



Assessing outcomes of rural development in Northern Laos

A Summary of Trends in Participation, Satisfaction, Capacity Development and Impacts for 'Integrated Rural Development in Poverty Regions of Laos' (NU-IRDP)

Published by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

In cooperation with



Imprint

Published by the

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

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As at

October 2015

Printed by

GIZ

Design and layout

GIZ

Photo credits

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Text

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GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

On behalf of the
German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Executive Summary

1. This report summarises findings from several studies capturing participation, satisfaction and impact trends among villagers targeted by the five-year Northern Uplands Integrated Rural Development Programme (NU-IRDP), funded by the German government and managed by GIZ.
2. *NU-IRDP* was a component of the overarching multi-donor funded Northern Uplands Development Programme (NUDP), established in 2010 to promote development in mountainous and remote areas of Laos, in ten of the country's poorest districts. During the lifetime of NUDP from 2010 to 2015, the GIZ-component – NU-IRDP – provided technical advice and operational funding to support district staff in planning for land use and local development in participatory ways, with a particular emphasis on agricultural practices. Village Development Planning (VDP) and Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) were supported in 446 and 230 villages respectively, implemented by local government staff partners with the participation of villagers. In addition, NU-IRDP implemented capacity enhancing measures targeting district-level staff, including on specific technical skills and broader organisational development.
3. *Land Use Planning and Land Management* activities focussed on comprehensive villager participation and spanned technical land zoning, rights awareness trainings, support to land registration and titling as well as PLUP. The process focussed on the management of smallholder land as well as the use of communal land for agriculture and conservation. Combining participatory spatial planning with activities on land registration and titling was expected to translate into enhanced tenure security, improved long-term investment in land and ultimately enhanced rural development. The activities resulted in the development of Land Use Plans for 446 villages.
4. *Village Development Planning* was supported and implemented in all selected villages and districts of NUDP. NU-IRDP provided ongoing advice and coaching as well as training to district staff to enhance their capacity to conduct participatory planning and maximise the quality of the resulting Village Development Plans. Villagers' priority measures were submitted to potential public, private and international funders. Both VDP and PLUP were expected to strengthen participatory planning at local levels, help align government and donor measures with bottom-up needs, and ultimately improve livelihoods in targeted rural areas.
5. *Main sources of qualitative and quantitative data* collected on NU-IRDP's participation, satisfaction and outcome trends were villagers' and district staff's perceptions. This report synthesises monitoring data collected routinely on various project activities as well as several evaluation studies using survey and statistical designs. The more ambitious the change or the emerging social benefits we are interested in, the more likely it is that factors unrelated to NU-IRDP played a significant role as well – the attribution of these effects to a large extent relies on villagers' subjective views on what factors changed aspects of their livelihoods and services available to them.
6. *The share of villagers participating in implemented activities* varies strongly between activities. Participation overall was higher for VDP activities compared to PLUP, particularly for women, presumably due to the more technical nature of the latter's process.

7. *There is a definitive link between an individual's participation in PLUP or VDP activities and their level of satisfaction with the process and outcomes.* This link is stronger for PLUP – those who participated actively in PLUP measures or those who were at least represented by someone in their household were significantly more satisfied with the results of Land Use Planning than those who did not participate, even before external funding was allocated to measures. For VDP on the other hand, satisfaction correlates more with whether the prioritised schemes were ultimately implemented.
8. *The quality and extent of an individual's participation depends strongly on social factors:* mainly gender and age group but also ethnicity, poverty and social status. Older, male villagers belonging to the dominant ethnic group in a village are most likely to have participated actively in VDP and PLUP. On the other hand, younger, female villagers belonging to secondary ethnic groups in a village were least likely to participate actively. Self-described poor villagers were at times strongly over- or underrepresented at meetings. There is a trend for the ethnic majority group to be overrepresented in the implemented activities – both in terms of numbers and quality of their participation - in the majority of villages.
9. *The perceived quality of facilitation varies strongly by district.* Dissatisfaction with district staff was mostly linked to some participants not being able to follow the facilitation conducted in the Lao language or not all villagers being adequately involved with the process. Villagers generally welcomed the initiative of district staff to pro-actively suggest measures for inclusion in the local plans.
10. *Overall satisfaction among both women and men was high.* According to a 2015 study, 61% were very satisfied and 36% satisfied. No significant differences in satisfaction were detected even though men and women participated to different degrees.
11. *In terms of actual implementation of plans,* of all planned VDP activities, a good quarter was either work in progress or completed by 2015. For PLUP, 47% of suggested projects had been either completed or were being implemented by 2015. Nonetheless, the absolute number of activities implemented is significantly higher for VDP than for PLUP, with a strong overall emphasis on agriculture and forestry. In accordance with expectations, plans developed longer ago had a higher chance of having been implemented by 2015 than more recent plans. Funding sources vary between sectors but overall, most funding originated with the government at different levels, followed by village self-mobilisation.
12. *The PLUP process displayed a slight tendency for land to be redistributed from non-poor to poor households* (being poor increased the likelihood of receiving land in the process and decreased chances of losing land). More than a third of 2015 study interviewees said they had decreased practices of shifting cultivation. PLUP, general government policy and land limitations were listed as important reasons for this, among others. Moreover, the majority (about 60%) of interviewees reported a change in their agricultural practice. More than a fifth of villagers saw a net increase in their cash crop production and only few reported net decreases. More than a third of interviewed villagers reported a net increase in reared livestock, with a third of these attributing this to the creation of new areas for livestock in their village (most likely due to PLUP), while about 10% citing a decrease in livestock rearing.
13. *While no data on long-term benefits of land registration and titling are available,* the 2013 study reflects villagers' expectations that both land registration and titling would to a large degree offer some tenure security, for instance by preventing or resolving land conflicts.

However, the vast majority of interviewees expected greater benefits from land titles, including the possibility of selling or transferring land or of obtaining compensation for land loss and loans by using land as collateral. Almost all respondents intended to use the land title to obtain a loan to invest in husbandry and farming or support their children's education.

14. *Village Development Planning had the potential for medium-term social changes to materialise, going beyond land use changes under PLUP.* About 70% of villagers interviewed in 2015 indicated improved relationships between men and women and ethnic groups in their village since VDP. In terms of land use, about a fifth of respondents had changed their farming practices by adopting new techniques or crops due to VDP, compared to about a quarter of interviewees changing farming due to other factors.
15. *In terms of broader social and economic changes, VDP appears to also have had an effect on improved education, family health and family income: improvements in education were mentioned most frequently as the positive change arising from VDP (about 19% of all respondents).* Almost 14% of respondents said that VDP projects had contributed to the improved health of their families and another 16% report health improvements through enhanced access to clean water due to VDP. In addition, roughly a fifth of villagers report increased income due to VDP, primarily due to livestock support, agricultural training received and infrastructure improvements.
16. *The self-assessment of district staff's individual technical skills and their organisational practices showed substantial average improvements in both areas due to capacity building measures implemented under the project.*

Abbreviations

AMS	Activity Monitoring System
BMZ	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forest Office
DONRE	District Office of Natural Resources and Environment
DPO	District Planning Office
DRDO	District Rural Development Office
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPS	Global Positioning System
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LGP	Local Governance Planning
LM	Land Management
LMDP	Land Management and Decentralized Planning
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MoNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Interior
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NCRDPE	National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
NUDP	Northern Uplands Development Programme
NU-IRDP	Northern Uplands Integrated Rural Development Programme
NPCO	National Programme Coordination Office
PAFO	Provincial Agriculture and Forest Office
PALM	Participatory Agriculture Land Management
PBA	Programme-Based Approach
PIP	Public Investment Plan
PRDO	Provincial Rural Development Office
PLUP	Participatory Land Use Planning
PONRE	Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment
PPIO	Provincial Planning and Investment Office
SWAP	Strengths, Weaknesses, Aspirations, Plans
VDP	Village Development Planning
VLMC	Village Land Management Committees

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1. A brief overview of NU-IRDP

1.1 Context and rationale for NU-IRDP

Despite a notably high annual growth rate of on average 7% over the last two decades¹, villagers living in mountainous areas of Northern Laos typically lack economic opportunities as well as influence on what development measures are planned and implemented in their districts. Their longstanding reliance on subsistence agriculture has increasingly come under threat due to population growth, variable climatic conditions and resulting harvest failure and food insecurity, as well as due to land grabbing. Frequently, access to basic services – education, health, markets – is insufficient. What compounds existing challenges is that the state's institutions at different levels are often not adequately equipped for carrying out the kind of large-scale, multi-sectoral programmes that could remedy the situation. The government of Laos has recently embarked on devolving the previously centralised development of strategies and planning processes to district and provincial levels. It is also in the process of strengthening institutional capacities at several levels by capacitating local sectoral agencies, allocating more public funds to the district level, and qualifying personnel in pilot districts.

Against this backdrop, the Northern Uplands Development Programme (NUDP) was established in 2010 with the financial support of the European Union, and the governments of France, Switzerland and technical cooperation support from Germany. The programme's goal has been to promote rural development in remote, mountainous and poor areas of Laos through coordinating and harmonising different interventions that aim to improve agricultural practices, livelihoods and opportunities, and reduce poverty. At an institutional level, the programme has also sought to improve coordination among ministries and Development Partners. In the same vein, the ultimate goal of the government of Laos is to strengthen its own governance and development capacities to reduce its reliance on external aid, so that improved capacity to manage financial assistance might in the future allow for direct budget support.

NUDP targeted the rural population in ten districts of three Northern provinces that are among the poorest in Laos - Luang Prabang, Phongsaly and Houaphan. In each of the districts three Kumban (village clusters) were identified, with a total of 230 villages. The BMZ-funded component of NUDP – the Northern Uplands Integrated Rural Development Programme (NU-IRDP) – was implemented by GIZ, and embedded in the overall programmatic NUDP approach. NU-IRDP cooperated with the NUDP National Programme Coordination Office (NPCO), which is part of the Department of Planning of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF).

Over a period of five years, starting in 2010, NU-IRDP aimed to strengthen the capacity of districts to plan for land use and local development in participatory ways, with an emphasis on agricultural practices, by providing technical advice and operational funds. Programme activities were designed to improve the capacity of sectoral institutions in the districts that increasingly have to deliver development services to local populations, as well as coordinate with each other whilst encouraging the participation of villagers. Village Development Planning (VDP) and Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) were supported in 446 and 230 villages respectively, implemented by local government staff partners with the participation of local villagers. Decreasing guidance from GIZ was meant to allow for the process to be increasingly facilitated and monitored by the districts

¹ World Bank Lao PDR Development Report 2014.

themselves. The programme put particular emphasis on enabling the participation of women and making sure their interests were reflected in planning.

Furthermore, NU-IRDP conducted several capacity enhancing measures targeting governmental district staff, including specific technical and financial trainings, but also trainings to foster improved participation of villagers during field activities. During the involvement with the NU-IRDP project activities, the governmental district staff also increased their capacity in various general fields including improved management, facilitation and monitoring skills among others. These capacity enhancing measures not only aimed at improving individual capacities but to promote institutional progress within the local districts.

Drawing on experience gained from the programme, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and other participant ministries were envisaged to also improve the basis for a programme-based approach (PBA), the NUDP. NU-IRDP worked with experts and responsible decision-makers at national level ministries, tasked with planning, guidance and supervisory functions, in order to enable them to act as multipliers of the approach in the future.

1.2 Implementation of Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP)

Villagers' participation in the PLUP process

First day
Opening ceremony takes place with whole village and with district governor or vice-governor. The Village Land Management Committee (VLMC) is formed as representative body of the village, to carry out activity planning.

Second to third day
Socio-economic data collection at household level.

Fourth to fifth day
Village boundary demarcation, including VLMC and representatives from surrounding villages

End of PLUP
Finalisation workshop with whole village where results are explained and a spatial and narrative plan are laid out. An Action Plan with description of family involvement and timeline is developed and shared.

Cost per village approx. 1.500,00 USD

Land management spans a broad range of activities from land zoning and land use planning to land registration and land dispute settlement. NU-IRDP support targeted Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) as well as legal enabling conditions, by tackling land registration and titling.

Land Use Planning is not a new concept in the Lao context, but there are caveats in its prior application which NU-IRDP attempted to tackle. These past attempts by others – notably a comprehensive roll-out of Land Use Planning by the World Bank - have been perceived as lacking villager participation and have generally left behind no strong documentation of planning outcomes.

With the involvement of the District Office of Natural Resources and Environment (DoNRE) and the District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO), the first PLUP supported by NU-IRDP was rolled out in early 2011, and work at a village level continued until summer 2015. The process focussed on the management of

smallholder land as well as the use of communal land for agriculture. PLUP set out to create Land Use Plans for each of the 230 target villages, which elaborated timelines and necessary actions, so that, for instance, land from relatively land-rich families could be re-allocated to those without

land. The resulting Land Use Plans also specify the usage of communal lands, mainly pastures and bush areas, as well as conservation areas, mainly forests.

