary. Special emphasis should be made on addressing the lack of improvement in dietary diversity of children and the limited progress made in some WASH indicators.

## 1.2 Key Findings from Consultation under RPF III – Additional Financing

Below are key points from the consultation (See also the summary in Annex 1 of this report).

### 1. Overall sub-project Information:

- Of 36 targeted villages, currently 26 villages have returned the first set of revolving funds and 10 villages are collecting funds
- 39 self-help groups under the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF)
- At least 1 Nutrition group per village (four groups formed in Ban Nong-Lea and one group formed in Ban Pha-Lin)
- 27 subprojects related to infrastructure development were delivered by PRF in Nonghet District

### 2. Project Management – Implementation Team (see registration forms)

#### a. District Implementation Unit (DIU)

The DIU, consisting of district government assigned staff and project hired personnel, is responsible for implementing subproject activities in the entire Nonghet district (four PRF direct hired staff per district, and they work together with district government staff). In Nonghet following staff joined interviews (see attendants' sheet).

1. District coordinator / overall management (1 person - male)
2. Infrastructure development / engineering / environmental management and monitoring (2 persons - males)
3. Livelihood support program / social development and inclusion / ethnic groups development / microfinance (2 persons - males)
4. Food and nutrition service delivery / training / mother and child health / home gardening (2 persons - males)
5. Admin / finance / logistical arrangements (1 person - female)

#### b. Village Outreach Team

A total of 9 Village Outreach workers (VOs) /Young Graduates (YG) joined interviews (6 persons for livelihoods support programme and 3 persons for nutrition intervention programme)

##### i. Outreach workers (Vos) /Young Graduates (YG) (Ban Nong-Lea)

1. Livelihood support program / social development and inclusion / ethnic groups development / microfinance (1 person - female (Suphab) responsible for six villages)
2. Food and nutrition service delivery / training / mother and child health / home gardening (1 person – male (Ying-Yang) responsible for 12 villages)

##### ii. VO / YG (Ban Pha-Lin)

1. Livelihood support program / social development and inclusion / ethnic groups development / microfinance (1 person - male (Zuha) - six villages)
2. Food and nutrition service delivery / training / mother and child health / home gardening (1 person - female (Manichanh) - 11 villages)

### **iii. Village Implementation Team (see registration forms)**

1. Village authority: Oversees village development planning, responsible for infrastructure development, coordination, etc.
2. Village self-help groups - livelihood support programs through the village development fund
3. Village nutrition groups - mostly pregnant women and young mothers

### **c. Capacity to manage the project by the implementing teams**

All consulted district authorities and responsible villagers reported that the management of subproject activities and construction works are not an issue.

The issues and challenges are often not caused by the project, and if any there are minor and/or indirectly caused by the subproject/activities.

#### **Capacity-building**

- All informants reported that they have received the following training:
  - Social and environmental code of practice
  - Culture and gender sensitivity
  - Finance management, procurement and accounting
  - COVID-19 risk and measures
  - Groups formation
  - Food preparation – at least eight courses
  - Home gardening techniques
  - Ban Ning-Lea said they have been informed about safe use of chemicals but Ban Pha-Lea said that the district official only told them not to use chemicals.

#### **Lengthy documentation (not ESF risk related but constantly brought up as an issue):**

- Too much paperwork and too many forms to complete; official documentation takes too much time; too many signing steps from the village level up to the district Vice-Governor (only a signature from the Vice-Governor is accepted, others cannot sign on his behalf).
- There is no copy of any documents/form leave at the village level, all the forms are collected and kept at the district level.
- Forms include ES screening forms, financial and procurement related, bidding related documents. Many of the heads of the groups, are unable to understand, read and write Lao language. In many cases, village authority members are assigned to help fill out forms.

#### **Language and cultural barriers (not project caused but may impede project performance):**

- All informants said that most of the Hmong women, especially older ones (40+), are unable to understand, speak, read, or write Lao language. Hmong men and women from villages which are not located directly next to the district vicinity and/or along a main road are unable to understand, read or write Lao. District staff reported almost all of the Phong ethnic groups do not understand, speak, read and/or write Lao. The targeted Khmu villagers tend to understand and be able to speak Lao compared to the Hmong and Phong ethnic groups.

- All of the consulted informants reported that there is no culture barriers and/or difficulties working with the project teams and government staff. Most of the project and government staff consist of Hmong ethnic group.
- Young Hmong VOs said they are not confident that other people will understand them due to their accents and that they can't pronounce some Lao words correctly.
- District Lao Lum officials don't feel that there is an issue working with the community. However, they acknowledge that an interpreter is needed to work with Phong and Hmong ethnic groups.

**Community engagement / social inclusion / exclusion: (issues brought up at all levels and discussed in all interviews)**

- District staff reported that villagers are willing to join meetings and take part livelihood support and nutrition intervention programs
- The engagement of women is encouraged by the project and some villages have about 50–80% females participating. Most, if not all, targeted villages have a higher rate of female participation than male.
- According to district staff, about 80% of village households participate in each PRF meeting
- Poorer families often do not join meetings nor take part in project activities. The reasons include: (i) lack of confidence; (ii) inability to pay membership fees; (iii) adverse experiences when they do join a meeting, such as being excluded / not being respected by other members of the groups / being discouraged from joining the discussion by other members.
- In mixed ethnic groups villages, the minority group(s) are being left out. The reasons include: (i) claims that it is too difficult to include them, and that the minority groups often do not contribute to discussions; (ii) members of the main group only work with each other / talk among themselves.
- Both district staff and VOs share the same views when asking about the reason for being poorer than others. These include: (i) lack of labor, meaning a family has old age people and/or young children without any supports, (ii) lack agriculture land, (iii) poor house conditions, (iv) being lazy, not motivated to work and/or participate in development programs.

**The VOs/YG concerns and suggestions**

- Travelling on a motorbike by themselves for more than 10km (up to 90km) on rural bad road conditions sometimes involved accidents and feeling unsafe (scare), they prefer to travel in a group.
- Village workers are also proposing to work in a group of 2 to 3 people for the reasons: (i) safety, (ii) have colleagues support when men are not listening to them, (iii) exchange learning, (iv) cover villages and (v) fun/enjoy working.
- Issues which are not caused by the project but may impede project performance:
  - Men, especially older men do not listen to them and often challenge their capability and knowledge. Some YG have to get help from district and/or village authority in the first few months of engagement with the project implementation team
  - Women are more open to information, opinions and engagement but women's views are often not taken seriously by the men. In this regard, similar to the village women, they requested that men should also be targeted for gender related trainings.



**Gender-related aspects (Discussed at the district and village level):**

- District staff, VOs / YGs and villagers were consulted, and all share the view that women and men have equal rights and access to all provided facilities and project benefits
- They all also say that women and men have different roles to play in participating in project development-eg. More than 90% of women engaged in the Self-Help Groups and 100% women in the nutrition groups, while most men engaged in infrastructure development.
- While all informants accepted that men and women have equal rights, many of them pointed out issues such as: (i) men not allowing their wives to attend a meeting and/or join a group and/or take a leading role in a group; (ii) women refusing to participate in a meeting / group discussion as their husbands and/or mother in-law reject their request to join a meeting or a group.
- All consulted people also accept that women lead and take care of household matters while men lead public matters. They also accept that it is fine for a young (single) woman to be called by a man (including village authority, project staff, etc.) to serve alcohol and entertain guests.
- Some of the district and VOs said that serve alcohol and entertain guests is an effective way to create trust / familiarity with each other and maintain good relationships with villagers; meanwhile those who are being called to perform such jobs state that they do not like to do those jobs and would rather not be asked to do so.

**Grievance Redress Mechanism**

- Traditional village grievance redress mechanisms are used by the villagers.
- District staff reported that are many verbal complaints / requests by the villagers on what they want the project to support. Written complaints are not made, and written requests are included in the village development plan.
- Both villages reported that they have been informed of the complaints system but they have nothing to complain about.

**3. Project Activities****a. Establishment of village groups****Village Implementation Team (VIT)**

This team mostly consists of village authority members. The team structure follows the traditional village authority arrangement, where the group leader is the village head, and two deputies are responsible for: (i) finance / economic development; and (ii) infrastructure development. The Village Women's Union (LWU) still oversees women's engagement and development. Members of the self-help groups (SHGs) are assigned to assist the deputy-finance to oversee microfinance/the revolving fund.

**Self-help groups**

There are eight SHGs in Ban Nong-Lea and four in Ban Pha-Lin. Assisted by the VOs / YGs, these groups are made up of about 8–15 members. Each group assigned six people to manage works: a team leader and two deputies/assistants, two accountants, one procurement officer, and one microfinance officer.

- The team members are also responsible for collecting, distributing and managing the group's fund as well as communicating with other project-assigned staff / VOs / YGs.

- The groups are only open to women. However, in Bam Pha-Lin, only a Village Women's Union member can understand and speak Lao and she is leading a group. Three other groups have selected men to be their team leader so that he can help to communicate with the project staff / outsiders.
- Ban Nong-Lea has eight groups.

### **Food and Nutrition Support Group**

Each targeted village has established a nutrition group, and they are made up of young mothers and pregnant women. Assisted by the VO/YG, the groups meet between 2 and 4 times per month to learn how to cook, and share food; and receive food supplements and seeds for home gardens.

### **Production group**

At the time of visiting, there is no production group yet.

#### **b. Component 1: Provision of Infrastructure Development**

Both villages – Ban Nong-Lea and Ban Pha-Lin – reported that the PRF has worked in their villages for many years (since PRF I, II, III, and III-AF) and with each version of the PRF, they have received different infrastructure support (up to \$14,500 per village under PRF III-AF). Discussions in the two villages revealed that the following support had been received:

1. Ban Nong-Lea: (i) a primary school (classrooms, toilet and sports playground); 140 rolls of barbed wire to fence community grazing land/forest for livestock.
2. Ban Pha-Lin: World Food Program supported the development of an access road (16 km from main road No. 7 in 2006). PRF supports fencing nets (Tanang), primary classrooms, a gravity-fed water supply, and a 2 km access road.

