

EXPLORING GENDER AND FORESTRY:

A REPORT OF WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES, OUTCOMES AND PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ACIAR PROJECT, LAOS PDR



This report is an outcome of ACIAR Project FST/2016/151 VALTIP3

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There has been a longstanding need and drive for greater attention to the current landscape of gender equity and forestry initiatives internationally. As part of an extractive industry, the economic practices profoundly shape relations within the family and the larger social relations including the relations between the citizen and the state. Questions such as the impact of plantation economy on the communities on the ground has emerged as an important theme. Particularly the role of female workers in the plantations and in the factory, including topics about women's participation in decision making forums.

In Lao PDR, there has been a diverse range of actors who have been elevating the need to enhance the foundational context of gender work across different sectors, including forestry. While new policies have been put in place to stop illegal logging, attention has been drawn to the risk that smallholders face on the ground. Besides the risk of exclusion from the international market, small growers also struggle to navigate the complex policy regulations and policies on the ground. There is a call to value the human factor within the timber industry in Lao PDR (Smith, Ling, & Boer, 2017).

This report details an exploratory gender component as part of the project FST/2016/151 "Advancing enhanced wood manufacturing industries in Laos and Australia" funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). In this report, we highlight the need to address the issue of setting up gender guidelines for the timber industry in Laos. Oxfam International (2017) position paper on gender justice in extractive industries underlines the requirement for recognizing and setting up a gender strategic plan to address the gender bias in the extractive industry. The report illuminates how policies within the extractive industry, including timber and mining, are often gender-blind and systematically exclude women from decision making processes (Oxfam, 2017). There are various obstructions that communities on the ground face because there is a lack of gender guidelines set up to support communities on the ground. Recognizing that women in the plantation economy form an important part of the labour force, issues of security, rights, and economic empowerment are important to be addressed (Friends of the Earth International, 2008).

In the timber factories of Laos, we noticed that there is a preference for women workers to do the finishing jobs such as polishing and filling the cracks of the wood products because they are considered to be more patient and precise when it comes to carrying out tasks that require concentration and focus. They are exposed to long hours of bending and inhaling chemicals. In this regard, the preference of women workers in certain roles in the timber factory shows some of the dimensions that need to be considered in developing gender guidelines, in the sector and in the country context. The understanding of and response to such dimensions can drive an agenda for social change and gender equity in the sector. (Oxfam, 2017)

There is particular need to examine the interrelationship between extractive economic regimes (such as the timber industry), development, and gender. The focus of an exploratory approach to gender and forestry for this project was to better understand what may be different- from farm to factory – and amongst project partners and beneficiaries, and how these inter-relate with gender relations and for communities on the ground. The aim was that the workshops provide some analytical tools to critically engage with the interconnections between gender and forestry

activities and to look towards ways to enhance gender considerations within the project and as part of a wider drive for going beyond seeing gender as a tick box project need to a more transformative view of how gender analysis and approaches could contribute towards gender equity.

ACIAR PROJECT CONTEXT

The ACIAR Project in Lao PDR aims to help the Lao PDR and Australia to develop innovative wood processing industries to enhance markets for planted timber resources. It is in its third phase FST/2016/151 (2017 – 2021) 'Advancing enhanced wood manufacturing industries in Laos and Australia'. Two previous ACIAR projects: FST/2005/100 'Value-adding to Lao PDR plantation timber products' (2007-11) and FST/2010/012 'Enhancing Key Elements of Value Chains for Plantation-Grown Wood in Lao PDR' (2012-16) have enhanced knowledge and capacity in wood science and processing and identified policy and administrative issues that impede the development of an efficient and competitive smallholder plantation sector and wood processing industry in Laos.¹

The introduction of a gender component has been initiated in this 11th year of the project partnership. Whilst various gender research and training initiatives have developed over that time in the sector in Lao PDR there had been no gender component of this part of the ACIAR project in Lao PDR. The Project had conducted gender and social inclusion workshops as part of the Papua New Guinea project.²

Professor Ozarska initiated and invited researchers and trainers from the University of Melbourne, the lead being Dr Dolly Kikon, a social anthropologist who specializes in gender and extractives industries and Dr Tania Miletic, a researcher and facilitator who specializes in international development and peacebuilding, both from the School of Social and Political Sciences.