At initial stages of PLUP, a Village Land Management Committee (VLMC) was formed in each village, involving nine elected representatives from the respective village, leading on the planning of activities. These committees also serve as the first point of contact for villagers to air their grievances on land use and possession. Where the VLMC fails at resolving a conflict, the issue is taken up at progressively higher levels - the Naiban (village chief), Khumban, district, province and finally, the National Assembly level – until a solution may be found.

The participatory process in the villages was accompanied by capacity strengthening activities to ensure the involved district staff effectively facilitated the process. A parallel socio-economic assessment on the basis of household surveys established the amount of land available, the location of land and households' level of productivity, among other things, to serve as the basis for problem analysis. On the basis of the data, the PLUP teams drafted maps of current land use and future land zones. A full PLUP cycle required about two weeks of facilitation and discussions in each village. Based on emerging experience, slight changes to the participatory methodology were made throughout the programme; for instance, in some villages from 2012 onwards three-dimensional displays of the village area were used instead of maps. In some villages, virtual simulations of land use changes were used with the VLMCs, in order to strengthen their appreciation of the negotiation process which takes place in Land Use Planning.

Land registration and titling support

Sustainable land use requires some degree of tenure security for farmers, to provide incentives for longer-term investments in the land and for addressing land conflicts that are often about ownership.

Land in Laos is owned by the national community, administered by the state and can be accessed by individuals and organisations through land use rights. Land titles serve as official certificates of permanent land use rights. In Lao PDR, a land title currently comes closest to being official documentation for the right to use and own land and can be used as collateral to take out loans; land titles can be mortgaged, sold or passed on to others as inheritance. The introduction of land titles for agricultural and residential land was widely seen to hold potential for protecting farmers from dispossession through land concessions to companies, making it less likely for investors to use the lack of documented user or property rights to appropriate land at the detriment of poor villagers. They were also envisaged to strengthen the responsibility of village communities for the environmentally and socially sustainable use of land and natural resources, and to address in part some of the existing land disputes. Land registration was originally intended to follow on land use planning, but in practice, the early years demonstrated few linkages between the two. The reason for this was that the early focus of implementation was on registering uncontentious – predominately private residential – land parcels, which did not require land use planning.

NU-IRDP supported MoNRE and its subnational line agencies in systematic land registration and titling of land in a subset of NUDP's target villages. This process was expected to result in the issuance of land titles for each plot of land owned and used by landholders. Overall, systematic land registration was implemented at a slower pace than originally anticipated in the NUDP target areas. By 2013, individual land registration had been completed in 39 villages with prior PLUP,

compared to more than 100 PLUPs completed at that time. Additionally, between 2014 and 2015 communal land registration had been completed in 29 villages covering 11.260 hectares of land.

Due to the apparent need for livelihoods support and a mainstreamed acceptance at policy level, in later phases of NU-IRDP the focus shifted to registering communal land only, which often serves multiple and at times conflicting purposes. The registration of communal land requires thorough needs assessments and land use planning in advance.

1.3 Village Development Planning (VDP)

In the past, local development plans were frequently drawn up at village and district levels respectively, without adequate linkages between the two levels. NU-IRDP set out to change this, by supporting systematic Village Development Planning and strengthening the institutional capacity of district staff to facilitate villagers effectively drawing up plans sensitive to village-level priorities. VDPs were supported in all selected villages and districts of the NUDP. Villagers identified development actions on the basis of a pro-poor use of their locally available resources and needs in participatory ways. The programme supported capacity development of district staff through ongoing advice, coaching and training during the Village Development Planning process.

The focus was on facilitating the active participation of villagers, thereby improving the quality of Village Development Plans, while basing them on their knowledge, needs and capacities. The measures selected and ranked by villagers according to their priority were submitted to the districts and other potential funders, such as the government of Laos, private investors and international donors. The district level was subsequently supported in adopting the priority measures from village development planning and land-use planning exercises in their own district plans. The facilitators aimed for proportional representation of village groups – along ethnic and gender lines - in the workshops. Approximately 50 villagers participated in each village, though degrees of participation varied between social groups and between villages as described below. The VDP Facilitation Team, normally headed by the DRDO and composed of a number of sectoral agency representatives facilitated VDP in the villages at the start. Later, the Kumban and village heads were trained to facilitate the VDPs on their own with technical backstopping provided by district staff. The District Planning Office as well as MPI at the national level performed training and oversight functions for the local facilitation teams.

SWAP - Strengths, Weaknesses, Aspirations, Plans methodology in VDP

The VDP planning guidelines - also known as the Participatory Planning Manual or PPM for village level planning - stipulate the use of SWAP in the village planning process. SWAP as a methodology ensures that the list of proposed interventions are not merely “wish lists” but undergoes a process of introspection and analysis of the village’s situation (strengths and weaknesses) in each of the sectors, as well as an articulation of the villagers’ aspiration or vision. It is from these that village plans or interventions are identified and proposed. These planned interventions are then voted upon and ranked in terms of priority by the villagers.

Cost per village approx. 100 USD (plus training and mobilisation expenses for government staff)

Each of the plans was created within a day of discussions in the village. The process started with drawing up a village map, establishing Strengths, Weaknesses, Aspirations, Plans (proposed interventions) for each sector. These plans or proposed interventions are then consolidated and

ranked by the villagers in a participatory manner using seeds or small stones for voting. This way, villages identified on average 25 priority projects. Five of these projects which are ranked among the top priorities are proposed to district authorities and other donors for possible funding support and/or action.

While one option for the realisation of the plans was the direct mobilisation of resources among villagers, the final Village Development Plans were submitted to the district level for consideration in district level planning and resource allocation. District plans are in turn presented at a provincial government level for consideration and inclusion into provincial level plans. The provinces are vested with public funds or budget, out of which measures from the VDP may be funded. The Village Development Plans were also expected to feed into the planning of the wider NUDP, the INGOs and donors, private sector, and socio-economic development planning at the district, provincial and national level.

As part of the parcel of support, district staff were trained in marketing VDPs as proposals for concrete measures to potential external funders. In 2010 and 2012, GIZ obtained funding of over two million Euro from the European Commission and BMZ for improving small village infrastructure as identified by the VDP process. The funding was used to finance and organise a host of small infrastructure measures such as small roads, bridges, drinking water and irrigation structures.

Two years after the first VDPs were developed - in 2013 - the government's VDP facilitation teams, with support from the GIZ NU-IRDP team, returned to all villages, and reviewed the status of implementation of the prioritised village schemes. A second review was conducted again in 2015 covering the second wave of new VDPs, which included areas beyond the defined NUDP target areas.

Both VDP and PLUP were expected to ultimately contribute to participatory planning at local levels, improve livelihoods through enhanced agricultural practices and assist in aligning government and donor measures with actual needs identified by the target villages themselves. While Land Use Planning should come first to provide spatial information on current and desired usage of land – to define some parameters for further village development planning – VDP was usually done first in the villages because they could be done faster and required less of the villagers' time. The more complicated and time consuming PLUP processes then drew on particularly the agriculture and forestry related components of the VDP for detailed spatial planning.

Both, the general VDP as well as the specific PLUP, were intended to provide an informational and planning basis, a motivational foundation and clearer, if still limited, land-use rights to villagers for engaging in upcoming agricultural promotion, investment and targeted extension activities. The participatory planning and identification of development measures served as the foundation for more varied and environmentally sound agriculture and livestock production methods and the creation of producers and marketing groups, the core goal of the NUDP.

2. Data sources for final impact assessment

This report is drawing on data from five main sources to provide a comprehensive picture of villagers' participation in PLUP and VDP as well as their perception of the process, satisfaction, and emerging benefits from NU-IRDP in economic, social and other dimensions.

NUDP, and consequently NU-IRDP as an integral part of the PBA lacked a clear concept for information and knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation, which could have assisted PBA management in observing, documenting and reacting to changes at the operational level. Initially it also did not have a concept for clear and measurable outcomes or impacts. The claim of capitalisation of the NUDP experiences was never substantiated. A logical framework with functional indicators was only developed by 2014, i.e. with a four year delay. Consequently neither sufficient financial nor human resources had been anticipated for the systematic and methodical management of knowledge.

Partially this is due to the fact that political pressure for immediate implementation and direct beneficiary benefits was very high, while on the other hand PBA procedures were still being elaborated. The task of semi-macro data collection for an up-scaling oriented PBA and successive data processing and analysis was heavily underestimated. At the same time the availability and quality of national statistical data and decentralised government staff qualified in data management was massively overestimated.

The NU-IRDP, therefore, only belatedly started to initiate studies and designed its own data collection tools without sufficient time and budgets, out of a need to manage the quality of the interventions in the NUDP Land and Local Planning components. The set of studies and review undertaken therefore has evolved from basic project implementation and reporting needs. They are not the result of an initially and systematically developed learning and reporting concept.

The approach taken to outcome and impact assessments are primarily based on simple but comprehensive villagers' and advisors' activity monitoring tools, as well as on observations and expert assessments. For most of these assessments control groups from non-intervention villages made little sense when it comes to assessing participation or planning implementation. In non-intervention areas there is neither a systematic participatory planning system nor are there plans whose implementation might be monitored. Consequently it is principally very difficult to attribute changes and improvements solely to the NU-IRDP planning support (the "attribution gap"). The data, assessments, observations and conclusions from the set of studies reported in this document therefore only claim to be indicative and useful for management and operations designs.

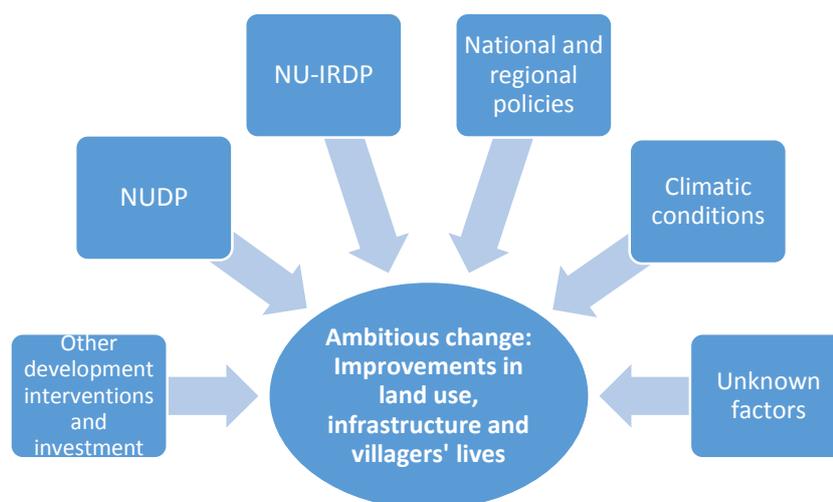
It is worth mentioning that the entire NU-IRDP as well as NUDP aim at building partner capacities and strengthening ownership. For this reason the information management methodologies were very much designed for and the surveys implementation aligned with the partners' capacities in order to enhance their understanding of methodologies and results. Interview and survey techniques were conveyed through trainings and the emerging results were discussed and used for enhancing the understanding of the need to systematically manage knowledge and learning. Thus, the following analysis and statements also have to be seen as outcomes of joint learning and an incremental capacity development process.

Table 1: Data sources on NU-IRDP implementation and outcomes

Data source	Period covered	Approach used
<i>Activity Monitoring System (AMS) data</i> , on demographic information at a village level and disaggregated participation and satisfaction rates	2011 – 2015 for PLUP 2014 – 2015 for VDP	Direct observation and village data documentation, and assessments of villagers' participation through district staff
<i>Perception study on PLUP and VDP</i> with approximately 2460 villagers, focussing on participation patterns and early benefits arising from PLUP and VDP	2013	622 semi-structured interviews with individual villagers complemented by focus groups with women and village authorities. Data collected in a sample of 42 out of 230 NUDP target villages.
<i>Perception study on Land Registration and Titling</i> with 114 villagers in 9 villages, on early perceived benefits	2013	Semi-structured interviews with individuals in 9 villages. Since the used sampling method was convenience sampling, the findings cannot be applied to all the people who received land titles or whose land was registered, but it can illustrate trends.
<i>Review of Impacts of VDP and LUP, observing the status of implementation of planned activities</i> in 446 VDP and in 110 PLUP villages	2015	Quantitative and qualitative information regarding actually implemented planned measures, collected by authorities of the 446 villages, handed over to district level staff. It also assessed the extent of beneficiary coverage, the level of satisfaction of villagers on the implemented schemes and the sources of funds or resources used.
<i>Study of villagers' perception of PLUP and VDP</i> , on participation, process feedback and benefits emerging from PLUP and VDP	2015	Semi-structured interviews with 294 villagers in 20 villages for PLUP and VDP respectively, and 10 villages for VDP expansion, and by 20 Naiban interviewed (out of 84), in 10 target districts of PLUP
<i>Experts assessments of district staff capacities (2013) and capacity improvements (2015)</i>	2013, 2015	GIZ advisors' assessment of existing and improved skills of staff in 10 cooperation districts.
<i>Self-assessment of district staff capacities and institutional self-assessment</i>	2015	Questionnaire and group exercises with district staff in 10 cooperation districts to assess individual and institutional capacities

The degree to which NU-IRDP's contribution to the observed changes can be established varies, ranging from changes that cannot be attributed to NU-IRDP support to those changes that are unlikely to have emerged without the GIZ intervention. Generally, the more time has passed since the intervention, and the more complex or ambitious the change is we are looking at, the smaller is NU-IRDP's contribution likely to be and the stronger is the combined influence of other factors. These factors might include other parallel interventions broadly relating to livelihood, agricultural and village governance support, delivered through the agriculture promotion activities of other NUDP components or other agencies, economic and social shifts partially due to closer regional economic integration as well as external and unforeseeable and uncontrollable factors such as the occurrence of animal diseases, or irregular climatic patterns.