In Ban Nong-Lea discussion focused on fencing and in Ban Pha-Lin on the 2km access road. These were just provided in 2022. In both villages the provided infrastructures are for communal use. The fence for the communal grazing land/forest is open to all households that have cattle (only cows); however, identified poor households do not have cattle and are therefore unable to use the communal grazing land. The 2 km access road is a communal road that connects the village to agricultural areas. However, since it is only 2km, the rest of the road still needs to be repaired / develop.

### **Community engagement for infrastructure work**

- Assigned district officials visit villages during village planning/design for development.
- VOs and YGs continue to engage/work with the communities and assist them with organizing meetings, collecting membership fees, planning for microfinance contributions, collecting returned funds and assisting individual members to select livelihoods options.
- Village meetings and focus groups discussions: ((i) women's groups, (ii) district officials, (iii) village authorities and (iv) VOs/YGs all reported that they have engaged in village meetings on village planning/requests for infrastructure from the PRF.
- Ban Nong-Lea reported that the poorer households often do not attend village/activities meetings and that the authorities often have to encourage them to join meetings; in contrast, at Ban Pha-Lin, all consulted groups reported that the poorer families/households are keen to join meetings.

### **Selection processes**

- Villagers have received training on safeguards (negative list, social and environmental code of conduct and compensation/voluntary contribution rules, mitigation of impact on physical

resources and inclusion of vulnerable ethnic groups). This includes awareness about the need for sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment and social cohesion.

- Prior to selection process, DIU provided them with negative list so that the proposed infrastructures are not included in the negative list.
- With support from the DIU, community consultations were conducted, and a list of priority infrastructure / needs was proposed and selected by the villagers. Both villages reported the consultations were carried out 2–3 times and that all households, including vulnerable / poor households, participated before they decided on the infrastructure. Note that since there was a list of things the villagers want, the selection process was through a majority voting process.
- The selected infrastructure went through the processes of land donation and have already been agreed by the land/property's owner (see land acquisition section).
- As group discussions reported that some poorer families did not join the meeting, it is assumed that they were not involved in the voting on infrastructure (see Community Engagement section).

### Planning and design

- District reported that all impacted assets were screened, dealt with and solved before the proposals are submitted. Any impacts were internally solved by the villagers.
- The design process included suitable geo-localization collection of environmental data, (land information, watershed, etc.), cultural resource, disaster risk assessment and consideration.
- District often communicated with the villagers, conducted meeting to endorse the village development plan (VDP); reviewed on the design respect based on the resettlement framework standards; reviewed if there is any impacted land and impacted households; review any other potential issues related to safeguards; and endured final design and gave permission for villagers to proceed with their plan.
- Documentation of the infrastructure/financial requests of both villages was assisted by the district official and the DIU. The requested were signed by: (i) VIT, (ii) DIU, (iii) District Deputy Governor and (iv) PRF. Both villagers and district staff reported that these processes take time and involve lots of requests for approval documents and screening for impacts.
- Since all of the provided infrastructures are for community and use communal land/forest, there was no land acquisition nor voluntary contribution required from the community, accept minor temporary disturbances.

### Land acquisition and compensation

- **District Officials reported:** Land acquisition does not occur as the constructions are located on communal land. However, some irrigation and water supply subprojects in Mok District such as laying pipe systems sometimes run through an individual household's property and cause temporary disturbance and minor impacts during the construction period, but the land can be reused as normal after the construction. This has been verbally agreed by the owners to let the project work without any compensation.
- **Villagers reported:** All land used for construction, water supplies, schools, etc. is communal land, which is mutually selected by the community. Community did not ask for compensation. Instead, they want the PRF to allocate more support to improve infrastructures; and especially improve road conditions, repair bridges, water systems, etc.

## Procurement works

- District procurement officials received training from the project on financial management, procurement-related work and accounting.
- Both villages reported that procurement-related work was new to them and therefore they were assisted by the district officials during the document preparation and bidding processes.
- Both villages reported that they have received training on procurement-related aspects: distribution of bidding envelopes; and collecting, analyzing and selecting the shops / providers. Both villages requested three quotations from different providers / companies. They selected the cheapest offer.

**Management of environmental risks during the construction phase:** The project has resulted in some mostly minor injuries caused by construction and road accidents. Most risks are not directly caused by the project.

Project related risks:

- Interviewed village outreach workers reported that they have had motorbike accidents few times due to bad road conditions. Some of the access road from district to the project targeted villages are up to 40km in Nonghet, Xiengkhuang and up to 90km in Huamuang, Huaphan. Whenever, an accident occurred, a village outreach worker bears the cost by themselves and did not claim for their insurance due the lengthening documentation processes and sometimes the reimbursement money is too small and not worthwhile spending time on the claiming processes.
- Travelling on a motorbike by themselves for more than 10km (up to 90Km) on rural bad road conditions sometimes involved accidents and feeling unsafe (scare), they prefer to travel in a group.
- Village workers are also proposing to work in a group of 2 to 3 people for the reasons: (i) safety, (ii) have colleagues support when men are not listening to them, (iii) exchange learning, (iv) cover villages and (v) fun/enjoy working.

Not Project related but often discussed/raised by the informants

- Other identified environmental risks not caused by the project include: (i) encroaching on and using forest land; (ii) heavy use of chemicals / pesticides / herbicides; (iii) travel between areas / villages is time-consuming; and (iv) bad road conditions.
- At the district level, project staff said that waste is becoming a big issue. The discussion on waste included the following issues: (i) lack of proper landfill at the district and village levels, (ii) chemical / pesticides / herbicides, wrappers / bags / plastic containers, and (iii) poorer family members often take jobs as chemical sprayers / weed killers, which is harmful for their health; and (iv) the amount / volume of chemical use is increasing, especially regulated / permitted ones. This increases waste in the district but there is not waste treatment system and proper disposal site.

## Construction

- Subcontractor for school construction and machine owners for the 2km access road improvement villagers were informed of the social and environmental codes of conduct prior to construction/commencement of works.

- District reported that training related to the monitoring and mitigation of environmental and social safeguards during infrastructure implementation and how to conduct the accountability meetings were provided by the project.
- All of the provided infrastructure from the visited sites has not caused any temporary disturbance related to noise, dust, transportation and road safety, domestic waste or construction waste. For example, the schools are located at the far end/corner of the village and are built on communal land allocated specifically for school development.
- Villagers are involved in labor works such as fencing, digging earth and removing waste (e.g. tree roots, rocks) from access road construction. Only adults and household representatives (either a man or a woman from each household) are asked to work. No children are involved in the construction.
- District PRF's engineer conducted monitoring with VIT and check compliance with environment and social safeguards and reported the central level.
- Minor impacts and temporary disturbances during school construction such as air, noise, community health and safety due to construction activities and transportation of materials. These had been managed based on the ECOP; for instance, no transportation during the traveling time of students and farmers going to schools and/or farms, speed control, installation of warning signs, public information on work during and schedule, and no working on big buddha days.
- Resource efficiency and pollution prevention and management: no waste water was discharged into the natural stream or community land as the worker camp was provided with temporary toilet and waste bins. Solid waste collected and burned; however, the worker camp is located about 500m from the community.
- Biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of living natural resources: no impact because (i) subprojects were not located in the protected areas; (ii) negative list covered forestry operations, including logging, harvesting or processing of timber and non-timber products (NTFP); and (iii) workers were trained on no killing wild animals, no cutting forest.
- Some subprojects involving access roads also have some minor impacts (land deposition/landslides and waste) but these issues are naturally recovered.
- Labour and working conditions: (i) workers for road improvement, primary classrooms, a gravity-fed water supply, irrigation system were voluntary workers (without paid) from villages through rotation amongst households. Workers were informed of ECOP. No outstanding risks were identified; however, on a few occasions some villagers suffered minor injuries such as cuts from sharp tools, which can be easily treated with bandages under expense of an individual village worker. All informants reported that PPE are only provided to the core village construction technicians or supervisors, but not for general villager workers as the budget was not allocated for buying the PPE for the involved villagers.
- There are no reported issues related to ii) employment discrimination, (iii) labor related disputes and (iv) Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEA/SH) and child labor.
- Villagers are villagers were informed of risks related to COVID-19 transmission.
- Infrastructure hand over to the community is conducted through official village meeting with the representation and participation of village households.

### **Operation & Maintenance (O&M)**

- Each village has established an O&M committee and they are often the traditional village authority. One person is assigned to be the coordinator and the Village Women's Union looks after women's interests.
- The schools are overseen by a village education development committee.
- Water supply systems and access roads are managed by village O&M committee – the village authority.
- A six and 12 months monitoring is performed by district, accompanying by village appointed engineer and young graduates to check whether there is environmental or social issues related to the infrastructure operations.
- District official reported if there is any identifies issue, they would help to in place a mitigation action plan. However, so far, there is no issue.

### **Monitoring and reporting**

- The district official bears the monitoring and reporting tasks as part of quarterly, six-monthly and yearly reporting.

### **c. Component 2: Community Livelihood Enhancement**

There are eight SHGs in Ban Nong-Lea and four in Ban Pha-Lin. Only group members are entitled to Community Livelihood Enhancement benefits, that is the distribution of the village revolving fund.

