



PROJECT AT A GLANCE

Title

Public Information and Awareness Services for Vulnerable Communities Project (PIASVC)

Budget

(01/09/2021-31/08/2024)
CHF 1,816,000

Partners

Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, the Land Information Working Group (LIWG), the Ministry of Land and Natural Resources (MONRE), the Lao Women's Union (LU) and the Lao Front for National Development (LFND)

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The PIASVC aims at improving access to legal information and counselling services for vulnerable communities on overall natural resources and land rights. The project complements the efforts of the Government of Lao PDR in systematic land registration.

BACKGROUND

Land tenure security remains an issue for the most vulnerable in Lao PDR. Protection of land use rights for communal land holders and for those residing in state forestlands is limited, primarily affecting minorities and the poor.

Increased public awareness and access to information and counselling services is a fundamental prerequisite for the most vulnerable to secure access to land and natural resources and, in turn, enhance livelihoods.

Community participation in decision-making processes on the allocation and use of land and natural resources is typically low, especially in rural and remote areas.

With the expansion of large-scale development projects, it is critical to ensure inclusive consultation processes are in place so local communities contribute to natural resources management.

The revised Land Law and the Forestry Law recognize land use rights of individuals, while also providing a degree of protection to customary land use rights pending the issuance of official land titles. A basic understanding of these rights and knowledge of the enforcement mechanisms will support communities, who are heavily reliant on natural resources, in the fulfilment of these rights.

In addition, enhancing the capacity of village-level dispute resolution mechanisms is necessary to protect these rights. Village Mediation Committees (VMCs) and village's level paralegals play a vital role to settle disputes at local level.

They are closer and more accessible to vulnerable communities than formal channels, especially in remote areas. Yet, they lack both knowledge and skills in dealing with formal legal framework to be able to efficiently fulfil their mandate.

OVERALL GOAL

Improve the access to legal information and counselling services for poor and vulnerable persons in selected rural districts to enhance protection and fulfilment of their natural resources and livelihood rights.

OBJECTIVES

PIASVC is based on two main components:

1. Capacity building: To support capacity building for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) members of the Land Information Working Group (LIWG). The capacity development will focus on the development and delivery of public information dissemination and awareness raising activities, and in promoting and building community capacity for legal counselling services.
2. Sub-grants: Sub-Grants will be allocated to CSOs to cascade the capacity building inputs and train village level stakeholders to engage with their communities to disseminate basic legal knowledge on natural resource rights and to fill the gaps in legal advisory services.

STRATEGY

The PIASVC is aligned with Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024, contributing to the thematic priority on ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources. It contributes to the Swiss Cooperation Programme in the Mekong Region (MRCP) 2022-2025's goal of poverty reduction and inclusive and equitable development in Lao PDR.

The project specifically contributes to the MRCP's climate change and natural resource management outcome areas, in particular "People are more resilient to climate change and disaster, have more secure and safe access to natural resource, as well as better control over natural resource" and participates to the realisation of SDG 1, 5, 10 and 15.

APPROACH

The project will be managed and implemented by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation in partnership with the LIWG, a CSOs network working on a range of natural resources and rights issues in Lao PDR. They will work closely with the Department of Land (DoL) of the Ministry of Land and Natural Resources (MoNRE) to ensure coherence and synergies with their efforts on legal information and dissemination.

At the Sub-grants level, the project will work with several local Civil Society Organisations (Non Profit Associations) and engage with Mass-Organisations i.e. the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and the Lao Front for National Development

(LFND) to ensure that the project activities are properly directed towards women and ethnic communities.

EXPECTATIONS

The project aims to improve access to legal information and counselling services for around 30,000 vulnerable people living in selected rural districts, including 60% women and 85% ethnic minorities. The project's ultimate goal is to enhance the protection of their natural resources and fulfilment of their livelihood rights.

To achieve this goal, the project will build the capacity of approximately 70 LIWG civil society members, enabling them to deliver awareness-raising capacity building to village-based facilitators. This will equip roughly 420 village-based facilitators with the knowledge and skills they need to provide public awareness-raising services in their communities. In total, 60% of these facilitators will be women and 85% will come from ethnic minorities.

Additionally, approximately 60 LIWG member facilitators will undergo training to strengthen their ability to deliver training on counselling services related to natural resource rights. This training will be provided to around 300 para-legal volunteers, who will then be able to offer legal counselling services on natural resource rights within their communities.

PROJECT LOCATIONS

PIASVC will focus on areas where poverty levels exceed the national average (18.3% as of 2020). The project will be implemented in more than 200 villages in 19 districts that meet this criteria, by 11 CSOs who are members of LIWG.

The project will cover eight provinces, namely Houaphan, Xiengkhouang, Oudomxay, Sayabouly, Vientiane, Bolikhamxay, Salavanh, and Sekong.