Figure 3: NU-IRDP as one factor among several influencing land use and livelihoods



Statements on strong and plausible association between NU-IRDP and observed changes are appropriate where:

1. Respondents who were asked to make explicit statements about the role of PLUP and VDP pointed to VDP as a factor;
2. NU-IRDP staff has first-hand knowledge that the intervention likely exerted a stronger influence than other factors, and
3. Findings are in line with assumptions held by NU-IRDP staff about how long it would take for an intervention to demonstrate results or about the necessary sequence of changes that would be observed.

The more of these factors apply to a given change, the more certain we can be that NU-IRDP indeed did play a role in bringing it about. Conversely, cases where attribution is not possible to establish include those where respondents named alternative factors that led to improvements or deterioration of aspects of their lives, where NU-IRDP staff have knowledge of other factors that were more influential, or where changes defy expectations of how benefits would materialise.

The Impact Study conducted in 2015 represents the most up-to-date data gathering effort which explicitly set out to capture changes in all dimensions relevant to PLUP and VDP respectively and allows for some degree of generalisation for the overall target population across the ten districts, on the basis of statistical significance testing. Data was collected through semi-structured household surveys complemented by interviews with the Naiban of each of the 20 villages that were visited. The sample included those villagers aged 18 or over that had attended PLUP and/or VDP. No interviewee was asked questions on both PLUP and VDP but only on one type of intervention, in order to avoid confusion. The sampling strategy the GIZ study team employed guaranteed proportionality by cluster sampling – villages were selected randomly while ensuring that all districts would be covered. Then, households to be interviewed were selected in those villages until a pre-set sample size was reached.² The qualitative answers to open-ended questions were coded into closed answers at the data processing stage. Generally, where 30 people or less answered a question, there is no statistical significance and conclusions cannot be drawn for the overall target population. Any corresponding findings need to be considered with caution.

² For PLUP and VDP interviews, sampling sizes were proportional to the distribution of households covered by VDP across the districts. For VDP expansion, a non-proportional number of villagers was interviewed in each of the five target districts for logistical reasons. This data was then weighted during analysis to eliminate this source of bias.

3. Findings on NU-IRDP Process and Participation

Highlights at a glance

- ❖ The most recent data indicate that 23180 villagers from 446 villages with an overall population of 171633 villagers participated in the PLUP and VPD Activity Review in 2015, which is an overall participation rate of 14%.
- ❖ Those who participated actively in the PLUP or VDP meetings or who were at least represented by another household member were significantly more satisfied with the results of land use planning in their village than those who had not participated. The quality of interaction with district staff varies significantly between districts.
- ❖ Ethnic majorities appear to be overrepresented in the participating group of the overall population.
- ❖ Overall satisfaction as captured by VDP and PLUP review in 2015 was high – 61% were very satisfied and 36% satisfied. Only 3% were not satisfied. What is more, men and women overall displayed very similar rates of satisfaction with VDP and PLUP.
- ❖ The quality and extent of an individual's participation strongly depends on social factors - gender, ethnicity, age, poverty and social status. Older and male villagers belonging to dominant ethnic groups in a village are more likely to have participated actively in VDP and PLUP. Self-described poor villagers were at times over- and underrepresented in meetings, frequently severely so.
- ❖ Facilitators assessed women's participation to be consistently less strong than men's participation, except in a few villages where their participation quality was on a par for certain activities (e.g. VDP planning meetings).
- ❖ The participation patterns of poor households varies strongly by area. Poor households overall were frequently overrepresented in terms of numbers participating. Overrepresentation of poor households is desirable rather than an issue, however, the quality of their representation, was assessed as low average overall, and consistently less strong than non-poor's participation. Moreover, this trend is not consistent – in 2014 village development planning meetings, poor villagers were underrepresented in 110 out of 222 villages. In 17% of cases, they were underrepresented by more than 40%.

3.1 Participation of villagers

As part of its internal monitoring, NU-IRPD has been collecting and analysing activity monitoring data for PLUP since 2010 and for VDP expansion since 2014. The Activity Monitoring System (AMS) includes village overview data and sheds light on participation rates for the districts, disaggregated by ethnic groups, gender and poor and non-poor villagers, and on the quality of their participation as assessed by the district facilitators. The VDP and PLUP studies conducted in 2013 and 2015 complement this picture, for instance with qualitative data on reasons for non-participation and other details on participants. Particularly the assessment of quality of participation, for instance of men and women, by district facilitators is to be viewed with caution as it is highly subjective and prone to individual biases. However, it may serve as an indication of patterns and overall trends.

Table 2: Collection of data through the AMS

2010 – 2013	2014 – 2015
Collection of data on technical planning activity and land zoning process for PLUP for 110 villages	Collection of more extensive data on different steps of the PLUP and PALM process for 110 villages, as well as combined data on VDP planning meetings and VDP review in 222 VDP expansion villages and 229 NUDP target villages

For different NU-IRDP activities, different participation rates were registered by AMS.

Table 3: Participation rates in % overall and disaggregated for female and poor participants

Activity	Overall participation rates (% of overall population participating)	Share of female participants	Share of poor participants ³
VDP and PLUP review in 2015	13 – 15% average participation rates aggregated at a province level	46% overall	25%
VDP planning meetings in 2014	17 – 20% average participation rates aggregated at a province level	42% overall	27%
Technical planning activity and land zoning process for PLUP and PALM from 2010 to 2013 in 110 villages	2 – 3 % average participation rates aggregated at a province level ⁴	18% overall	25%
PLUP and PALM activities from 2014 – 2015 in 110 villages	15 – 25% average participation rates aggregated at a province level for opening, economic data collection, and closing activities; 4 – 7% participation rates for planning activity	37% for opening, economic data collection and closing activities overall; 23% participation rates for planning activity	Insufficient aggregated data available

For PLUP, participation rates overall tended to be highest for the opening and closing meetings and lowest for the planning activity. The planning activity represents villagers' involvement in the VLMCs, which likely included those in leadership positions, with relatively strong knowledge and understanding of land management.

³ Poverty as defined by village statistics.

⁴ These low participation rates refer to only one technical step for which data is available between 2010 – 2013 and does not consider the larger and more inclusive opening and closing meetings.

Table 4: Overall participation rates at different steps of PLUP in %

Province	Opening Meeting	Economic data collection	Planning activity	Closing meeting
Huaphan	25	16	4	25
Luang Prabang	16	15	7	17
Phonsaly	22	20	7	23
Overall	21	17	6	22

It is notable that while women’s participation rates overall appear to have improved significantly by 2014 compared to previous years, with strongest results in Huaphan Province, the one activity that saw a steep decline of their involvement was the planning activity, carried out mainly by the VLMC. The reasons captured elsewhere for why women do not speak up in meetings or do not even attend likely apply in this scenario as well. VLMC involvement comes with an added time commitment that many women – responsible for a range of domestic duties as well as income generation – might find difficult to honor. Similarly, the anticipation of others’ disapproval or a common self-perception of their own low levels of understanding and knowledge of the problems at hand as well as village and gender hierarchies are likely to all have prevented greater women’s involvement in the VLMCs. More importantly, the VLMCs tended to consist of village level officials, positions mostly held by men. Women’s participation across all steps overall at a province level was assessed as average, with significant differences between some of the districts (with some assessing their participation as good and some as bad). However, it is not this step where there is the biggest discrepancy between how women’s and men’s participation quality was assessed but rather the closing meeting. It needs to be highlighted that quality of participation was appraised by meeting facilitators along a simple scale, which only offers a highly subjective rating of participation.

Table 5: Women’s participation rates at different steps of PLUP in %

District	Opening Meeting	Economic data collection	Planning activity	Closing meeting
Huaphan	38	40	15	40
Luang Prabang	37	36	29	38
Phonsaly	37	33	21	34
Overall	37	37	23	38

The profile of study respondents in 2015 is briefly considered separately here as it provides the majority of data about emerging benefits of VDP and PLUP. Of the study respondents, all of which had participated in PLUP or VDP:

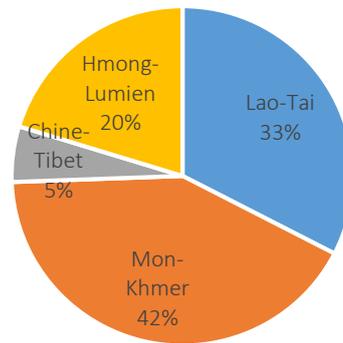
- 36.9% are women
- 94.7% are married
- 15.9% self-identify as poor
- And respondents live in average household sizes of six

The composition of the study population thus closely matches the profile of VDP and PLUP participants surveyed in the 2013 study. This demographic profile of survey respondents is foreclosing what both the 2013 and 2015 studies have revealed about participation patterns, with most active participants being married men of mature age from dominant ethnic groups.

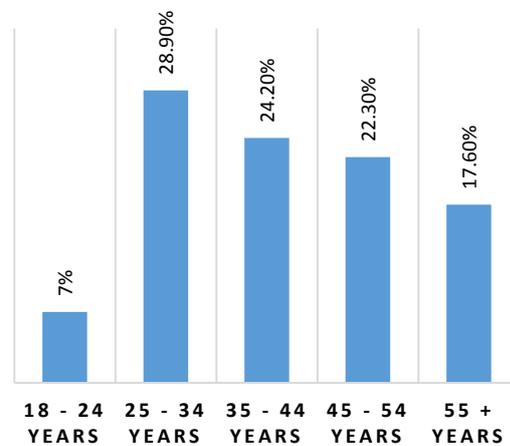
The 2015 study showed that almost all respondents – all of which have participated in PLUP or VDP - were able to fully or partially remember both the PLUP and VDP activities (97.6% and 99.4% respectively). However, men tended to remember PLUP better than women. This is in line with the common perception of land use planning as the more technical issue, with women generally speaking up more during VDP meetings compared to PLUP. There are also differences in how well main and minority ethnic groups remembered the activities – ethnic Lao-Tai respondents remembered the PLUP activities best out of all ethnic groups. On the other hand, members of for instance the Hmong-Lumien community felt significantly less involved compared to Lao-Tai people.

Figure 4: Demographic profile of respondents

Ethnicity of 2015 respondents



Participant Age groups



3.2 Villagers' satisfaction with the process and their participation

The 2013 and 2015 PLUP and VDP studies demonstrated that villagers widely valued their participation and inclusion in village development and land use planning. 97% of all 2013 respondents said it was personally important for them to participate. A high percentage of people interviewed in 2015 - 93.4% - said VDP was worth the effort, believing that it initiated change and helped bolster local development priorities. 45.4% of villagers interviewed in 2015 indicated they had participated *very actively* in the VDP activity, by asking questions, discussing and making suggestions.

What is more, **those who participated in the PLUP or VDP meetings or who were at least represented by another household member were significantly more satisfied with the results of land use planning in their village.** This tentative 2013 finding on the linkage between participation and satisfaction is confirmed again in 2015, where respondents who felt their opinions were not sufficiently heard were considerably less satisfied. Only 27% of those not feeling properly involved said they were happy with PLUP (compared to over 50% of better involved villagers), and 65% of them wished for a revision of PLUP (compared to 45% in the camp that felt well involved). It is difficult to conclusively explain this link – while intuition might suggest that less participation leads to less satisfaction, it is possible that some villagers did not participate actively in PLUP for those precise reasons that also affected the eventual results of land

distribution and thus their satisfaction. In any case, it is evident that participation is linked to the satisfaction of beneficiaries and thereby, potentially, to the long-term success of agricultural and poverty reduction interventions.

For VDP, the link between participation and satisfaction was less strong than for PLUP, since the actual implementation of the village plans happened with often significant time lags and even then not in every case. In contrast, PLUP immediately resulted in a village level plan for the use and distribution of land that relied less on external resourcing and could be used and self-implemented by the communities. The 2015 data confirms early findings from 2013 – villagers are likely to have a negative view of the VDP process if no tangible follow-up is happening. In line with this, the more villagers report external support following VDP, the higher the satisfaction in that village with the process.