### **Community engagement for accessing to microfinance and livelihoods development**

- Village meetings and focus groups (women's groups, district officials, village authorities and VO's/YGs) all reported that the membership of SHGs is voluntary.
- Ban Nong-Lea reported that poorer households often do not attend village/activity meetings and that the authorities often have to encourage them to join a meeting; in contrast, at Ban Pha-Lin, all consulted groups reported that the poorer families/households are keen to join meetings.
- Both villages share the view that poorer households do not join the project revolving fund due to lack of cash to pay for membership (minimum of 5,000 Kip per month). A few families joined and then left due to inability to pay for membership.
- While Ban Pha-Lin reported that some better-off households are content with not joining SHGs, Ban Nong-Lea reported that the better-off households are keen to join as they seek the opportunity to get more support and hope to borrow cash from the revolving fund. They are also keen to establish a production group with PRF.
- Both villages reported that a representative of each household is asked to join community work in: (i) fencing grazing land with barbed wire in the case of Ban Nong-Lea; and (ii) removing tree roots and rocks in the case of Ban Pha-Lin.
- Villagers in Ban Pha-Lin also provided food to the subcontractors who stayed in the village for a few days during road repairs.

## **Production**

- The main crops produced currently are **corn/maize, cassava, rice, beans, seasonal fruits and green vegetables.**
- Livestock – poultry, cattle/cows, goats and especially pigs – are preferred livelihood enhancement options. For instance, in Ban Pha-Lin, only one family used microfinance to raise ducks, all other members used it to raise pigs.
- A few SHGs suggested that the revolving fund should cover other activities such as investing in running a small shop that sells household goods and dry food (eggs, candies, instant noodle, etc.)
- At the time of visiting, many villagers were selling oranges and cherry blossom trees to the Vietnamese to be used for the New Year Celebration
- Production groups are being discussed, but were not yet finalized at the time of the village visit. It is worth noting that most of the interested villagers are those who are already members of an SHG.
- Both visited villages still rely on forest products, livestock and non-timber forest products
- Home garden are supported and practiced by the villagers but only very small patches. They plant vegetables during cold/dry season (this time of year). Only a few families have a reasonable size home garden and they are used as a module for other families to learn from.

### **d. Component 3: Community Nutrition Interventions – addressing inclusion and fair distribution of benefits**

- The nutrition groups are open to pregnant women and young mothers and the groups are formed voluntarily
- All of the district auth nutrition intervention activities have changed members' behaviors in the following ways:
  - From being unsure about whether to join to constantly participating in the cooking groups; from not wanting to eat the food to liking the food
  - Villagers are interested in new food menus
  - From having gardens in the fields to establishing home gardens
  - Children like to eat the food
  - Seeds and other supplementary foods are found to be useful and they are asking for more.
- All of the consulted women said they understand the information provided because the VOs speak Hmong language with them.
- Most women said the short video clips are very helpful in learning how to cook and for learning new information.
- While none of the identified poor families in Ban Nong-Lea joined the nutrition groups, poorer families in Ban Pha-Lin join the group and said that they enjoy meeting with each other during the cooking class.
- Home garden classes focus on vegetable planting and making homemade fertilizers. Chemical use is discouraged by the staff.

- While Ban Nong-Lea said information on the safe use of chemical has been provided, Ban Pha-Lin said they have only been asked by the district staff not to use them and no safety instructions have been provided yet.

#### **e. Cross-cutting issues**

##### **Benefit sharing**

- The infrastructure provided by PRF to the visited villages is for communal use (schools, water systems, access roads, barbed wire for fencing grazing areas) and while the villagers at the village meeting reported that everyone have access to and use those provided facilities, they also said that some families do not have the means to use those facilities. For instance, poorer families from Ban Nong-Lea are unable to equally use the water supply, school and barbed wires that fenced the grazing areas. The reasons given were: (i) their houses are located in the corner of the village, far from the school and water supply; (ii) they do not have cattle to put in the communal grazing areas.
- In both villages, poorer families are not members of SHGs.
- Poor families in Ban Nong-Lea do not join nutrition groups, despite having young children and pregnant women
  - The ESF preparation team visited four identified poorer households. Observations suggested that the following: poor housing conditions and built on the hill, three families have lots of young children, ages below 6yo and they were in poor/ruined clothes, and older people, three families located in the same areas, far from school and water supply. Two of the families have lots of chemical plastic containers
- Interviewed poorer family members also confirmed that are too poor, too shy and have no money to pay for membership fees. They also said that they often spend overnights at the place where they work, mostly at a corn farm and have no time to join a meeting.
- Some better-off families are voluntarily not joining SHGs.

##### **Gender sensitivity/GBV**

- Women's groups discussions revealed that although women are encouraged to join meetings and take decisions, their decisions are sometimes disregarded and have been asked to be dropped by their male partners/authorities and male elders.
- Women asked whether the project can ask more men to engage in gender equality / women's / men's roles in household training.
- Women said that video on gender equality is very useful but the men were not watching, only women; meanwhile men are not taking the information they pass on seriously. The women asked to have more men watch the gender equality videos.
- While almost all consulted men and women saying that having young women serve alcohol and entertain guests is normal, the young women who have been asked to do so disagree with the statement and prefer not to do this job.

##### **Ethnic groups/cultures differences and barriers**

- While cultural differences are not an issues, language is one of the issues mentioned by all consulted informants at all levels.
- Older women in group discussions said that they mostly do not understand the information in a meeting (even when conducted in Hmong language). They prefer project staff to communicate with them directly (not in a public meeting).



- The consulted minority group, the Khmu, said that they are willing to attend meetings, but mostly they have nothing to ask.

#### **Vulnerable households/people – special support**

- Currently there is no special treatment toward vulnerable and poorer families
- Most cannot join the SHG and therefore do not have access to group support, which include: (i) microfinance support at 1% interest, (ii) emergency fund, mostly due to sickness, accidents and costs related to children's education.

#### **Communication/coordination – best communication tools for a particular group**

- All of the consulted women villagers in Ban Pha-Lin and older women prefer to be communicated with directly in their local language; meanwhile some men and women said they are willing for communication be in Lao.
- Video in their own language is effective, but not many older women and men have mobile phones or other tools to watch a video.

### **1.3 LESSON LEARNT FROM PRF III**

In general, environmental and social safeguards review were conducted quarterly and annually. During the implantation of the PRF III-AF, an Environmental and Social Specialist (ESS) and a Quality Assurance Advisor were recruited to conduct due diligence of the construction of the 53 subprojects in the 6 Provinces. While there were no outstanding issue related to environmental and social impacts, issue on UXO clearance has brought up for discussion and asking PRF to pay special attention to the matter. To address the issue, PRF has coordinated with the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) on the process for obtaining a UXO clearance certificate from UXO-Laos even if the subprojects are small and focusing on rehabilitating and improving existing infrastructures for all 10 provinces. PRF paid specifical focus on its current target 4 Provinces: Pongsaly, Oudomxay, Houaphan, and Xiengkhouang (and the 7 targeted districts) under PRF III-AF. Under CLEAR, ESMF have also included measures specifically to address issues related to UXO.

#### **1.3.1 Infrastructure development**

- The type of infrastructure work in the subprojects that were selected/provided were mostly small in size. The impacts of civil works are minimal. For instance, of a total of about 1,400 subprojects implemented, 120 (8%) involved a minor loss of private land or assets, mostly under road and water supply subprojects. All project-affected persons were classified as direct beneficiaries.
- A due diligence conducted in late 2021 on 53 sub-projects in the 6 Provinces revealed no outstanding on environmental and social issues, but issue on UXO clearance has been discussed and addressed.
- No physical relocation of households or business entities occurred during the implementation of PRF II and PRF III-AF.
- There are some houses had their small part of their land and some agriculture products effected by infrastructure sub-projects -rural road, irrigation system, water supply system, However, no household lost more than 5% of total productive assets. All such impacts were addressed through voluntary donation in line with the provisions of the Compensation and Resettlement Policy Framework.

- The evaluation confirmed that potential benefits versus negative impacts on land or household livelihoods and assets related to infrastructure construction had been discussed. Measures to minimize impact had been developed and agreed within the communities and by affected households. In all cases, affected persons directly benefited from the infrastructure construction that caused the loss.
- The technical implementation team reported that the Compensation and Resettlement Policy Framework is followed well. However, documentation and monitoring need to be strengthened. They suggest that the reporting system/documentation needs to be improved with simplified forms and documents for practical implementation on the ground. This issue was identified during PRF II and reported as improved during the implementation of PRFIII-AF. Under CLEAR implementation, ESF-related documents should be revised and simplified to ensure adequate monitoring and documentation and ease of follow up by officials at the provincial and district level. Reporting related to social and environmental issues should also be updated to align with World Bank safeguards policy and national policy Decree 192/PM to follow E&S instruments, – specifically ESF 5 and Decree 84/GoL on land acquisition and compensation.
- Project implementation experience shows that affected households may not be fully aware of their rights and able to make an informed choice to receive compensation at replacement cost. Lessons learned from PRF II stated that some local PRF staff consider that affected people are entitled for compensation at replacement cost only if they lose more than 5% of their total land and less than 5% is to be donated/contributed to the project. PRF technical teams reported that project-affected persons are often willing to contribute their lost assets in exchange for better infrastructure such as rural access roads, water supply and irrigation systems.
- During implementation of PRF II, project reports stated that PRF district staff did not have the necessary capacity to provide support related to proper land acquisition processes and that affected persons may be forced to donate assets because beneficiary communities cannot technically prepare the land acquisition report. This issue has been addressed during implementation of PRF III, through the recruitment of both environmental and social safeguards officers and a monitoring and evaluation officer who are based at the central level and oversee overall project reports and documentation. However, interviews with the technical team suggest that improvements are required in the core staff to oversee all environmental and social issues. PRF III currently has combined roles (e.g. the infrastructure and environmental officer is combined, social development is combined with social safeguards/gender/ethnic groups, and a monitoring and evaluation is combined with grievance redress mechanism). The recommendation is to have specific environmental and social officers instead of these combined roles.
- For the management of rural water supply and latrine improvement activities, especially under PRF III, impacts are addressed through the Environmental Code of Practice developed by Nam Saat. For CLEAR, the code of practice will be updated to align with the World Bank ESF and will be applied to all subprojects that involve civil works.
- Although PRF does not allow the physical relocation of households or businesses under its support program, one of its main focused components is infrastructure development. In addition, although the construction, improvement or rehabilitation of community

infrastructure is small in size, impacts on small strips of land and other assets are likely to occur. PRF requires that all proposals involving civil works (regardless of the size) within the existing target areas and new provincial and district PRF offices, have updated land acquisition procedures to meet the ESF 5 and Decree 84's requirements.