2013 study showed that almost all of the interviewed villagers (96%) were satisfied with the duration and division of activities. The vast majority of respondents was also convinced of the technical skills of the District teams and showed satisfaction with the explanations given. At the same time, about half of all respondents were unhappy with the additional workload that activities imposed on them.

There are differences between the districts in terms of how satisfied villagers were with how district staff facilitated their participation. Real dissatisfaction was only captured in the district of Houameuang, where land distribution was still ongoing at the time of the 2013 study – again, a link between the lack of tangible outcomes and satisfaction can be assumed to exist. On the other end of the spectrum, Khua showed the highest participation rates and highest satisfaction levels of villagers with the facilitation and results of PLUP and VDP. A number of 2015 study participants – particularly in the districts of Viengthong, Viengxay, Sampanh, Phonsay and Viengkham - indicated problems with understanding the facilitation in Lao language conducted by district staff. Overall, more than half of the 2015 interviewees thought the discussions and decisions around PLUP involved people sufficiently, though about one third answered that not all villagers had been involved, suggesting a need for improvement.

The data suggests that facilitating district staff have a strong influence on villagers' understanding, their degree of ownership of the process and inclusion of different social groups. However, social hierarchies and culturally rooted respect for elders might limit the extent to which younger district staff can shape greater inclusiveness of discussions.

In terms of awareness of crucial institutions in the process, as part of PLUP, the Village Land Management Committees (VLMC) were constituted as decision-making fora made up of local citizens in each of the target villages. In 2015, 76.5% of interviewed villagers were familiar with the members of their VLMC at least to some extent. 46.5% of villagers who experienced a situation that required assistance actually approached their VLMC, indicating high awareness and relevance of the VLMC and its mandate. In roughly half of these cases, problems were successfully solved with the VLMCs' help.

3.3 Factors determining quality and extent of participation

The quality and extent of an individual's participation strongly depends on social factors - gender, ethnicity, age, poverty and social status.

Generally, levels of active participation were confirmed to be higher in men in the 2013 and 2015 studies and across the AMS data, as well as in older people, those describing themselves as non-poor and in villagers from the Lao-Tai ethnic community. Frequently, women and young people did not participate in activities because another household member – usually the head of their household – was already attending and speaking on their behalf. A significant share of non-participating women had household chores or childcare duties that prevented them from even attending the meetings. Individuals' own assessment of their level of participation in 2015 suggest that women of all ethnicities contributed significantly less actively than men, and there is tentative evidence that self-described poor women contributed even less actively to discussions than women who reported they had non-poor backgrounds. Women from ethnic groups with strong hierarchical structures were least likely out of all social groups to fully participate.

Reasons for non-participation of women

- Head of household already participated
- Household chores and childcare duties
- Had to tend to fields and inconvenient timing of meetings
- Lack of information about the fact there was a meeting

Reasons for passive participation of women

- Fear of “saying something wrong” and shyness speaking up in front of village authorities
- Insufficient knowledge of Lao language
- Lack of education or weak understanding of activities
- Perception that contribution “would not be interesting to others” or that others would not listen.

About a third of female respondents in 2013 recommended separating men and women to help the latter overcome their hesitations and lack of confidence to express their opinions, and to open up opportunities to discuss women-specific topics. This contrasts with the remaining majority of female respondents not favouring a separation along gender lines. After all, this option was not pursued further during PLUP and VDP implementation due to the impracticality of repeating the process with different groups. However, further participation and inclusion training were undertaken.

Age as another determining factor of participation translates into younger people (18 – 24 years) participating in and contributing to VDP and PLUP more rarely than older people. Reassuringly, participation rates of those having recently settled in the village almost matched those displayed

On defining poverty

Survey respondents in 2015 were asked to self-identify as either poor or non-poor, so poverty as treated by the study is clearly of a subjective nature. However, this approach has advantages over more intersubjective common measures of poverty, such as using income and assets to determine whether a respondent has passed the poverty threshold. Income and expenditures are prone to under-reporting and recall issues and may ignore factors exacerbating or alleviating the effects of poverty, such as household size and composition, future prospects and past resources or access to non-market goods. Considering the additional high cost of obtaining these more intersubjective data, self-identification was found to be the more pragmatic and no less meaningful option.

by well-established villagers. Similarly, poor people displayed no conclusive pattern of participating less only slightly lower participation rates than those self-assessing as non-poor – in many instances, they were even better represented, but this varied strongly by village. However, poor villagers also mentioned relatively more often than non-poor ones that they felt their opinion was not relevant to others and that they therefore did not participate more actively. No differences in satisfaction were detected between new and long-standing inhabitants and non-poor and poor community members.

AMS data demonstrates several trends complementing the observations of the 2015 perception study:

- The primary ethnic group appears to often be overrepresented in numbers and through the relatively high quality of their participation compared to the secondary ethnic group in some areas, notably in Mai, Viengkham and Viengxai districts.
- The participation patterns of poor households varies strongly by area. Poor households overall were frequently overrepresented in terms of numbers participating. Overrepresentation of poor households is desirable rather than an issue, however, the quality of their representation, was assessed as low average overall, and consistently less strong than non-poor's participation. Moreover, this trend is not consistent – in 2014 village development planning meetings, poor villagers were underrepresented in 110 out of 222 villages. In 17% of cases, they were underrepresented by more than 40%.
- Participation in PLUP and PALM appears to have been lower overall when compared to VDP, particularly among women. Women are representing about 13 to 20% at a provincial aggregate level, however, at a district aggregate level, participation can fall much lower. For instance, in May district in Phonsaly Province, only 9% of participants were women.
- Facilitators assessed women's participation to be consistently less strong than men's participation, except in a few villages where their participation quality was on a par for certain activities (e.g. VDP planning meetings).

Recommendations for the improved facilitation of the PLUP and VDP process

- ❖ **Listening to women:** Considering the risks involved in underrepresenting women's input to community level planning – which might relate more strongly to overall and maternal health and education than men's priorities – more effective ways of engaging with women need to be found. The options for shifting mindset and cultural norms are naturally limited for district facilitators as, for instance, villagers themselves decide who constitutes VLMCs, with men volunteering much more frequently than women based on their generally better knowledge of village landscapes.
The range of feasible options to promote women's active participation includes ensuring they can physically participate in the first place – for instance by scheduling meetings at times compatible with their house duties, accommodating translation needs early on in the process and providing safe spaces for expression of views – as well as ensuring that the input is then valued by decision-makers in the process. There are no quick fixes for this and longer-term awareness building involving both men and women in the communities as well as district authorities is necessary for this. While separate sessions for men and women may not be feasible due to budget constraints, there are other options. For instance, collecting anonymous written feedback from women would ensure their concerns do not remain invisible. Where literacy is an issue, other – perhaps more visuals-based – methods for gathering information about their preferences should be considered. District staff also needs to be trained and motivated accordingly.
- ❖ **Role of district staff:** Respondents generally appreciated district staff adding their own ideas to the plan. Only a few people objected. In order to ensure that this kind of involvement does not happen against people's will, feedback to facilitation needs to be closely monitored and followed-up. Moreover, to minimise the unintended exclusion of some groups, improved translation services provided during the PLUP and VDP process need to be considered. Where there is no opportunity for villagers to complain in safe ways and receive responses to their complaints, these need to be established.
- ❖ **Follow-up to VDP:** 77.5% of villagers want to see better follow-up particularly to VDPs – both in the form of advice and funding for proposed projects. Almost a third of villagers recommend the VDP should be repeated regularly to keep up with recent developments and should ensure everyone's participation at convenient times. Open feedback from some of the other Naiban suggests more follow-up for projects and activities outside the agricultural season would be beneficial. It is also recommended to repeat VDP and PLUP regularly for further adjustments and involvement of those who did not participate previously.

4. Implementation of VDP and PLUP activities

While the quality of PLUP and VDP implementation and the degree of villager participation in the process are considered important, without resources to realise activities set out in the Land Use and Village Development Plans, positive effects on economic, social and ecological dimensions will not materialise. Reported self-mobilisation of villagers for the implementation of activities for VDP is generally high, with 60.1% saying they discussed follow-up actions and/or even collected money to implement projects themselves. Roughly three quarters of villagers said the village authorities took some sort of action after VDP. Unlike with PLUP, as mentioned above, satisfaction with VDP is closely intertwined with the level of external support received to implement the plan – villagers that did not report follow-up to VDP also had a rather negative perception of VDP. Similarly, the more support is reported in a village, the higher the overall satisfaction, up to a point. Perceptions of villagers of how many schemes had been realised are more optimistic than data gathered by district and village authorities on actual implementation of activities in June 2015. The following summarises findings from a status review of activities planned by villagers under PLUP and VDP.

Brief methodological note

As part of the 2015 review of activities for PLUP and VDP, data was collected on the status of activities developed during the VDP and PLUP processes. GIZ staff trained individuals from the districts on what data to gather, who then passed this on to the village authorities. Authorities then collected data amongst their own community, and then shared this with the district authorities for collation and submission to the study team at GIZ. This VDP and PLUP review spanned all 10 districts with 23,127 villagers living in target areas.

PLUP: The review includes 102 out of 230 original PLUP villages as the remaining 128 villages had not had a review as of 2015 yet. A total of 771 activities were planned by these villages. Since there is missing information particularly on Huaphan Province, which had not had a review to date the PLUP data can therefore not be considered strictly representative of all PLUP villages. Some of the early PLUP sites did not produce the same type of action plan with identified schemes as others. This inconsistency needs to be kept in mind.

VDP: The review has data on 446 out of a total of 451 VDP villages covering 99% of all villages in the 10 NUDP target districts. This is 193% in excess of the NUDP covered. Thus, data collection covered almost all villages and findings are likely to be an accurate representation of all relevant villages.

What is the status of VDP and PLUP activities?

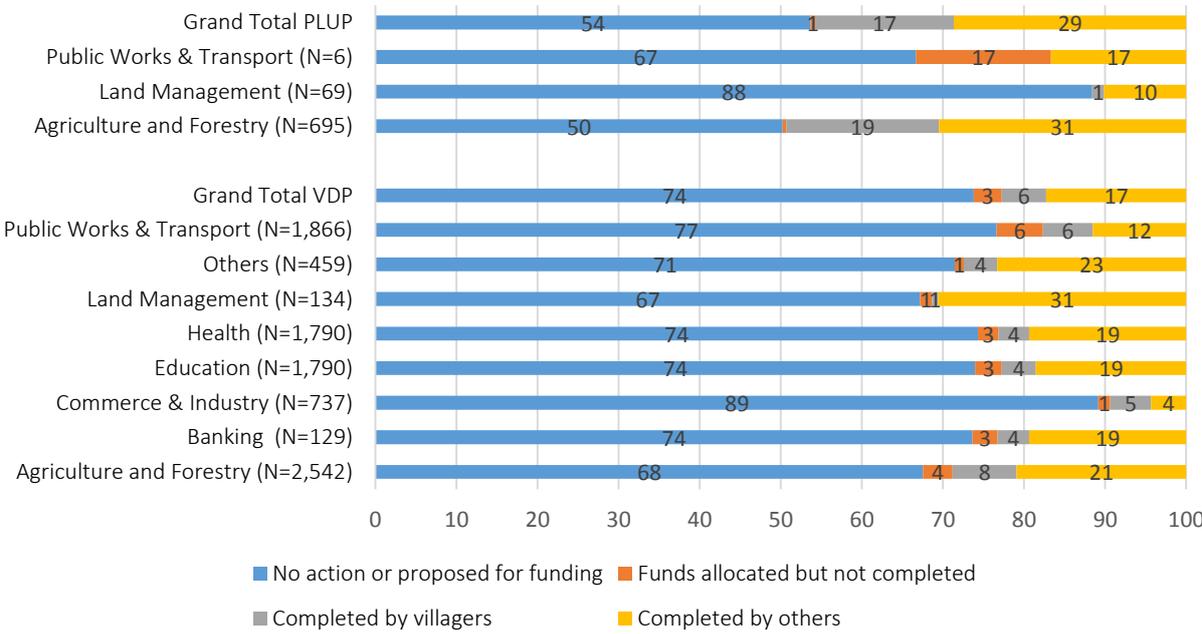
Activities in different sectors – from agriculture and forestry to commerce and health – demonstrate different implementation rates. Those plans developed a long time ago are expected to have higher implementation rates than more recent plans as explored more below. Data collection and analysis distinguished between six different statuses:

0. No action taken
1. Activity completed by villagers themselves
2. Activity proposed for funding
3. Activity approved and funds allocated
4. Activity funded, initiated but not completed
5. Activity completed by external funder

Where an activity has been approved, initiated or completed, this is considered to count towards the respective implementation rate, or in other words, these activities are considered implemented. Key observations on the picture emerging from the data are:

- *Overall implementation rate:* Of all planned VDP activities a good quarter (26%) has been work in progress or completed. The success rate to date for reviewed PLUP was even higher, at 47% of projects working towards or having already undergone completion. The high implementation rate for PLUP is mainly due to progress made in the agriculture and forestry sector where a lot of work has been completed either with the help of external funders or by villagers themselves. Furthermore, the PLUP planning process required a narrow and time-bound definition of activities, with a focus on those that could be realised by villagers themselves. This could partly explain the differences in implementation rates between PLUP and VDP overall. However, the absolute number of activities implemented is significantly higher under VDP.
- *Implementation through villagers:* For both VDP and PLUP, agriculture and forestry was the sector in which a relatively high percentage of projects were implemented by villagers (8% and 19% respectively). Conversely, land management was an area with low rates of implementation through villagers. Reason for this is the high costs for technical equipment, dearth of technical know-how and considerable length of time needed for measurement, to implement land zoning and registration activities.