- Activities to support livelihood and nutrition activities and nutrition enhancement did not result in any loss of private land or assets. Livelihood/nutrition grants provided under the pilot were typically used for the production of small livestock such as poultry and catfish, for weaving activities and the provision of special meals for pregnant/lactating mothers and malnourished infants. Some small structures such as village nutrition centers were built on public spaces within beneficiary villages. Because activities also included the promotion of crop production, safeguard instruments including the simple Pest Management Plan were prepared and used to minimize and mitigate environmental and social impacts associated with livelihood and nutrition activities. The safeguard assessment under PRF III did not find any outstanding safeguard issues associated with livelihood/nutrition activities.
- PRF technical teams are of the view that community-driven activities under PRF III are effective in improving public health, hygiene and community well-being through better latrine systems, water supply and other community initiatives. CLEAR also intends to continue this approach and activities will be implemented at the village, cluster village (kumbans) and district levels in targeted provinces. The RPF therefore will be made available in Lao language to be accessed and used by the local community.
- PRF has developed a negative list, which will also be updated and incorporated in all E&S instruments.
- A feedback and resolution mechanism was developed under PRF. However, the evaluation for PRF III document preparation found that, while beneficiaries are well aware of the purpose and function of the mechanism, it is rarely used for anything other than thanking the project for its support or requesting more support. To strengthen the mechanism, PRF has initiated every six months follow-up visits during PRF III implementation to ensure that no outstanding grievances or impacts of land acquisition remain unaddressed. These face-to-face follow-up visits are facilitated by kumban facilitators (KBF), and may very well help overcome social and cultural barriers to utilization of the feedback and resolution mechanism. These barriers include: (1) illiteracy – people who cannot write their complaint; (2) language – people who cannot speak Lao and therefore cannot use the hotline; (3) traditional preferences to resolve any conflict without interference from outside the village – usually conflict resolution is facilitated by the village chief and village elders (*Neo Hom*); (4) the custom of paying a fee if requesting support from a higher level; and (5) loss of 'model problem-free village' status – a prestigious recognition from local government.

## Grievance Redress

The existing GRM used by PRF was designed based on the WB Safeguards Policy and the GoL Decree 192/PM, specifically Article 13, which requires an investment project to establish an effective mechanism for grievance resolution. The Project has set up Feedback and Resolution Committees (FRCs) at the village, kumban (note that this administrative has been

dissolved in most local areas), district and provincial levels, composed of concerned departments, local officials, and village chiefs. The Feedback and Resolution Mechanism Guideline states that all feedback should be properly documented by the FRC at the respective level and addressed through consultations in a transparent manner aimed at resolving matters through consensus. The steps are involved:

- All complaints should firstly be handled and resolutions should be sought at the village level. If the problem cannot be solved in the village, complaints and legal action against these guidelines, the implementation of agreements found in the minutes, or other grievances can be filed according to the procedures summarized in this section and detailed in the Project Operational Manual dealing with the Feedback and Resolution Mechanism.
- The complaint, if the resolution at the village level is unsatisfactory, will be brought up to the district authorities (District Government Office in consultation with concerned line agencies). If the resolution at this level is not satisfactory, the complaint will be lodged with the Provincial Court of Law, whose decision would be final.
- In addition to the feedback and resolution mechanism described above, complainants may also (or permit representatives on their behalf) voice their concern or complaints with the PRF team at the central level or use the hotline of the National Assembly if complainants are still not satisfied with the resolution of their complaints at the project and provincial level.
- All legal and administrative costs incurred by complainants and their representatives at the FRC are to be covered by the project proponent.

Under PRF III-AF, the PRF required that FRC should have at least 50% women and they should be trained to perform social audits. Responsibilities of the social audit committee are as follows:

- Ensure that all committees and the leaders of the committees function in a just and fair manner.
- Where discrepancies and malpractices are noted, report them to the wider representative meeting of the village.
- Perform an internal audit of all records and accounts of the organization and other committees, at least once every two months.
- Ensure adherence to PRF principles, rules and concepts such as transparency in the functioning of committees.
- Identify weaknesses and take remedial measures.
- Report remedial actions taken at the general meeting of the village.
- Social audit committee should meet at least once a month and inform the village organization management about any issues.

Discussion with the PRF technical teams<sup>9</sup> suggest that the current GRM process and management is somewhat effective but needs improvement, especially on assigning a key person to implement/ operationalize the GRM. In general, all of the targeted and beneficiaries' villages are familiar with the traditional government policy on handling of petitions, which follows formal processes from the village to the district, provincial and national courts. This mechanism is communicated by the district authorities to the village authorities as part of their oversight roles. However, at the community level, villagers are often unfamiliar with specific project-related grievance processes and often bring unrelated issues to discuss with the project. Examples include but are not limited to: (i) just want to talk to the person from end line because it is free; (ii) issues related to contract farming; (iii) use of unregulated chemicals/pesticides/herbicides and their impacts. The team reported that the hotline that used to be active during PRF II is now inactive because: (i) there are no staff posted specifically to take calls from the hotline; (ii) hotline calls are often not related to project-caused issues; and (iii) the hotline task was added to an existing M&E task, and because it was an add-on task and often the issues raised were unrelated to the project, the hotline eventually became inactive.

The technical teams also report that while the availability of a GRM – including a hotline – is important, a more immediate need is a resource person to operate the GRM and communicate with key stakeholders on how to process grievances and petitions at various levels. This is to avoid receiving calls and complaints that are unrelated to the projects.

### **1.3.2 Engagement of women and vulnerable groups**

Beside environmental and social safeguards related matters, PRF has setup a set of **Core PRF Principles and Community Development Rules** to guide its implementation on the ground. There are six core principles and ten rules. The principles are: (i) simplicity (ii) 2) community participation and sustainability, (iii) transparency and accountability, (iv) wise investment, (v) social inclusion and gender equality, and (vi) siding with the poorest. According to the discussions with the PRF management and technical teams these core principles are proven to be very effective as they are not only motivating project staff and its local coordinators, but also gaining trust and commitment from the targeted khumbans, villages and communities. CLEAR will, therefore, continue to apply these core principles and rules.

The principle of simplicity, it aims to ensure greater transparency and provide easy steps guidance to engage its stakeholders in project development and planning; ensures people understand project/subproject objectives by using local communication methods and avoid complicated administrative procedures.

The principle on community participation and sustainability address community incentive and ownership in participation, especially in the planning and designing of subproject infrastructure development (rural access roads, small bridge, irrigation systems, etc) in a way that it would benefit all involved stakeholders. This includes shares responsibilities (working with/for the subproject) and costs (usually 10% of the total subproject costs). To ensure

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<sup>9</sup> Discussion with teams working in the areas of: (i) infrastructure improvement and environment management; (ii) socio-economic development/livelihoods support programme; (iii) secure food and nutrition security; and (iv) M&E on 25 November 2022.

subproject sustainability, the project requires all community members, including the marginalized groups, have the right to suggest how grants should be used and to voice their opinions and express their needs. To this end, the PRF has developed various community engagement guiding manuals for various project's components and for interacting with different groups.

The principle on transparency and accountability addresses accurate information and satisfaction of project activities and on the use of funds/small grants. All proposed subprojects are required to conduct public meetings and stakeholders' questions, concerns, feedbacks are records, and the decisions are made collectively. The Feedback Resolution Mechanism (FRM) was developed and revised during PRF III-AF. It was communicated to all subprojects' stakeholders during implementation. Village Mediation Committees/Social Audit Committee are informed of the FRM during subproject preparation stage. For the implementation of CLEAR, although the existing FRM is functioning, a lightly updated version is developed and included under SEP and this ESMF.

The principle on wise investment addresses the effort to use PRF resources wisely so as to ensure the widest possible coverage and the best possible cost-effectiveness. Most of the resources is designed to be used and spent on the Kumban and village levels and the management and administration costs are designed be kept to a minimum. This guiding principle will also be used under CLEAR, meaning that most of the resources will be allocated directly to the local levels and CLEAR will require targeted Kumbans and villages to open Bank Account and receive financial management training. Wise investment also involves mutually select an investment/infrastructure that it is cost effective and allow the targeted villagers to gain maximum and sustainable benefits from the subgrant allocated to them.

Principle on social inclusion and gender equality will also be strictly applies to CLEAR. A social inclusion and gender equality action is being developed (updating from PRF III-AF) to ensure that no members of the community can be excluded from participation in CLEAR activities regardless of production/income levels, gender or ethnicity, disability or age. Same as PRF III-AF, special efforts will be made to reach out to the most vulnerable groups of the community such as (i) households with the poorest, single headed men/women, ethnic groups (ii) people with disabilities, (iii) landless, labourless, and (iv) aged groups. This principle also includes measures to overcome linguistic obstacles, gender disparities and any other economic, social and/or cultural barriers during the planning and implementation phases to enable vulnerable people's voices to be heard in terms of proposing, prioritizing and implementing subprojects.

The principle on siding with the poorest goes hand in hand with the principle on social inclusion and gender equality that requires all PRF staff and facilitators to work for the poorest and ensure that at

least two-third (66%) of the subprojects benefited to the poorest villages within each participating Kumban.

These principles have been translated into ten actionable community development rules for working with communities on a day-to-day basis and they are:

1. Unity (“samakee”)
2. Equity (“samerphab”)
3. Pro-poor (“haikattukngak gone”)
4. Women empowerment (“haixitkaemaeying”)
5. Correct vision (“tongmeevixay that”)
6. Bottom-up planning (“vangphaenchak khan ban”)
7. Ownership (“kanchaokan”)
8. Self-confidence/self-esteem (“kuampeneng”)
9. Transparency (“kuampongxay”)
10. Wise Investment (“khan long tuentongkumkha”)

These principles and rules are praised by the technical implementation teams and they will be incorporated in the community driven development (CDD) planning process for all project and subproject activities under CLEAR.