Figure 3: Implementation rates across reviewed activities (in %)



How has the ratio of planned versus implemented activities evolved over time?

For all activities that were reviewed for VDP and PLUP, the amount of time passed since original planning is one of the factors determining whether they have been implemented as of time of review. While the number of activities developed in 2010 is too small to make conclusive statements (14 activities only), the pattern emerging between 2012 and 2014 clearly suggests that more time passed since planning correlates with greater implementation rates. Thus, 34% of all activities planned in 2012 were implemented as of the 2015 review compared to 15% of activities planned in 2014 implemented by 2015. However, activities planned in 2011 – despite a longer

stretch of time having passed - have been implemented at a slightly lower rate than 2012 activities. This might be explained with the experience gained in the initial year of rolling out VDP and PLUP, after which villagers were encouraged to develop more strategic, realistic and prioritised list of actions they wanted to see implemented. There is a plausible expectation that particularly for activities planned in the past two years, overall balance of implementation and non-action will further improve in the coming years.

Table 6: Percentage of activities implemented out of total list of activities developed by year

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
71% (out of 14)	30% (out of 2,975)	34% (out of 2,355)	27% (out of 1,059)	15% (out of 4,879)	24% (out of 11,282)

Where does funding for implementation of activities come from?

Funding for activities originated most frequently with the government (35%), including district, provincial and national levels. This was followed by self-mobilisation of resources by villagers themselves (27%).

As indicated before, funding sources vary significantly between different sectors, and within sectors, for PLUP and VDP. For instance, for Agriculture and Forestry and Commerce and Industry overall, villagers themselves proved to be the far greatest source of mobilisation. However, Agriculture and Forestry activities were also the focus of funding from the private sector, the Lao Government Bank, GIZ, NUDP and I/NGOs. The government acts as the most crucial source of funding for the social sector, including education, health as well as Public Works and Transport.

Figure 4: Composition of funding sources for ongoing and completed schemes (N=2,437)

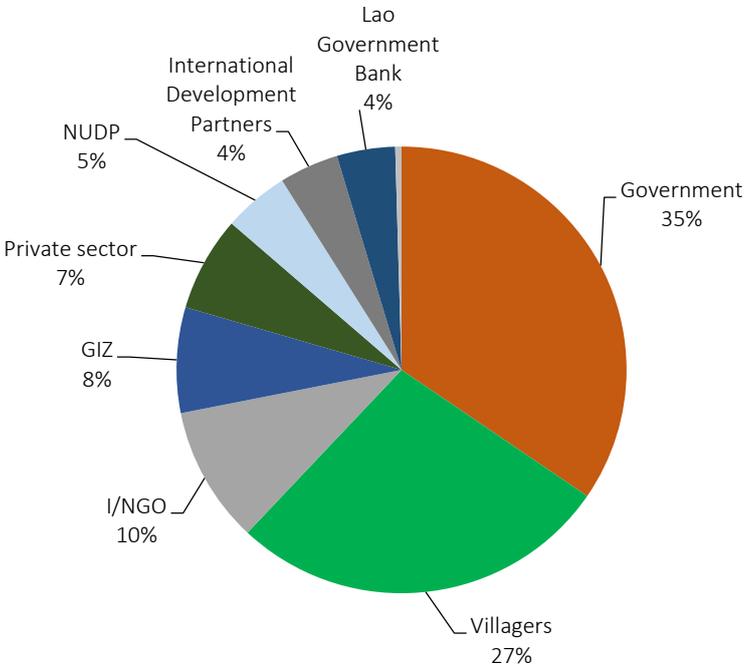


Table 7: Top funding sources for activities ranked per sector (% of funding delivered)

	Agriculture and Forestry	Banking	Commerce & Industry	Education	Health	Land Management	Public Works & Transport
1	Villagers (32%)	Government (41%)	Villagers (55%)	Government (57%)	Government (54%)	GIZ (33%)	Government (49%)
2	GIZ (15%)	I/NGO (30%)	Government (26%)	Villagers (18%)	I/NGO (20%)	NUDP (26%)	Villagers (32%)
3	Government (13%)	Villagers (19%)	Private sector (9%)	Development Partners (10%)	Villagers (18%)	Government (26%)	Private sector (16%)

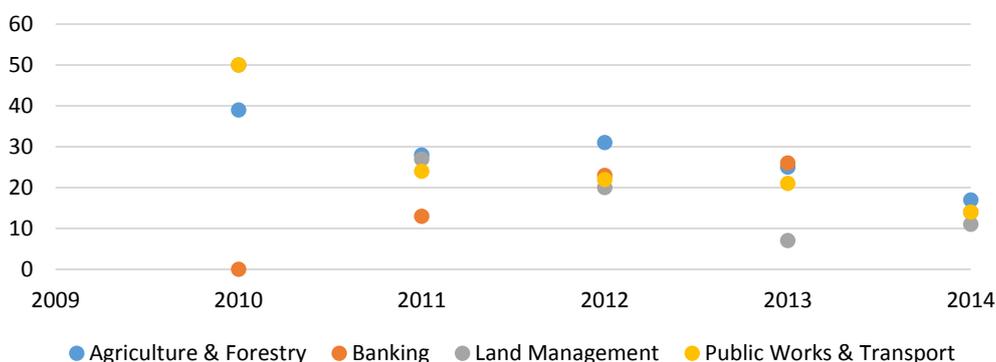
It is notable that villagers are one of the main sources of funding across almost all sectors with the exception of Land Management, for feasibility reasons discussed above. Government as a source of funding is playing a consistently key role as well.

Status of economic activities

When homing in on economically focussed activities – spanning agriculture and forestry, banking, land management, as well as public works and transport – a slightly higher implementation rate compared to the overall average across all sectors becomes evident (32% compared to 26% average). That said, banking and land management account for a relatively small number of activities – with 332 activities planned and 83 implemented. A trend confirmed earlier emerges yet again as agriculture and forestry display relatively high rates of implementation (35% overall). Breaking this down further allows for conclusions about sub-sectoral trends, though with some variations. A similar pattern can be observed as before but with some variations. For Public Works and Transport as well as Land Management, 2011 marks the year with the best implementation rate to date. This is because 2010 was insignificant in terms of producing many schemes for implementation and the process of developing schemes at a large scale only really kicked off in 2011. These most likely related to small scale infrastructure activities, implemented after 2011.

Banking defies the overall trend slightly – activities planned in 2013 were more likely to have been implemented than those planned in 2011 or 2012.

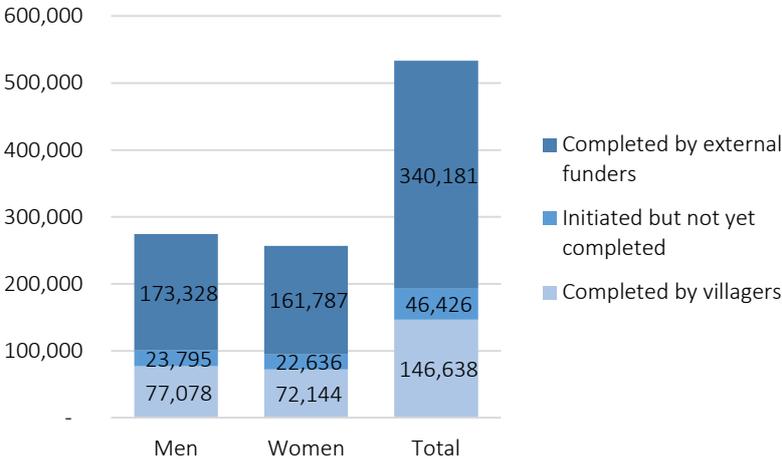
Figure 5: Percentage of sub-sector activities planned each year, implemented by 2015



Number of beneficiaries and satisfaction rates

The villages provided information on who was benefiting from which activities. A degree of double-counting is necessarily involved where the same individuals may have benefitted from several activities. When comparing VDP with PLUP satisfaction rates, there is no significant and meaningful difference between the two.

Figure 6: Beneficiaries of initiated and completed activities



In 151,902 instances, women were very satisfied with the activities. In 7604 instances, women were not satisfied with the activities. 86,770 were satisfied.

In 161,019 men said they were very satisfied with the activities. In 7980 instances were they not satisfied. Overall, men and women show very similar satisfaction rates.

Key findings and lessons learned

- ❖ Self-help and self-mobilisation of villagers was shown to have been a crucial factor enabling implementation of schemes. Ways of promoting this further should be explored in the future.
- ❖ Even though women tend to be less well represented than men at the planning stage, men and women overall show almost identical satisfaction rates. According to available data, they also equally benefit from implemented activities.
- ❖ Unlike with PLUP satisfaction with VDP goes hand in hand with the level of external support received to implement a planned activity – at an individual level, villagers who did not report follow-up to VDP also had a rather negative perception of VDP. Similarly, the more support is reported in a village, the higher the overall satisfaction, up to a point.
- ❖ It can sensibly be assumed that implementation rates for PLUP are higher when compared to VDP because PLUP from the start required a specific and time-bound definition of planned activities with a strong focus on those things that could be realised by villagers themselves.
- ❖ Generally, the longer ago an activity was planned, the higher its chance of being implemented by now. The caveat here is that activities planned in 2012 have seen even higher implementation rates than those planned in 2011 – which is likely to be due to the more focussed planning and improvements made to the process in year 2 of rolling out VDP and PLUP.
- ❖ Agriculture and Forestry are the sector with by far the largest number of planned activities for both PLUP and VDP – followed by Public Works and Transport and Education activities planned under VDP.

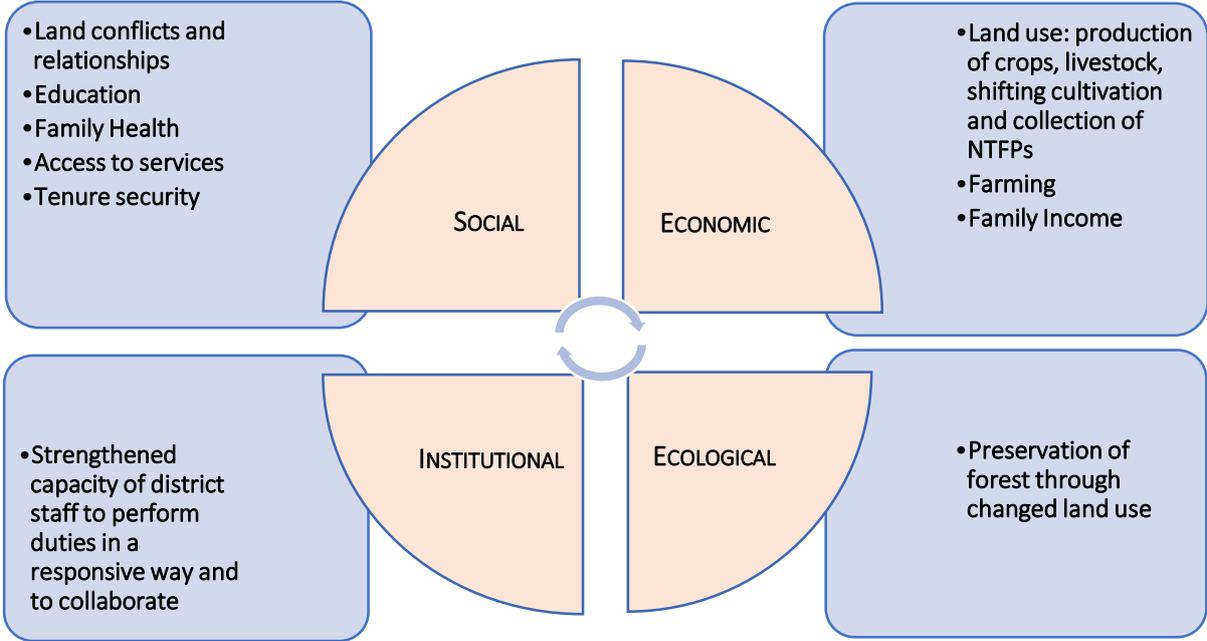
5. Findings on NU-IRDP outcomes

5.1 NU-IRDP’s dimensions of change

The NU-IRDP project as a whole aimed to contribute to social and economic improvements at a village level, but also supports aspects of institutional capacity development and ecological change, with a focus on improving agricultural practice. Potential changes resulting from PLUP are primarily concentrated on land use, including agriculture, and thus only indirectly impact on higher-level social and economic changes, such as family health or increased household income. For VDP, these changes may materialise more quickly as measures resulting from VDP focussed on more immediate improvements to social and broader infrastructure.