Other lessons learned seems to also revealed positive impacts. For instance, despite Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the implementation of various activities involved direct physical contacts, much progress has been achieved during the course of 2020-2021, especially on establishing and providing training to targeted Farmer Nutrition Groups (FNGs). The MIS system of FNG had also been developed and currently functioning. This system shows that by the end of 2021, 249 FNGs in 231 villages have been establish and benefits a total of 9,928 members from 5,632 households. On the gender equality and social inclusion, PRF III-AF has incorporated gender aspects in all PRF’s activities such as village planning, implementation, operation, and maintenance. PRF has also re-set up the Focal Point staff in October 2021 with roles and responsibilities to help in developing the gender equality and social inclusion strategy and promote women inclusion and empowerment. As a result, PRF III-AF managed to recruit a total of 215 staff which included 95 females (44.19%). This number/percentage is about 14.19% higher than project targeted/expectation and the number of women involvements is much higher in 2021 and 2022 compared to the previous years. The project also managed to have higher percentage of female representatives in the leading positions. For instance, the percentage of village Self-Help Groups (SHG) management committee is 81% and percentage of women involved in decision-making is 50%.

### **1.3.3 Land acquisition**

Lessons learned from PRF, PRF II and PRF III include the following:

- The type of infrastructure work in the subprojects that were selected/provided were mostly small in size. The impacts of civil works are minimal. For instance, of a total of about 1,400 subprojects implemented, 120 (8%) involved a minor loss of private land or assets, mostly under

road and water supply subprojects. All project-affected persons were classified as direct beneficiaries.

- A due diligence conducted in late 2021 on 53 sub-projects in the 6 Provinces revealed no outstanding on environmental and social issues, but issue on UXO clearance has been discussed and to address this issue, PRF has coordinated with the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) on the process for obtaining a UXO clearance certificate from UXO-Laos even if the subprojects are small and focusing on rehabilitating and improving existing infrastructures for 10 provinces. Special attention on UXO clearance was paid to the current target 4 Provinces: Pongsaly, Oudomxay, Houaphan, and Xiengkhouang.
- No physical relocation of households or business entities occurred during the implementation of PRF II and PRF III-AF.
- There are some houses had their small part of their land and some agriculture products effected by infrastructure sub-projects -rural road, irrigation system, water supply system, However, no household lost more than 5% of total productive assets. All such impacts were addressed through voluntary donation in line with the provisions of the Compensation and Resettlement Policy Framework.
- The evaluation confirmed that potential benefits versus negative impacts on land or household livelihoods and assets related to infrastructure construction had been discussed. Measures to minimize impact had been developed and agreed within the communities and by affected households. In all cases, affected persons directly benefited from the infrastructure construction that caused the loss.
- The technical implementation team reported that the Compensation and Resettlement Policy Framework is followed well. However, documentation and monitoring need to be strengthened. They suggest that the reporting system/documentation needs to be improved with simplified forms and documents for practical implementation on the ground. This issue was identified during PRF II and reported as improved during the implementation of PRFIII-AF. Under CLEAR implementation, ESF-related documents should be revised and simplified to ensure adequate monitoring and documentation and ease of follow up by officials at the provincial and district level. Reporting related to social and environmental issues should also be updated to align with World Bank safeguards policy and national policy Decree 192/PM to follow E&S instruments, – specifically ESF 5 and Decree 84/GoL on land acquisition and compensation.
- Project implementation experience shows that affected households may not be fully aware of their rights and able to make an informed choice to receive compensation at replacement cost. Lessons learned from PRF II stated that some local PRF staff consider that affected people are entitled for compensation at replacement cost only if they lose more than 5% of their total land and less than 5% is to be donated/contributed to the project. PRF technical teams reported that project-affected persons are often willing to contribute their lost assets in exchange for better infrastructure such as rural access roads, water supply and irrigation systems.
- During implementation of PRF II, project reports stated that PRF district staff did not have the necessary capacity to provide support related to proper land acquisition processes and that affected persons may be forced to donate assets because beneficiary communities cannot technically prepare the land acquisition report. This issue has been addressed during implementation of PRF III, through the recruitment of both environmental and social safeguards officers and a monitoring and evaluation officer who are based at the central level and oversee overall project reports and documentation. However, interviews with the technical team suggest that improvements are required in the core staff to oversee all environmental and social issues. PRF III currently has combined roles (e.g. the infrastructure and environmental officer is combined, social development is combined with social safeguards/gender/ethnic groups, and a



monitoring and evaluation is combined with grievance redress mechanism). The recommendation is to have specific environmental and social officers instead of these combined roles.

- For the management of rural water supply and latrine improvement activities, especially under PRF III, impacts are addressed through the Environmental Code of Practice developed by Nam Saat. For CLEAR, the code of practice will be updated to align with the World Bank ESF and will be applied to all subprojects that involve civil works.
- Although PRF does not allow the physical relocation of households or businesses under its support program, one of its main focused components is infrastructure development. In addition, although the construction, improvement or rehabilitation of community infrastructure is small in size, impacts on small strips of land and other assets are likely to occur. PRF requires that all proposals involving civil works (regardless of the size) within the existing target areas and new provincial and district PRF offices, have updated land acquisition procedures to meet the ESF 5 and Decree 84's requirements.
- Activities to support livelihood and nutrition activities and nutrition enhancement did not result in any loss of private land or assets. Livelihood/nutrition grants provided under the pilot were typically used for the production of small livestock such as poultry and catfish, for weaving activities and the provision of special meals for pregnant/lactating mothers and malnourished infants. Some small structures such as village nutrition centers were built on public spaces within beneficiary villages. Because activities also included the promotion of crop production, safeguard instruments including the simple Pest Management Plan were prepared and used to minimize and mitigate environmental and social impacts associated with livelihood and nutrition activities. The safeguard assessment under PRF III did not find any outstanding safeguard issues associated with livelihood/nutrition activities.
- PRF technical teams are of the view that community-driven activities under PRF III are effective in improving public health, hygiene and community well-being through better latrine systems, water supply and other community initiatives. CLEAR also intends to continue this approach and activities will be implemented at the village, cluster village (kumbans) and district levels in targeted provinces. The RPF therefore will be made available in Lao language to be accessed and used by the local community.
- PRF has developed a negative list, which will also be updated and incorporated in all E&S instrumentss.
- A feedback and resolution mechanism was developed under PRF. However, the evaluation for PRF III document preparation found that, while beneficiaries are well aware of the purpose and function of the mechanism, it is rarely used for anything other than thanking the project for its support or requesting more support. To strengthen the mechanism, PRF has initiated every six months follow-up visits during PRF III implementation to ensure that no outstanding grievances or impacts of land acquisition remain unaddressed. These face-to-face follow-up visits are facilitated by kumban facilitators (KBF), and may very well help overcome social and cultural barriers to utilization of the feedback and resolution mechanism, These barriers include: (1) illiteracy – people who cannot write their complaint; (2) language – people who cannot speak Lao and therefore cannot use the hotline; (3) traditional preferences to resolve any conflict without interference from outside the village – usually conflict resolution is facilitated by the village chief and village elders (*Neo Hom*); (4) the custom of paying a fee if requesting support from a higher level; and (5) loss of 'model problem-free village' status – a prestigious recognition from local government.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

As the World Bank focuses on the development effectiveness, and project's impact, it's important the following aspects be considered and mainstreamed throughout the project implementation.

### 4.1 Inclusion Approach

- **Inclusion.** Part of vulnerable households, particularly those who are disadvantaged may be potentially left out of project planning and project benefits. Given this, criteria should be developed to provide opportunities for the disadvantaged group, which is a subset of poor and vulnerable group.

The World Bank Group defines social inclusion as:

1. The process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society, and
2. The process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity to take part in society.

Social inclusion is an integral part of—and vital to—achieving the World Bank Group's twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. To ensure the project promote social inclusion, the following aspects should be implemented carefully and consistently over the course of the project:

- **Consultations.** Meaningful consultations can contribute to improved design, implementation, and sustainability of development interventions. The objectives of consultation with project stakeholders, particularly with project beneficiaries include receiving input for improved decision-making about the design and implementation arrangements of a development project, to contribute to improved results and sustainability. In this context, consultations can potentially give voice to the needs of different target groups, including vulnerable and marginalized groups; improve risk management by identifying opportunities and risks from and to a project (World Bank, 2012b); and increase transparency, public understanding, and citizen involvement in development decision-making. Consultations with key stakeholders also including project-affected people and civil societies. While consultations are frequently used during World Bank project preparation, engagement is less systematic during implementation.

The Bank suggested that consultation should start with clear subject and purpose, adequate stakeholder representation and methods of consultation, and disclosure of and timely access to understandable, relevant, and objective information and documentation. Meaningful consultations also require stakeholder identification and analysis, including due consideration of representativeness and inclusion of women, disadvantaged, vulnerable groups, ethnic minority peoples. In addition, safeguard policies require adequate documentation of consultations as part of the project documentation. Consultation should also be informed well ahead of the event to enable participants to prepare themselves.

Governments need to make relevant information available to citizens in accessible and understandable formats, and to build the capacity and systems to provide adequate responses to citizen feedback. Citizens need to acquire minimum skills to engage, and they need to be interested in the issue.

- **Information disclosure.** Open access to information does automatically lead to participation and impact, which also depend on such context factors as enabling legislation and grassroots activism. Information formats and activities need to be part of the design of citizen engagement processes and be based on an understanding of the target audience. Project information will be posted at community centers as well as disseminated through community meetings to ensure farming households who are potential beneficiaries of the project could

study and participate as they wish. The Bank will ensure people in the project area have access to project's information to determine how they participate in the project activities. As a good practice, the Bank's suggested that the information provided be relevant (responsive to citizens' interests), timely (sufficient notice), and understandable (language, format, and local context).

- **Languages.** Ethnic minority groups may be potentially excluded simply because the language used during information sessions, consultation meetings, trainings, project planning sessions are not in the language that they use on a daily basis. According to World Bank (2013, Inclusion Matters), language is an important aspect of identity and claim to political and cultural space. Language can thus be an important driver of both exclusion and inclusion. Thus, consideration should be given to frequent use of local languages during consultation, meetings, and trainings with the participation of ethnic minority groups.
- **Sociocultural norms.** Social norms can considerably affect that way men and women participate in training. Social norms contributes to establishing farming practices. Thus, changing a current farming practice mean changing a social norm that is deeply rooted in one's belief system, which may affect farmers' social network that is close to them, such as their family members, relatives, friends, neighbors, their business partners. Women in Laos spend remarkable amount of time doing house chore and farm works. They are considered appropriate more for the household role. As such, more men (than women) attend an events (meetings, trainings, etc.) outside their home. Under the project, depending on the training topics, women should be encouraged to participate as they apply the knowledge to make a joint decision with their husband.
- **Specific ways to to reduce barriers to participation of ethnic groups:**
  - **Recruitment of a social development/ ethnic groups specialist:** also specialized in gender to work part-time throughout the life cycle of the project and conduct social risk screening for each new proposed subproject site. The specialist should help with designing consultation methodology suitable for ethnic groups, monitor remote community participation levels, collect disaggregated information and data on gender and ethnicity relevant to aspects of project activities. S/he should also help the project to develop a set of training with measures to improve access of the vulnerable groups, poor, women, etc., as well as facilitate delivery of the gender/SEA/VAWC training, addressing risk management and awareness raising.
  - **Identify ethnic interpreters to overcome language barriers** (eg. Include Khmu, Phong, Akha, Yao, etc. YGs) disseminate information in clear and simple local language to support comprehension by those who are less literate. This may include individual face-to-face communication with the illiterate at the designing and/or group formation stages.
  - **Develop/incorporate cultural awareness messages in a field guide for all groups** that incorporates the concept of sensitivity to ethnic groups (cultural responsiveness) and inclusive consultation/social inclusion. These messages can also ensure that the project and its staff and subcontractors respect ancestral and spiritual land and forest use and remain sensitive to customary use of land by the community, especially ethnic groups.
  - **Preference selection of ethnic groups representatives, men and village elders for training under project components,** promote better understanding on gender equality, project administrative procedures (processes and steps involved) so that village outreach/young graduates as well as village women can feel more confident to participate in project activities.

- **Prioritize distribution of equitable benefit sharing.** develop special measures towards the vulnerable groups and this may include extra effort and budget to tailoring livelihood/income generation activities to bridge the gaps and response to actual needs of the poor households, people with disabilities, female headed households, etc.

## 4.2 Improved Farming Practices

Livelihood Improvement that is initiated and owned by project's target households themselves is fundamental to increasing household income, nutritional status of their children, and their well-being. The Table below summarizes key constraints that ethnic groups typically in household agricultural production and proposes practical ways to address such constraints to improved farming productivity at household level (through promoting adoption of new technologies) and at community level (through select value chain).

Constraints to ethnic smallholder farmers	Proposed actions under CLEAR project
<b>Culture, Social Norms, Farming Practices</b>	
<p><b><i>Ethnic Languages</i></b> Each ethnic groups such as Akha, Khmou, Phong, etc., have their own language. Even though some could speak the national language, their daily spoken language is their mother tone.</p>	<p><b><i>Promote use of ethnic languages</i></b> It is important that local EG language be used, whenever possible, in meetings, workshops, trainings, etc. where all participants are from the same ethnic group. Where written language is available, written language should be used, particularly in project's media such as leaflets, posters, etc.</p>
<p><b><i>Traditional Farming practices</i></b> Changing a farming practice, from an existing tradition which is deep rooted (e.g. slash and burn agriculture), takes time. In addition, adopting a new farming technique (e.g. climate smart technologies, pest management...) may require both husband and wife to learn and commit to application. Some techniques may require extra time and effort which requires EG people to learn and adapt over time.</p> <p>Therefore, training events should be followed with technical support, hands-on guidance in the field (e.g. demonstration site, on-field workshop during cropping season/harvest) to draw lessons learned and promote interest of the trained and EM neighbors to trial out the new techniques/technologies. Participants in stakeholder meetings also expressed the lack of adequate sensitization and awareness raising on new technologies thus hampering the adoption of such technologies and practices. This hampers</p>	<p><b><i>Promote use of high-yield farming techniques grounded on existing farm system and practices</i></b></p> <p><b>Before training:</b> Extension agencies need to make special effort to sensitize farmers on the benefits and application of the newly introduced technologies, particularly to check if the planned technologies is suitable to local farming system, culture, and marketability, etc. This is critical to promoting adoption of the introduced technologies. The following should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainings (agricultural extension...) should be organized by ethnic group so that local language could be used (e.g. ideally by trainer/facilitator speaking the same language, or with an interpreter's assistance).</li> <li>• The need for use of ethnic languages need will be assessed for each target groups – well in advance, to allow sufficient time for training preparation.</li> <li>• Where possible, training and extension materials should be summarized (in key points) in target group's written language (if any), for their reference following the training, and for sharing with other members of the same ethnic group (particularly those who do not have the chance to come to the trainings/workshop).</li> </ul> <p><b>After trainings:</b> All trainings should be organized with a clearly prepared plan for post-training technical support. Such follow-up support is fundamental to promoting the trial of the new training</p>

Constraints to ethnic smallholder farmers	Proposed actions under CLEAR project
widespread adoption of new technologies, limiting their uptake and affecting improvements in agricultural productivity.	<p>knowledge that later leads to adoption on the part of the trained farmers.</p> <p>The following key steps could be followed when an agricultural extension training program is planned for a village:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct training needs assessment;</li> <li>• Prepare training materials (considering use of ethnic language in classroom and in training leaflet ...)</li> <li>• Deliver training and conduct post-training evaluation</li> <li>• Set up demonstration sites (e.g. using farm of a trainee)</li> <li>• Organize on-field follow-up technical support. Where possible, Farmers Field School should be used to take advantage of crop growth and field observation)</li> <li>• Provide customized technical support for trained farmers to promote trial of newly introduced technology</li> <li>• Continue the process to assist farmers to make progress – from learning, trial, early adoption, and full adoption.</li> </ul>
Production Assets	
<p><b><i>Lack of security of tenure</i></b></p> <p>According to a survey conducted by Indochina in 2022, in four project provinces, it was found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 69% of households own 1-3 land plot(s). Although the average farm size is 3.5 hectares, only 2.2 hectares, on average, is cultivated in the past 12 months (only 63% of each household's land is farmed).</li> <li>• For those who have land, they may own 2 or 3 plots that are scattered.</li> <li>• Only 1/3 has land title<sup>10</sup>.</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Enhance land access and land tenure</i></b></p> <p>Since 1989, Laos has been accelerating its transformation from a centrally-planned economy towards a market economy. Considerable success in the reorganization of its legal and regulatory framework has been achieved within a short period<sup>11</sup>. It is important that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land-based income be promoted through farming that takes into account farm size, land distance from home, labor availability, market for the target crops, adoption of improved farming techniques, etc., including nutrition benefits for project's beneficiary households;</li> <li>• For landless households, other income generation activities that are not land-based need to be explored;</li> <li>• Land titles be provided to farmers (under other government programs) for secured land tenure which promotes investments on land.</li> </ul>
Household Labor	
<p><b><i>Lack of Labor</i></b></p> <p>According to a survey conducted by Indochina in 2022, in four project provinces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average household size: 6 person</li> <li>• 81.2% of household members work as unpaid (own-account) workers.</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Refine household labor division &amp; promote labor exchange</i></b></p> <p><b>Home labor</b></p> <p>Domestic labor division may need some adjustment thereby women are more involved in paid work than unpaid home chore. Women participation in farm labor would not only ease the lack of labor for farm works but also promote their role in income generation activities. This is an</p>

<sup>10</sup> Source: Indochina Research, 2022, Nutrition Convergence Monitoring Mid-term Survey Report (prepared for the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the World Bank.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/W4760E/w4760e0c.htm>

Constraints to ethnic smallholder farmers	Proposed actions under CLEAR project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only 10% are paid workers.</li> </ul> <p>This above finding suggests that there is a lack of home labor that affects agricultural productivity at household level.</p>	<p>important start for households to prepare themselves for better use of training knowledge, effective use of loan, etc.)</p> <p><b>Labor Exchange</b> Current labor exchange among a small group (2-3 households) are still adopted. This practice should be leveraged to overcome the lack of labor when project interventions are unfold and upscaled that require farming intensification for increased income.</p> <p><b>Mechanisation</b> Where possible, mechanisation should be promoted to overcome the lack of labor and allow consistent quality output of certain stages over crop cycle. Use of ploughing machine, seed spreader, small tractors are essential to leveraging labor shortage meanwhile saving cost if adopted for a larger group of households.</p>
	<p><b>Conduct campaigns for public awareness raising for change of attitude and practice</b> The following steps are suggested to gradually promote the participation of women in economic activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare IEC materials (leaflet, training materials that promote gender equality through equal economic participation)</li> <li>Conduct annual IEC program, workshops, to raise awareness of the community in terms of the role and potential of women in improving economic situation of households.</li> <li>Involve mass organizations, including Women' Union, Farmers Association, particularly Youth Union, to get the message across.</li> <li>Organize contests on knowledge on gender equality, and sharing success story of the women's improving economic activities, including story about husband sharing household chore to enable his wife to join him in family's income generation activities (e.g. farming, non-farm business...)</li> <li>Loan application process requires signature of both wife and husband, with written commitment of husband sharing chore works to enable his wife time for income generation activities and effective loan use.</li> </ul>
<b>Loan Access</b>	
<p><b>Loan</b> On-going RPF-III (Additional Financing) has a loan program. As of June 2022, there are total of 8,557 individuals who are using loans provided through SHG.</p>	<p><b>Customize Loan Items</b> To ensure effective loan use, it's important that loan be provided based on crop cycle. This allows loan borrower to access the right amount of loan timely to make timely investment in the crop. Example include loans for investment in agricultural inputs such as seeds, trees,</p>