The change dimensions are not always distinct from each other – for instance, while family health pertains to the social dimension of change, it interacts strongly with household economics. Social and economic changes can be reported at a household or individual level – the more difficult-to-measure institutional changes on the other hand need greater triangulation, by drawing on the perception of district staff’s performance by villagers as well as assessments made by district staff and key informants.

Figure 7: NU-IRDP’s relevant areas of change



The following draws on the 2015 study of villagers’ perceptions of VDP and PLUP, which employed a robust design of random selection of villagers among participants combined with quantitative and qualitative data collection through surveys. Taking place almost five years after the start of VDP and PLUP, the study serves to corroborate earlier assumptions particularly around emerging changes in villagers’ livelihoods – assumptions tentatively tested but not sufficiently validated through AMS and the 2013 study. As mentioned before, in some areas the attribution gap – where there is little concrete evidence to substantiate claims about NU-IRDP’s crucial role in bringing about changes – is larger than in others.

5.2 Emerging changes in relation to PLUP's activities and goals

Highlights on PLUP outcomes at a glance

- ❖ While half of all respondents recognised potential of PLUP for resolving tensions, only a small number of people actually called on and benefitted from PLUP for conflict resolution.
- ❖ Through the PLUP process, land from land-rich households was re-allocated to those with less land, to *some* degree. The 2015 study shows that 10.9% of self-described poor-people said they had received more land after PLUP compared to 6.1% of non-poor respondents who received additional land.
- ❖ 22.2% of villagers (53) reported a net increase in cash crops – with net increase being defined by the study as an increase in at least one crop with no decrease in any other crops for a given household. Data hint at the possibility that an increase in land since PLUP is associated with an increase in cash crops, though this link cannot be generalised to the overall target population.
- ❖ 33.8% of all interviewed villagers (69 counts) reported a net increase in livestock they were rearing. There appears to be an overall increase in livestock rearing, often attributed by the interviewees to the fact that there are now designated areas for livestock rearing available.
- ❖ Shifting cultivation was reduced clearly in almost all families. About 40% (17 individuals) attributed this to PLUP or government policy.

Social changes: land conflicts and influence on investment decisions

PLUP was envisaged to support decisions on land use, investment and distribution and also help resolve investment-related conflicts.

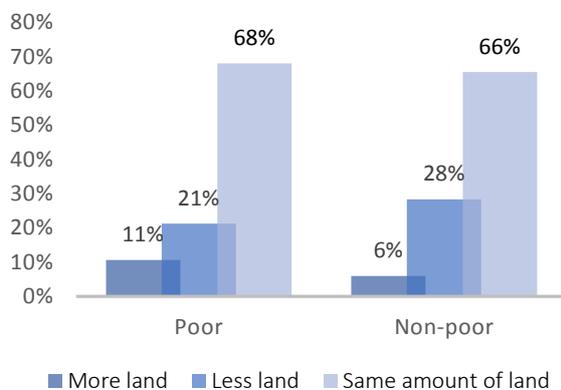
While half of all respondents recognised the potential of PLUP in this area, only a small number of people actually called on and benefitted from PLUP for conflict resolution. 50% of respondents saw PLUP as a potential tool to solve smaller conflicts in the village or with other villages, but the vast majority of respondents (80%) had never encountered a situation in which they would have thought it helpful to consult PLUP. Out of those 35 interviewees (12% of respondents) that had actively used PLUP to solve smaller conflicts, 15 said the conflict was in the end resolved without PLUP, the involvement of district staff was not satisfactory or involved parties did not adhere to the agreement.

Of the 72 interviewed villagers who mentioned they had had a land conflict, 35% (25) reported the conflict had been completely or partially resolved through PLUP. However, unlike VDP, PLUP produces clear benefits for some households and drawbacks for others through the re-allocation of land. 34 villagers (11.6% of all interviewees) also mentioned they had conflicts after and because of PLUP, with 9 of them saying the conflict was eventually resolved. This scenario occurred where villagers lost land to a neighbouring village or where someone's land was reallocated to somebody else from the same village.

Less than 15% of 2015 study respondents thought PLUP could support them in resolving substantial conflicts with private companies, foreign investors or conflicts with the government, especially where decisions of the district or higher levels of government are involved.

Social changes: land redistribution

Figure 8: Land redistribution for poor and non-poor villagers after PLUP



Through the PLUP process, land from land-rich households was re-allocated to those with less land, to some degree. The 2015 study shows that 10.9% of self-described poor-people said they had received more land after PLUP compared to 6.1% of non-poor respondents who received additional land. On the other hand, 80 interviewees said their families had lost land after PLUP. These households were more likely to belong to the Mon-Khmer and Hmong-Lumien communities and to live in larger households than the average respondent, but also more likely to describe themselves as non-poor. Overall, poor people were also less likely to have lost land (21% compared to 28%

among non-poor).

16 out of 20 interviewees who said they had received more land after PLUP mentioned they had more food available due to an increased amount of land, for instance by being able to grow more rice. More than half of those receiving more land said they were earning more money as a result, though the figures are too small to draw general conclusions.

Social changes: land use

It was expected that agriculture development activities, including improved livestock raising, fisheries, and food gathering activities, among others, would be based on the PLUP process, which would also guide authorities in enhancing infrastructure according to prevailing needs.

The study data cannot tell us to what extent households are overall better or worse off due to a change in land use – many reported both increases and decreases for different types of agricultural activity, so a reported decrease in a certain kind of crop could mean that the households is expending more effort on livestock rearing or the cultivation of other, more profitable crops. However, the 2015 study confirmed several trends in how households were using their land. While PLUP aimed at bringing about improved and more efficient land use, there are other factors that have played a role. **Overall, 60.2% of study participants reported a change – negative and positive - in their agricultural activities.**

Land Use: Cash Crops

22.2% of villagers (53) reported a net increase in cash crops – with net increase being defined by the study as an increase in at least one crop with no decrease in any other crops for a given household. This means at least 22.2% of villagers saw an overall increase of their crops, but the true percentage is likely to be higher. The study results suggest a constant level or even a slight increase in the cultivation of cash crops across the target population. The single most mentioned factor driving this increase is enhanced market demand for cash crops, followed by external support by a donor or a company that led to enhanced production conditions. Those very few households that reported decreases mentioned shortage of land, low quality of soil and lack of labour force as main reasons.

People who lost land after PLUP were more likely to experience a greater decline (or at least not an increase) in cash crops compared to people whose amount of land stayed the same or increased (32.8% compared to 10.5% with same amount of land and 4.6% with more land respectively). **Data hint at the possibility that an increase in land since PLUP is associated with an increase in cash crops**, though this link is not statistically significant and can therefore not be generalised to the overall target population.

Land Use: Livestock

33.8% of all interviewed villagers (69 counts) reported a net increase in livestock they were rearing. 10.3% (21 counts) reported a decrease, regardless of an increase. The results suggest an overall increase in livestock over the study districts, particularly when viewed jointly with open answers from villagers saying they either decreased shifting cultivation because they had started focussing on livestock or increased their cash crop production to procure food for their livestock.

34.2% (26 counts) of those who had seen an increase in livestock attributed it to the fact that there was new area for livestock in the village, which can be assumed to be due to PLUP in most cases. Loss of livestock through disease was a major reason mentioned for a decrease in livestock.

Land Use: Shifting cultivation

The government of Laos aspires to reduce shifting cultivation, otherwise known as ‘slash-and-burn’ cultivation, which comes with a host of environmental and social challenges. It instead promotes more permanent agricultural land use. There are estimations that about 10% of the total area of Laos is subject to shifting cultivation, a large proportion of which is located in the mountainous North of the country.⁵

Against this backdrop, it is noteworthy that **36.2% of all respondents (107 counts) said they had decreased shifting cultivation.** Shifting cultivation has also decreased more or less evenly across all districts. The main reasons given by interviewees were a shortage of land available for shifting cultivation; lack of labour and a focus on paddy fields. **Of those having reduced shifting cultivation, 40.2 % attributed the change to PLUP or a general government policy (17 counts) or a limitation of land available for shifting cultivation (26 counts).**

Land Use: Non-Timber Forest Products

Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) include edible plants and animals, medicines and barks and fibres including bamboo and rattan. A significant share of the Lao population relies on them for their own subsistence and for valuable export products.⁶ Due to increasing deforestation for agriculture (particularly shifting cultivation) but also due to expanded settlements, logging and infrastructure projects, areas in Laos have seen a steady reduction in forest land and associated natural resources. Hence, the PLUP process included determining measures for the protection of forest areas.

⁵ <http://www.mekonginfo.org/assets/midocs/0001423-farming-shifting-cultivation-development-in-northern-laos.pdf> last accessed on 2nd June 2015

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/ac778e/AC778E12.htm> (last accessed on 23rd July 2015)

The 2015 study finds a slight trend indicating the greater availability of NTFPs - while 19.9% of all respondents state that, for various reasons, there are more NTFPs available or being collected, 13.8% say there was generally a smaller amount of NTFPs available. However, numbers are hinting at differences between the districts, with increases reported in Phonxai and an overall decrease reported in Houameuang. **Almost a fifth of all villagers said they had reduced shifting cultivation to respect conservation forests or said the availability of NTFPs in their village had reduced because the government limits areas in which to collect them**, which relates to the PLUP process. Generally, **villagers appear to have increased rather than decreased NTFPs collection**, with many mentioning the protection of forest as an important reason why more NTFPs were available.

5.3 Emerging changes in relation to land registration, land titles and tenure security

At the time the dedicated land registration survey was carried out, in November 2013, land titles had only been handed over in six out of 39 villages (amounting to 866 titles, most of which were residential). Land registration had taken place any time in the 1.5 years running up to the study. Some of the interviewees had already received their land title; others were at an early stage of having their land registered and adjudicated while still waiting for their final land title. It is worth remembering that owners of land who received recently land titles or registration very are likely to have different expectations as to the benefits of registration than those who received land registration or titles long ago.

Respondents included:

- 31 landowners of *registered agricultural and residential land*
- 6 holders of *land titles for residential and agricultural land*
- 77 holders of *land titles for residential land only*

The small number of respondents does not allow for generalisable statements to be made.

By far most of the agricultural land was owned by the male head of the household, followed by conjugal co-ownership. Only a few interviewees indicated female ownership of agricultural land. Most agricultural land was used for paddy fields, followed by plantations. In contrast, residential land titles are most frequently owned by both husband and wife in the study population.

Generally, land titles were seen to offer greater livelihoods opportunities than merely owning registered land. Thus, interviewees' expectations of how owning registered land compared to holding a land title in terms of benefits underline the crucial economic and social relevance of both legal steps.

Villagers expected that both land registration and a land title would take them a long way towards tenure security by offering:

- Security of land ownership from sudden loss of land
- Prevention or resolution of land conflicts due to clearer demarcation of boundaries

However, the vast majority of interviewed villagers expected that land titling would bring them greater benefits than land registration would, including:

- Security of long-term ownership over land, making it easy to sell, transfer or inherit it.
- Clearly demarcating the boundaries of land owned and thus help prevent or solve land conflicts.
- Opening up opportunities to obtain loans and to receive compensation where land is taken away from their owners or long-term users.
- Making tax collection more transparent.

39% of interviewees (34) had experienced conflicts over land prior to land registration, most of them regarding agricultural land – for example, where in the absence of official documentation boundaries and ownership were not clear, there were instances of people intruding on each other’s land. Conflicts also occurred in relation to residential land. **For owners of registered agricultural and residential land, 83% of land conflicts were solved after land registration**, which included discussions on the land boundary with the Naiban, the owner in question and a party representative.

“I USED TO HAVE A PROBLEM WITH A NEWCOMER FROM ANOTHER VILLAGE, WHO HAD NO PLOT TO CONSTRUCT A HOUSE. AT THAT TIME I DID NOT HAVE ANY EVIDENCE TO CONFIRM MY OWNERSHIP, SO THE NEWCOMER CONSTRUCTED HIS HOUSE ON MY LAND

At the time of review, only one person with a residential land title stated that the land title was helping him solve a conflict. The remaining conflicts had not been solved because they had just occurred, so that villagers had not had a chance to use their land title for conflict resolution. Some respondents stated they preferred a more non-confrontational approach of first negotiating and reasoning with other parties involved without using their land title.