Constraints to ethnic smallholder farmers				Proposed actions under CLEAR project
Rank	Activity	Members	%	<p>fertilizers, pesticide, etc. Loan group may be based on group that adopt labor exchange to build on existing strong bonding social capital.</p> <p>Loan should target long-term plan including agroforestry, particularly those who are allocated with forest land that need intensive and investment in the first few years of the crop cycle. Further, lending institutions must also explore the possibility of designing loan instruments that do not require land as a collateral but explore the possibility of accepting group guarantee as an alternative option.</p> <p><b>Provide Basic Financial Literacy to Loan Members</b></p> <p>To promote effective use of loan, loan members should be trained on how to use their loan effectively. Effective use means their loan is used to support effectively the purpose for which loan is borrowed, such as for cultivation, animal husbandry, retail trading, etc.</p>
1	Pig raising	2,904	43.99%	
2	Chicken raising	1,437	21.77%	
3	Goat raising	591	8.95%	
4	Weaving and sewing	468	7.09%	
5	Duck raising	448	6.79%	
6	Cultivation (ginger, corn, vegetable, cassava, mushroom, fruit)	440	6.67%	
7	Fish farming	164	2.48%	
8	Retailed Trading	101	1.53%	
9	Trading (animal, vegetable)	28	0.42%	
10	Galangal	10	0.15%	
11	Buying grass seeds	5	0.08%	
12	Growing brooms	2	0.03%	
	Grand Total	6,601	100.00%	
Source: PRF's Bi-Annual Progress Report (Jan-June 2022)				
Market Linkages (value chains)				<p>Participation in select value chains through contract farming</p> <p>With the above preparation in place, following activities should be promoted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good, trained farming households will be invited to join commodity specific value chain initiated and led by PAFO, DAFO</li><li>• Close monitoring of household production will be done to build good reputation for both farmers and private sectors in the value chain.</li></ul>
Inadequate attention and lack of support and promotion of local niche products				<p>Given the potential of ‘unharnessed’ promising products and value chains, project may commission a few small studies to document wild edibles, animal produces and herbal medicines that are available in the project districts, together with the range of local/indigenous knowledge associated with their cultivation/rearing as well as their traditional use. Such studies could lay the foundation for developing new products and value chains which can add to the existing agricultural production</p>
Bamboo shoot and rattan processing, weaving, basketry and wickerworks, wild medicinal herbs, particularly natural dyes and weaving, offer opportunities for developing niche products				

Constraints to ethnic smallholder farmers	Proposed actions under CLEAR project
	portfolio of project district/village that promote income for poor householdss.
<b>Knowledge for Improved Production</b>	
<b>Training Topics</b>	<b>Conduct Training Needs Assessment</b> Conduct topic-specific trainings on select commodities (based on local needs & market demand/analysis) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key topics may include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Soil fertility management &amp; effective use of fertilizers;</li> <li>➤ Plant protection &amp; effective use of pesticide and other agricultural products;</li> <li>➤ Water management, coordination, and water saving technologies;</li> <li>➤ Labor safety measures to protect farmers and their health (e.g. use of protective measures when spraying pesticide...)</li> <li>➤ Post-harvest technologies (e.g. warehouse, storage, maintenance...), particularly for perishable farm produce such as fruit...)</li> <li>➤ Good agricultural practices for select commodities for awareness raising and promoting technology adoption</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Infrastructure for Improved Production</b>	
<b>Limited rural infrastructure that support agricultural production</b> Limited access to basic infrastructure for agricultural production such as tertiary road, on-farm irrigation, food processing facilities ...)	<b>Identify small-scaled infrastructure that is still bottleneck to agricultural production</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify bottlenecks that affect transportation of farm product and adoption of post-harvest techniques;</li> <li>• Invest in identified bottlenecks (small-scaled infrastructure)</li> <li>• In rainfed area where irrigation is not possible, identify feasible water harvesting methods to help improve home production, including animal husbandry that help improve family nutrition, and household health.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Tuan Anh Le, Alessandra Gage, Dhrupad Choudhury. 2022 (Indigenous People Development Plan).



## ANNEX 1 – Summary of Consultation During Project Preparation

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
25 Nov 2022	PRF Implement ation Team	4	0	0	Assessment capacity of PRF-District to manage ESF risks	<p><b>ESF Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PRF has extensive experience in managing social and environment related issues as they have been working in the areas of poverty reduction from more than 20 years .</li> <li>Since PRF often involved in in infrastructure development, PRF team also suggested that they have extensive managing and implementing land acquisition, compensation and resettlement-related issues</li> <li>Under CLEAR, PRF it will continue to assume overall responsibility for the implementation.</li> <li>CLEAR implementation will follow the existing arrangement for PRFIII- Additional Financing (PRFIII-AF) comprising a CLEAR/project central office led by the Project Management Team under the leadership of the Executive Director.</li> <li>Despite having implementation experience, ESF is new and thus PRF core staff need to understand the be to E&amp;S instrumentss. ESF training is therefore inserted in the ESF project preparation consultants.</li> <li>PRF will schedule a time to receive ESF related trainings</li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PRF has few staff and most of them are taking multiple roles. While some multiple roles are easier to manage, some tasks required more inputs and time consuming. This issue should be solved under CLEAR</li> </ul> <p><b>Official Documentations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are too many farms and steps for both side, WB and Lao government, making harder/difficult to work on time. This applies not only to ES works but to all other project related works. Under CLEAR, official document processes should be must simpler</li> </ul> <p><b>Social inclusion:</b></p>	Lao

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PRF is in the process of developing a gender action plan with the aim to engage more women, mother with young children and benefit sharing plan with the aim to make sure that project provide benefits fairly, especially to the poorest.</li> <li>PRF main beneficiaries are poor households in poor districts, thus the project works are involved engaging ethnic groups community, women, young mothers with children under two and promote livelihoods support program.</li> </ul> <p><b>Monitoring and reporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The engineering/Infrastructure team is taking care of the environmental safeguards monitoring</li> <li>The Livelihoods/Nutrition team is taking care of the social safeguards monitoring</li> <li>Issues and Concerns</li> <li>Minor issues were found (not cleaning after the construction completion) and those issues were managed; rural access road provided by the project were used by loggers and these issues need to be dealt with at the local district level.</li> <li>The E&amp;S monitoring/due diligence is conducted two time a year (6/12month)</li> <li>Mostly people/villagers are happy with the project's activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Main issues and concerns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Under staff</li> <li>No key inhouse experts for social and environmental safeguards. Under CLEAR, these experts should be recruited to support PRF</li> <li>Limited budget for ESF monitoring works and no budget for mitigation/restoration works</li> </ul>	
9 Jan 2023	District Implementation Team	7	2	4	Assessment capacity of PRF-District to manage ESF risks	<p><b>Engagement with villagers during project periods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selection of activities: organizing village meetings (use bottom-up model), engaged about &gt;50% women to 80% because project asked for women to participate.</li> <li>Divide the group between men and women, give priority to women (each meeting, we take 80% of women's comments).</li> </ul>	Hmong

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The implementation activities are based on the opinions of the female + male group.</li> <li>Planning meeting at the district level: we required 3 representatives from each village (2 of them must be women).</li> <li>We encourage women to join meetings and groups, but men are not taking women seriously. We have to talk to men many times.</li> <li>We want to have Khmu staff to communicate with the Khmu villagers, we have only Hmong</li> </ul> <p><b>ES impact management:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No impacts. because work in community work. For example, the water pipes laying from irrigation project, if it go through people's land , it must be buried deep into the land.</li> <li>All construction activities are in communal land, and we are not allowed more than 5% impacted land, if any.</li> <li>If land impact, not here, but in Mok district, villagers compensate each other as they all want the water. There is one case where the irrigation intake is built on a villager's land of about 300 m2, after discussions, the villagers agreed to allocate another piece of village land (1 hectare) to the impacted household.</li> <li>Under CLEAR we will the same, only work on community land, to avoid impact.</li> <li>If there is an impact, whether it is a tree, crops or small strip of land, the community must solve them before submitted their proposal to us. We don't have budget to cover compensation</li> </ul> <p><b>Livelihood improvement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>each village establish a group comprise of six people per group (Chairman, Vice President, Finance 2 people, Seed, Procurement);</li> <li>Village representatives opened village accounts (3 people, 2 out of 3 signed);</li> <li>The village fund is used for providing small loan to villagers to raise small animals (pigs, goats...)</li> <li>Food nutrition Promotion:</li> </ul>	

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 36 villages, 39 groups were established to carry out activities: nutritious cooking, home garden, friends teaching friends (villages teach each other and teach other villages);</li> <li>Set up FB, WhatsApp, create audio-video materials in Hmong language to educate the community and get more involved in project activities;</li> <li>More and more villagers, mothers and young children like to project food. The villagers cook 2-3 times a month.</li> <li>In the past, we did not promote the collection of forest products, but we promote home gardening. under CLEAR, we should include forest products to add a food menu.</li> </ul> <p><b>Procurement work:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After choosing the activities, select the responsible committee at the village level, train them;</li> <li>Tenders open envelopes - village notified to Thalia - central district notified - operation;</li> <li>Bid packets are distributed free of charge;</li> <li>The PRF central approves the budget, the district transfers it to the village, the village procures products (but through the confirmation process from the district);</li> <li>There is a village-level team in charge (disbursement, monitoring);</li> <li>villagers don't have knowledge on procurement, we want more training for them.</li> </ul> <p><b>Infrastructure work:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documentation of each activity is taking too long, involved many steps. We want to reduce this process</li> <li>We have to make sure that 90% must serve the common interests;</li> <li>Construction: if involved villagers, we need to closely monitor as they do not familiar with construction works.</li> <li>Personal protection equipment (PPE) only for advisors/technicians not the villagers, so they work without PPE</li> <li>Selection of an infrastructure activity is too short, limited time to work with the villagers, we want more time to consult during project design, collect data</li> </ul>	