Perceived tenure security

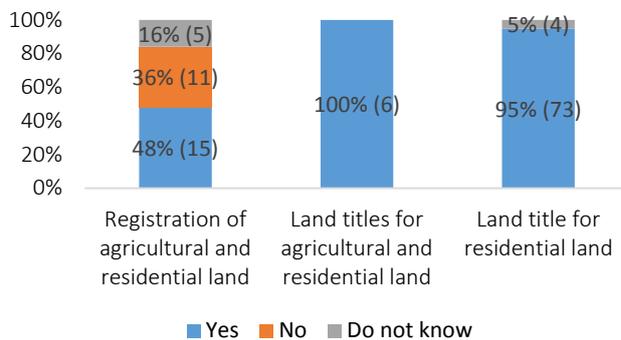
Both land registration and holding a land title drastically improved tenure security as perceived by land owners – all villagers who had received a land title (for either agricultural or residential land) felt more secure about their land ownership because a title represents a legal guarantee on what amount of land belongs to them. Land registration made everyone but one respondent believe that their land ownerships was more secure because it was officially demarcated and recognised by government authorities. Importantly, for all those whose land had been registered, there is an expectation that a land title will follow.

“IN THE PAST, AFTER WE FINISHED OUR HARVEST, THE PLOT WOULD NOT BELONG TO US AND CHANGE THE USER EVERY YEAR, BUT NOW THAT MY PLOT HAS BEEN REGISTERED, IT WILL STILL BELONG TO ME EVEN AFTER I HAVE FINISHED THE

Land administration and owners’ economic situation

In terms of expected compensations for a loss or expropriation of land, for instance for a road extension, construction or hydropower projects, there are wide differences between what land registration and a land title are perceived to offer comparatively. While almost all holders of a land title were certain they would receive compensation in such a case, about 36% of villagers with merely registered land (11) thought it would not be enough to be compensated. The reason for this was believed to be a lack of proper documentation to prove ownership. 16% of respondents (5) with registered land did not know about their right to compensation, and lacked knowledge of the corresponding law.

Figure 9: In case of land loss, do land owners believe they will receive compensation?

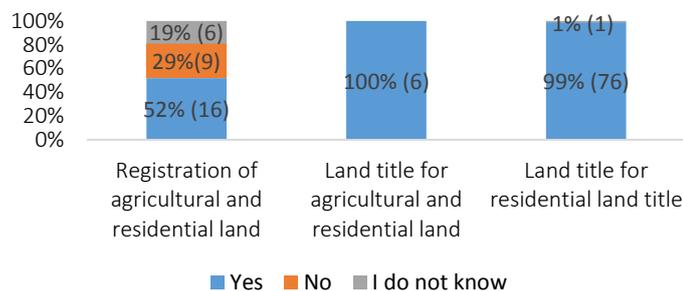


“A SITUATION HAPPENED BEFORE WHERE MY PLOT HAD BEEN REGISTERED, BUT MY RESIDENTIAL LAND WAS USED TO CONSTRUCT A HEALTH CENTER, AND I DIDN’T RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION. SO I THINK LAND REGISTRATION IS NOT ENOUGH TO CONFIRM OR HELP ME RECEIVE THE COMPENSATION. BUT IF I HAVE A LAND TITLE, I CAN GET COMPENSATION, AS THE TITLE INCLUDES ALL THE DETAILS OF THE LAND SUCH AS THE

More than half of respondents whose land had been registered believed that registration could increase the value of their land, partly in expectation of receiving a land title in the near future. However, 29% (9) of them believed land registration could not increase the value of their land without a land title since it would not suffice to maintain the confidence of potential buyers.

Those having received a land title almost all believed that it increased the value of their land by buttressing buyer confidence, making it easier to transfer land (either through selling or passing on land to family members as inheritance), to build higher value housing structure, to prevent land conflicts in the future and to get a loan by using the land as a collateral.

Figure 10: Do land owners think that land registration and land titles can increase the value of their land?



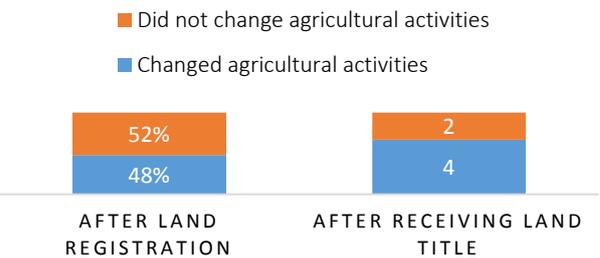
To home in on one important aspect of investment, 94% of respondents

(107) overall believed that a land title could be used as a trustworthy collateral to obtain a loan. A vast majority of them - about 86% (92) - intended to do so once a land title was obtained in order to invest in husbandry and farming, support their children’s education or to construct new housing. However, of those actually holding a land title, almost nobody had used it as a collateral for a loan. The reasons for this were that people lacked experience of using a large amount of money; people feared they would not be able to pay the interest, and because of limited land in their possession. There were a few examples where a land title enabled respondents to take out a loan, for instance to expand their grocery store and restaurant or to buy maize seeds for farming. Others were planning to improve their house and buy livestock if their pending loan application should be accepted.

Investment of villagers in their agricultural and residential land

Prior to land registration, interviewees would use half of the available plots for producing short-term cash crops such as cardamom, galangal or lemon grass, depending on market demands. About 27% of the agricultural land was used for rice paddy fields and some used their land for upland rice production. Moreover, remaining land was used to plant fruit trees, partially for families’ own consumption with small amounts sold on the market. Only a small share of interviewees stated that they had planted long-term crops such as coffee or teakwood trees before their land had been registered.

Figure 11: Changes in agricultural activities after receiving title or registration



“I HAVE CHANGED FROM PLANTING CORN TO COFFEE, BECAUSE THERE IS AN INVESTOR WHO HAS COME TO BUY IT. THE LAND HAS BEEN REGISTERED AND COFFEE IS A SUSTAINABLE TYPE OF CROP THAT HAS TO BE PLANNED IN A

48% (15) of farmers whose land had been registered adapted their agricultural activities, for several reasons. Some had received external investment for their plot, some felt more secure about their land tenure and thus invested more, and others introduced a new kind of crop more suitable for their plot than the previous one. Those 52% (16) who had not changed their practices had their own reasons – either their current agricultural production still generated enough income or they did not see a reason to plant other types of crops apart from rice. Some said their plots were too small to invest differently in it and some said they had already planted long-term crop before registration, so there was no need to switch. Most of those who had not changed their practices, however, intended to so in the future, for which one reason was that land registration had given them confidence in the permanence of the plot. On the other hand, those who had received residential and agricultural land titles showed a slightly higher tendency to change their agricultural practices. It should be noted that the figures are too limited to draw firm conclusions.

Prior to land registration, almost all interviewed villagers (97% or 111) had lived in semi-permanent houses made of bamboo, wood and grass. 23% of villagers (26) invested in improved housing after land registration. The rest did not improve their house due to a lack of money or because they were sufficiently satisfied with the house and wanted to spend their income on other things instead, such as farming or education. Most of them wanted to invest in their house in the future, depending on money available and confidence that land registration would provide them with reliable ownership.

Of those that had received only residential land titles, 45% (35) improved their house, either by extending their grocery shop, constructing a toilet, or using more permanent building material. Some of them said this was due to them feeling more confident about their ownership of land, though the availability of sufficient funding was a pre-condition for this as well. Despite other considerations, the land title clearly plays a significant role in villagers’ considerations of investment.

When asked whether villagers with registrations or titles for agricultural land would be willing to accept investments from external investors, somewhat surprisingly, a clear majority – 65% (24 out of 37) – said they would not. There were concerns among these respondents that the land might be taken by investors, or its quality reduced due to the use of chemicals. Some had already started growing permanent crops and did not want to have to take them down.

Economic impacts were mostly similar for those interviewees whose land had at the time of the survey only been registered, and those, who had already been further along in the process and received land titles, mainly for residential private land.

Conclusion

The study detected little difference between holders of registered land and land titles when it came to perceived tenure security and confidence. However, when probing deeper, there were significant differences between these two groups, particularly with regard to the perceived prospects for compensation if land was taken away for infrastructure projects or other purposes. In the same vein, study participants were divided over whether land registration had increased the value of their property whereas almost all of them expected a land title to definitely do so.

Recommendations and lessons learned

- ❖ It is recommended to further roll out land registration, so that more people can benefit from this initial step of legalising land ownership. This, if properly enforced, can lead to better taxation and improved land administration already.
- ❖ A frequently mentioned factor for owners of exclusively residential land titles was a lack of money that hindered them to improve their house in the face of other priorities, such as paying for schooling. A small share of respondents with residential land titles also indicated they were reasonably happy with their housing structure as it is. This might indicate a need for income that can be better met through registration or titling of agricultural land as opposed to residential land. Thus, there needs to be rigorous assessment of farmers' priorities that should inform which land is valued higher and needed more – tenure security over agricultural land or residential land.
- ❖ A commonly recurring barrier to using land to its optimal purpose in interviewees' responses is the small size of land. Further assessments are needed to understand the critical threshold in terms of size that allows land to be used as collateral for loans and to be attractive to foreign investors.

5.4 Emerging changes in relation to VDP's activities and goals

Village Development Planning necessarily has a broader focus – including social infrastructure and institutionalization of participatory planning mechanisms within the government – than Land Use Planning. Again, it can be assumed that the contribution of NU-IRDP to any changes in areas such as farming, education, family health and food availability varies, ranging from VDP being a crucial factor for the changes we observe to VDP's influence being more negligible due to other factors.

Highlights on VDP outcomes at a glance

- ❖ 70.8% of interviewed villagers (324) gave indications of improved relationships in the village since VDP.
- ❖ A total of 20.3% of respondents (83) said they successfully started a new farming technique or crop according to VDP.
- ❖ 34.4% (149) thought quality of education had improved as result of VDP.
- ❖ According to 13.7% (57) of interviewees, the construction or improvement of health centres and provision of enhanced medical services as part of VDP projects contributed to the improved health of their families.
- ❖ While 57.4% of villagers reported an increase in food availability, around 11.8% attributed this explicitly to a VDP project
- ❖ Roughly a fifth (21%) of villagers report increased income due to VDP projects, particularly due to VDP projects on livestock support, cash crops, agricultural training and infrastructure.
- ❖ It is assumed that social and economic changes will take more time and be more fluid than can be measured in the brief lifespan of a project phase

Social changes: Social relationships in the village

70.8% of interviewed villagers (324) gave indications for improved relationships in the village since VDP, for instance by stating that women and men were now having more open discussions than before VDP, that poor people shared their concerns more often and/or that different ethnic groups had increased their exchanges since VDP.

Relationships appear to have improved to a lesser degree between ethnic majority and minority groups, indicated by their difference in perceptions: 14.6% of villagers belonging to the main ethnic group mentioned increased exchange of interactions between ethnic groups after VDP compared to 5% of villagers from ethnic minorities.

Social and Economic Changes: Farming

About half of all respondents said they had changed their farming practices, with almost equal numbers attributing this change to VDP and to other factors respectively. A total of 20.3% (83) of respondents said they successfully started a new farming technique or crop according to VDP and 2% (8) decreased farming to start other income-generating activities due to VDP – compared to 25.1% (103) who had changed or decreased farming practices due to other factors. In total, 12.4% (53) decreased farming to carry out other income generating activities, most of these cases not related to VDP. This is in line with the PLUP results, where a relevant proportion of villagers reported changes in agricultural activities due to new ways of generating an income, such as paid labour in construction. 47.4% (235) said they had not changed anything in their way of farming.

The data suggest that VDP played a significant role in prompting villagers to try out new techniques or crops, but had a much smaller influence on creating alternative income-generating activities that led to decreases in farming, compared to other factors.

25.5% of poor people said they successfully introduced a new method or used a new crop in line with VDP. Chine-Tibet seem to have used new methods much more often than other groups (65.9% mentioned they used new techniques/crops), although this group comprises only 30 interviewees in two villages. Members of Hmong-Lumien never mentioned using new methods.

Social changes: Education

Respondents were explicitly asked to describe what positive change (if any) had resulted from VDP. Improvements in education were the kind of change mentioned most frequently by 18.9% of all 448 respondents (85 individuals). This is likely to be an underestimation of the true positive impact of VDP on education, however, since 42% of villagers (178) also mentioned that the school building in their community had improved and 34.4% (149) thought the quality of education had improved as a result of VDP. Considering these responses, there is strong overall indication that VDP contributed to improved education for at least 50% of villages covered by the VDP work.

The data, however, also indicates room for improvement for the quality of education in 14 out of 30 study villages. A proportion of villagers (14.5% or 59 counts) reported that schooling had not improved at all. In terms of social equity, it is important to note that the data indicates poor people likely benefitting from the general positive impact of VDP on education as much as non-poor people did.

Social Changes: Family Health

While its focus was on agricultural improvements, VDP also had the potential to play a significant role in improving health through its directly health-related and its water-related interventions, including latrine provision, health care centre improvements or training for health workers. Across the target population, 46.7% of interviewed villagers have seen family health improve independently from VDP-related activities. However, according to 13.7% of interviewees (57), the construction or improvement of health centres and provision of enhanced medical services as part of VDP projects contributed to the improved health of their families. 16.2% of respondents (66) report that VDP projects improved their access to and quality of water, which subsequently improved their family's health.

Again, a need for further support remains as 17.9% of villagers (86) say they still have severe health problems.

Economic Changes: Family Income

Roughly a fifth (21%) of villagers report increased income due to VPD projects, particularly due to VDP projects on livestock support, cash crops, agricultural training and infrastructure. However, the majority of respondents indicated an increase in income mainly due to other factors than VDP. 58.4% of respondents (262) report more income unrelated to any VDP project, also through cash crops and livestock but also the collection of NTFPs, textile production and income received through construction or other labour.

Poor people appear to benefit from VDP to about the same extent as other people. That said, this still leaves 26.4% of villagers (121) who have not had more income since VDP. Notably, only 15% of Mon-Khmer increased their income due to VDP compared to 40% of Chine-Tibet.

Economic Changes: Food availability

Changes in food availability are closely linked to changes in land use, farming and family income. Again, VDP can be said only to be one of the factors leading to an improvement of the situation. Even though 57.4% of villagers reported an increase in food availability, only around 11.8% attribute this explicitly to a VDP project. 10.3% of respondents (43) indicated that VDP enabled them to generate additional income (mainly related to livestock and road construction), which increased the amount of food the families had available.

A third of people – 33.1% or 152 counts - said there had been no change for them at all, and 8.3% of villagers (42) have even less food available now. This is unsurprising insofar as improved food availability can be expected to only occur for a subset of the population that has already seen improvements in other areas, such as increased income or changed land use.

Environmental changes

In terms of environmental changes, villagers (17.9% of all respondents or 84 individuals) predominantly reported negative environmental changes or incidents, such as increased erosion or more floods. However, the vast majority (83.7% or 68) said these were unrelated to VDP. Those who did attribute these negative changes to VDP said it was due to inadequate implementation of the projects. For instance, in Pakseng Village in Pakxeng District, villagers complained about the dirt and stench caused by pigs being reared as part of a VDP project when the village had no clean way of accommodating them. In Angsang Village in Viengxai, villagers and the Naiban report flooding of paddy fields due to a bridge constructed by a VDP project. This goes back to the fact that developed plans will have been of varying quality in each district, depending on district staff motivation and experience to facilitate the process and advise on specific measures, among other factors. VDP is a means to identify the priority needs of the villages. Once a decision has been made to implement at VDP-identified project, project level planning need to be done to ensure the feasibility and success of the project, as well as provide ways to mitigate risks.

May, Samphan and Phonxai are districts with particularly high proportions of people mentioning environmental problems.

Access to services

16.9% of villagers (77) and 10 of 30 Naiban mentioned that new roads constructed due to VDP improve their access to important services. 26.7% of villagers (113) mentioned new services independently from VDP.

5.5 Emerging changes in individual and institutional capacities

Highlights on individual and institutional capacity development at a glance

- ❖ 133 governmental staff from nine cooperation districts⁷ filled out component specific questionnaires self-assessing their *individual* capacities. Heads of partner organisations gave an assessment of the *institutional* capacities of their organisations.
- ❖ Individual capacities were assessed asking questions regarding technical, financial, monitoring, management and facilitation skills. Overall district staff working with both components of NU-IRDP reported a good perceived level of individual capacities with few gaps regarding specific technical skills.
- ❖ Institutional capacities were assessed asking about agreement with statements on institutional mandate, management, monitoring, human resources, financial resources and institutional learning. For both components, the perceived main issue regarding *institutional* capacities was “Financial Resources” highlighting insufficient budget and “Human Resources” pointing to high turnover of staff.
- ❖ District staff of both components of NU-IRDP confirmed substantial improvements due to capacity building measures in terms of individual and institutional capacities.

NU-IRDP aimed to strengthen the capacity of district staff and also improve the capacity of sectoral institutions in the districts to be able to implement project activities increasingly independently. This idea is reflected in the capacity development approach of NU-IRDP, which shapes all project activities. One example for this approach is the use of the “Financial Agreement” (FA) instrument, where districts are responsible for managing a certain amount of funds to implement project activities independently. To be able to do this, NU-IRDP provided specific financial trainings to district staff. In the same manner, various other capacity measures have been conducted.

In September 2015 those capacity development measures were assessed using a mix of different assessment methods, which were applied during the final lessons learned workshops of NU-IRDP. In total 133 governmental staff filled out a questionnaire providing a self-assessment of their *individual capacities* and the *institutional* capacities of their organisation. The participant group consisted of 95 district staff working with the Land Management (LM) component and 38 district staff working with the Local Governance Planning (LGP) component of NU-IRDP. The *institutional* assessment was conducted only by the heads of partner organisations, which for the LM-component were the heads of DONRE and DAFO for the district level and the heads of PONRE and PAFO for the province level. The LGP-component included representatives from DPO and DRDO at the district level, PPIO and PRDO at the province level and also the NCRDPE for the national level. Additionally to the questionnaire various group exercises were conducted to analyse the improvement due to capacity building measures of NU-IRDP.

⁷ Assessment was done with only 9 districts as Viengthong district split up into Hiam district and Sone district. This formally counts as 10 cooperation districts, but the PLUP team from Hiam is the same for Sone district.

Figure 12: Assessment of Individual Capacities

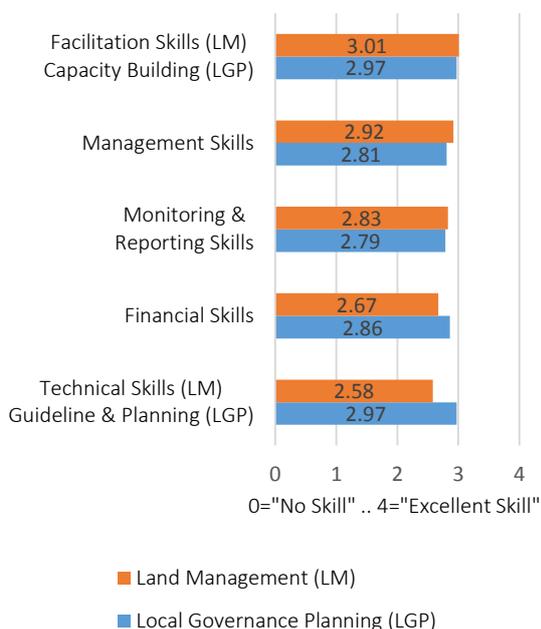


Figure 13: Assessment of Institutional Capacities



Individual capacities were assessed with the questionnaire asking for a self-assessment of specific skills in various areas (see aggregated results in Figure 12). The results showed an overall good perceived level of individual skills of district staff working with both components. For the Land-Management (LM) component there were only a few perceived small gaps regarding specific technical PLUP/PALM skills (e.g. operating GIS software or GPS hardware). For the LGP-component there were small perceived gaps regarding the use of collected data (use of VDP data in Public Investment Planning and the Socio-Economic Development Plans). Additionally, the LM-component also conducted a group exercise where technical staff evaluated the current capacities and improvements of the PLUP/PALM team as a whole. In the absence of a baseline, technical staff was asked to recall their level of capacities in 2013 where they estimated an average of 3.48 on a scale from 1=“Low Capacity” to 5=“High Capacity”. The estimated current level of capacities for 2015 was averaging 4.48, indicating a 30% improvement of overall capacities due to capacity building measures. Slightly differently the LGP-component asked direct questions about the improvement of capacities due to capacity building measures. District staff reported a good average improvement of 2.25 (on a scale of 1 = “No improvement” to 3 = “Big Improvement”). This shows a tangible improvement due to capacity building measures of both components.

Institutional capacity was assessed by heads of partner organisations (LM: Heads of PONRE, DONRE, PAFO, DAFO; LGP: giving agreement regarding institutional performance in specific areas (see aggregated results in Figure 13). For both components, the perceived main issue was the reported insufficient budget and the high turnover of staff as a limiting factor. In the group exercise involving the heads, they gave a high appraisal regarding the participatory capacity building approach. They reported an overall increased capacity of their staff and highlighted the ability of their staff to train each other. Specifically the benefits regarding the “Financial Agreement” instrument were mentioned as it provided sufficient budget but also gave increased responsibility to the districts staff such that they could ensure that the project activities matched local needs. Regarding things to improve it was noted that an improved data management system and an increased coordination and exchange of knowledge between the districts but also between the districts, provincial and national level would be beneficial.

Recommendations and lessons learned

- ❖ Capacity development measures should be aimed at increasing independence of the cooperating partner to implement project activities more without continuous support.
- ❖ The overall capacity development approach of NU-IRDP has been positively mentioned by the district staff. Especially the use of the "Financial Agreement" instrument has proven to be very beneficial and manageable for the district staff.
- ❖ To maintain the current level of capacity, there is an ongoing need for a holistic and sustainable capacity development approach, especially given the high turnover of staff.
- ❖ Institutional limitations like a lack of budget and high turnover of staff have to be taken into account when planning for the sustainability of outcomes
- ❖ An identified future challenge for the project that follows will be the setting up of an improved data management system to maintain knowledge within the district office and to facilitate information exchange with other districts as well as the provincial and national level.

6. Methodological recommendations

As part of a programme's Monitoring and Evaluation, several improvements should be explored in the future:

- Systematic impact assessment ideally requires control groups/quasi-controls, strong data on intermediary changes and causalities connecting an intervention to outcomes, or large-scale statistical information. This includes a strategic focus on monitoring priority outcomes in addition to activities as well as paying attention to attribution questions. To do this with maximum efficiency and effectiveness, a clear theoretical framework defining questions, responsibilities and opportunities for data usage as well as baseline data on key indicators to avoid recall issues is likely needed.
- Walking the talk on strengthening women participation and voice by greater focus on this in M&E – e.g. by monitoring not just participation of women but including gender focus in facilitation training; and monitoring whether women's priorities are systematically underrepresented once issues are decided by VLMC or VDP committees mostly staffed by men (which is a circumstance not easily changed as it requires deeper shifts in mindsets). Where women are represented in VLMCs, try to understand barriers and opportunities to their meaningful participation on the basis of M&E data. The same holds true for monitoring other aspects of demographic profile of constituted decision-making fora (e.g. to ensure ethnic minorities are proportionally represented).
- Initial project activities were not always monitored systematically through AMS. Even considering the difficulties of collecting reliable data in the given context, the collection and analysis of such data is crucial to determine where things go off-track as well as negative developments – in line with an ethical 'do-no-harm approach' to development. Often neglected but just as important is the regular use and dissemination of such data to relevant actors, to correct performance while implementation is still underway.
- For future programming, continue using a mix of approaches – semi-structured interviews, focus groups, analysis of perception-independent sources – as well as qualitative and quantitative data to gain an understanding what role the project played in complex changes. What the currently available data on LUP and VDP lacks in

connectedness and consistency, it partially makes up for through its breadth of sources (villagers, authorities at different levels) and methodologies.

- The available studies could have been combined to greater effect by using consistent data entry and analysis across all of them. Such greater usability of data sources would allow for efficient profiling of districts or villages and provide a more enhanced understanding of some of the cross-linkages between factors determining success of the intervention. For instance, discrepancy in performance of districts suggests that there were factors at play both during implementation and context that likely influenced success of measures. Variations in implementation at a village level – particularly where these are perceived by GIZ staff to be innovative – need to be recorded and cross-referenced with levels of engagement, satisfaction and eventual changes in land use and lives.
- M&E must be planned and designed right from the beginning of a project, but in such a way that no “data graveyards” are produced, due to collection of unnecessary amounts of detailed baseline data, never to be processed or never used for follow-up surveys and studies, or due to a lack of data processing and analysis capabilities and opportunities for usage.
- M&E must be properly resourced. Sufficient financial resources for surveys and IT-infrastructure are required, but this can only partially compensate for a lack of expertise and partner human resources. M&E is not an external expert business, but an essential element of knowledge management and, finally, ownership.
- The perception that surveys and information are costly and take away resources from the final target groups or beneficiaries needs to be changed. Implementation activism without proper steering and resource allocation for improvements of operations and impact leads to waste of development resources. M&E must be better valued and mainstreamed, without reducing it to a marginal “must do”.
- M&E systems set up within the framework of a project need to be linked and contribute to the institutional M&E system of the project partner (i.e. Lao Government). This means capacitating the partners in M&E so that they themselves are able to track progress of the project, draw analyses and insights on the results and use them in changing or improving public sector policies, plans and programs.