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
						<p>from time to time before survey-design, help them to develop the village plan and select suitable activity.</p> <p><b>Social and environmental aspects (customs and gender roles)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project asks for more female participants m than male: but in reality, some villages are still not able to do it;</li> <li>Financial related activities are difficult for all women, e.g. when women go to withdraw money in the districts, traveling is difficult and risky for them, riding or driving is not possible, some women take their husbands with them when withdrawing project money, some are illiterate make it harder for them.</li> <li>The women in some villages do not know how to read, so they have to get men to help them;</li> <li>Communicate with ethnic groups is difficult as ethnic groups women do not like to talk, if they talk too much it is seen as they are offended the men or their men don't like them to talk to us.</li> <li>Communicate with the elderly must use translators</li> <li>Poor families do not participate in project activities and do not benefit from the project ( mostly due to no income, little labor so they only work in the land, they feel inferior, rarely respected by their own community members) For example: don't have 5,000 kip per month to pay monthly membership condition. But some poor families are because they are just lazy to work.</li> </ul>	
<b>10 Jan 2023</b>	Ban Nong-Lae Morning	9	14	20	Village meeting and then Village authority focus groups	<p><b>Village Overview:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nong-Lae Village is located 14km away from Nong Het Municipality</li> <li>There are 2 ethnic groups (Hmong and Khmu);</li> <li>Population 387 people;</li> <li>The main income of the village is growing corn, raising cattle and pigs.</li> <li>There are 3 poorest, 1 poor families.</li> </ul> <p><b>Issues with Community Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women's voices are not respect by the men and the elders</li> <li>Women like to join public meetings, but they are not supported by their husbands and their mother-in-law.</li> <li>poor families are not joining the meetings or groups</li> </ul> <p><b>Food Nutritional Promotion:</b></p>	Hmong and Khmu

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members learn how to cook based on the provided menu-about eight courses/types and they are happy to learn how to cook together.</li> <li>Happy with the vegetable seeds to plant in their home gardens;</li> <li>The first 2-3 times the child didn't like to eat, later they eat, they also enjoy the food.</li> <li>women want to have more activities together and learn from each others</li> </ul> <p><b>Livelihoods Improvement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The village development fund is good/useful for lending during emergencies - school supply for children or sickness;</li> <li>although the money is for the poor, but the poor families don't borrow, they know they cannot pay back. other members use it for starting up business/trade, to raise animals and invest in corn fields (eg borrow money to buy pigs for LAK6 million and selling them at LAK12 million. Pig is one of the best investment).</li> </ul>	
	Afternoon	0	14	14	<b>Women Focus group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in each meeting, there are more women than men, they discussed and decided on activities, but sometimes men are not accepting or they reject the ideas. next time the project should ask for both men and women to attend a meeting.</li> <li>It is difficult for men to respect women's decisions.</li> <li>Women's activities also benefit men like home garden improve nutrition and wellbeing. Men still don't understand and think it is women's work.</li> <li>Women go to meetings but many don't understand Lao language and if there are many elderly people joining the meetings, the project should use translated language.</li> <li>The poor people are not able to participate in activities because they do not understand and are afraid of taking risks</li> <li>Some people are not joining the groups and they are waiting to see how others are doing first. they also don't want to take risks in saving and borrowing money from village fund.</li> <li>In some cases, the husbands are not allowed their wives to go to the meeting (because of fear, anger, worry that the wives meet other men, especially outside the village, the wives dress up to the meeting...)</li> </ul>	Hmong

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women who take care of project fund also fear of robbery when withdrawing money and traveling from local Banks to the village.</li> </ul>	
	Later afternoon	7	5	9	<b>Village Facilitators Focus groups</b>	<p><b>Main concerns include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One person is in charge of many villages</li> <li>Many ethnic groups need time to communicate;</li> <li>Men sometime not listened, must approach the chief to help explain to the villagers;</li> <li>Older people always need translators from their own tribes</li> <li>It is necessary to create confidence among the villagers (after the village training, the savings budget must be given to the village to manage). villagers need more financial management training;</li> <li>In some villages, the village facilitatory is still young, the villagers don't listen to them, they have to ask the elders for help;</li> <li>Sometime, we have to meet and explain to the husband, so the family don't fight after men understand about the benefits that the wife and children will receive from the project, and that the husbands can allow the wives to join meetings;</li> <li>The poor people do not understand and are persuaded by others to leave the membership. The poor cause delay and difficult for others.</li> <li>Some larger ethnic groups in the village are not difficult to encourage to join a group or a meeting, but smaller ethnic groups sometimes is difficult to get them to participate (e.g. they don't listen, they are afraid, they don't have money, they go to work, they are sick, etc...);</li> <li>In nutrition related work, poor people will participate, they sometimes come to eat, people who don't eat much (they say eating at home is more delicious);</li> <li>In some cases, poor people do not have money to save, but their husband smokes. We suggested that if the husband stop smoking for 1 day and then give the money to his wife to save, then they can withdraw later with interest, but the poor still decided to smoke and nit save); Sometimes we also lower the saving down to LAK2,000, but the poor still don't save</li> </ul>	

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some villages do not have electricity to watch video produced and/or provided by the project.</li> </ul>	
11 Jan 2023	PhaLin Village  Morning	12	4	14	Village meeting and then Village authority focus groups	<p><b>Village Overview:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PhaLin Village is located 16 km away from Nonghet district;</li> <li>There is 1 Ethnic group (Hmong) 43 households;</li> <li>The village does not have electricity;</li> <li>The road to the village is dirt and rocky (the road is quite difficult);</li> <li>There is an extremely poor family of 1 family (only 2 old people, no workers, children left home).</li> </ul> <p><b>Infrastructure work:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no issue, but want project to help with (i) improve road condition, (ii) water supply, and (iii) electricity connection</li> </ul> <p><b>Food Nutrition Promotion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>villagers have started to move from having garden in the field to having home gardens</li> <li>women and children enjoy the cooking classes and sharing food</li> <li>Poor households also join</li> <li>No problems, and want more support from the project</li> </ul> <p><b>Livelihoods Improvement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>want more village fund, the current is too small, want to work with the project, especially have fund to raise pigs, ducks, see that it is profitable;</li> <li>The villagers take turn to borrow money, but those who have borrowed once, are waiting to see if no one else borrows, they will borrow again;</li> <li>head of the group, when going to withdraw money, sometimes takes her husband or a relative with her for safety reason.</li> <li><b>Social and environmental assessment (customs and gender roles)</b></li> <li>There are still UXO in the areas, all constructions must notify the UXO clearance and must check first;</li> <li>most women, young, old, children are not speaking Lao and must use an interpreter</li> <li>The village does not have electricity, phone signal is not possible at the village but at the mountain/hill nearby the village</li> </ul>	Hmong



Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
	Afternoon	0	29	29	<b>Women Focus group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women join group because thinking that they can get a chance to borrow money for raising pig</li> <li>• Some women don't join the groups for the following reasons: husband not allowed fear of not being able to have money to pay for monthly fee, no husband to help earning income to secure that she can pay the fee, mother-in-law not allowed.</li> <li>• There are 4 self-help groups: only one women can speak Lao and she is a village women union, so other three groups have men as a leader to deal with communication and collecting ad saving money (women in this three groups are all illiterate).</li> <li>• Want more help, especially access to funding</li> </ul>	Hmong
	Later afternoon	2	2	2	<b>Village Facilitators Focus groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For nutrition work, one village facilitator is responsible for about 8 to 12 village and that is too much for one person to take care of. Six villages is the right size to work of the road is to too far.</li> <li>• Road is in poor condition, cannot ride fast, ride like walking in the rainy season. One village facilitator is working for three years and each year she has an accident due to bad road condition, but the injury is not severe as she ride slowly</li> <li>• Want to have health insurance for home workers (accident insurance already available);</li> <li>• Difficult journey. Villages are far away, take all day just to travel, (the farthest village used to travel 37-40 km),</li> <li>• some villages do not have electricity, so they have to stay at the village without be able to charge their phones;</li> <li>• In some villages, the villagers do not listen to them because they are female and young;</li> <li>• In some Lao villages and since we are Hmong employees, the Lao people don't understand our words because of our pronunciations;</li> <li>• Working with men is more difficult than working with women, especially older men. We get help from village authority</li> <li>• As an employee to work with the villagers, men often fear that their wives will think badly of them and don't like their wives to join activities;</li> </ul>	Hmong

Date	Time/ Location	Total local participants			Consultation Purposes/ Content	Feedback from local people	Notes (e.g. Name of EG)
		Male	Female	Ethnic Group			
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some villages where people used to visit, such as PS Company, Asia Face makes the villagers not want to cooperate and fear being attacked;</li> <li>Village facilitators want to work in groups, a team of 2-3 people, go to each village, exchange lessons and enjoy working.</li> </ul>	

## ANNEX 2 – Photos of Consultation Meetings in Project Provinces



Meeting with beneficiary mothers. Photo credit: Chansouk Insouvanh



Woman driving back from the field. Photo credit: Chansouk Insouvanh





Meeting with men from Producers Group. Photo credit: Sengphet Vannavong



Pigs of a member of credit loan program. Photo credit: Chansouk Insouvanh



Meeting with members of Self-Help Groups. Photo credit: Chansouk Insouvanh