As an interdisciplinary team, we were not engaged as 'timber' experts or gender experts in the Laos context. As facilitators and social scientists with expertise in gender and extractives our view was to not come in and take over a component of the project. Rather, we provided a small contribution to what needs to be an ongoing exploration and examination of gender issues in forestry, and as part of wider efforts to address the systemic and longstanding knowledge and cultural assumptions and practices, that create and sustain gender inequity.

Gender and Forestry Workshops

This report provides information regarding two gender and forestry workshops held in Luang Prabang and Vientiane in Laos, October 2018. The two workshops were conducted as an activity within the ACIAR (FST/2016/151) co-funded project in its Phase VALTIP3. It forms an output for Activity for VALTIP3 and summarises the discussions conducted

¹ ACIAR Project Description. Accessed from: <https://www.aciar.gov.au/project/FST/2016/151>

² Jo Roberts and Gary Hopewell, (30 August 2017) *Gender equity and social inclusion: Workshop activities, outcomes and project plan for continued implementation of gender equity*. An outcome report of ACIAR project FST/2014/065: Development of durable engineered wood products in PNG and Australia.

during the workshop with participants and reflections and recommendations for ongoing gender integration in the Project and partner activities.

The workshops engaged tree growers, workers and industry partners, government and educators in facilitated discussions about gender and forestry in the context of the broader project focused on advancing enhanced wood manufacturing industries in Laos and Australia.

In summary the workshops aimed to:

- Allow sharing of information and experience in relation to gender and forestry in Lao PDR.
- Create an environment where experiences can be shared amongst participants and project partners in a grounded, exploratory approach.
- Generate insights and knowledge about gender and the forestry in Lao PDR that can enhance the project and related activities in the future.
- Develop recommendations for strategies to enhance the integration of gender in this sector and across project components in the coming phase of the project and beyond.

WORKSHOP 1, BAN KOK NGUI, LUANG PRABANG, 15TH OCTOBER 2018

The first workshop was held in Ban Kok Ngiu, Luang Prabang, with the intention of engaging tree growers in particular.



A total of 20 people participated in the first workshop, excluding the team and facilitators. The workshop team delivering the workshop was: Dolly Kikon (UoM), Tania Miletic (UoM), with translation and support from Dao Midgley (ACIAR), Stuart Ling (ACIAR), Sayasith (LPTP) and Bounchanh (LPTP).



Table 1 summarises the 28 participants by group.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP 1 PARTICIPANTS

Organisation	# men	# women
ACIAR Project people – Laos	3	1
ACIAR Project people – Australia	0	1
Community Farmer Group Members from Kok Ngiu, Xienglom & Lak	8	12
Australian – Other	0	2
Total participants	11	16

Summary of Workshop 1

The morning began with a welcome and overview of the day by Mr Bounchanh Lattananvongkot. He warmly encouraged the community members to feel they can share their experiences and thoughts.

The introduction by Dr Tania Miletic invited the farmer group members to share their experiences in relation to gender and forestry from their experiences as community tree growers. To help participants feel comfortable, a light and participatory introductory activity enabled people to introduce the person next to them. There was laughter and insight into the relationships amongst the community growers and some of the differences between growers from different ethnic groups and locations.

Professor Barbara Ozarska provided an overview of the broader project and her impressions of the importance of gender considerations after being engaged in the Lao PDR AICR project for over a decade. She also noted that this was the first activity where discussion with community tree growers and project partners focused on the theme of gender.

Dr Dolly Kikon presented the participants with an overview on how gender in a range of related extractive industries offers key considerations of what may be important issues in the Laos context.

Dolly encouraged participants to think about extraction: plantation and gender; and gender as men/women dynamics in the context of the timber industry and in particular teak/wood. Dolly broadened the context towards the significance of thinking about gender in the extractive resource economy. The dominant story so far is one of dispossession (White & White, 2012) gender violence (Macintyre, 2011); conflict (Le Billon, 2008); illegal activity (Pereira & Ratnay, 2013) and the relationship between the state and its citizens. (Li, 2016).

How are decisions made (in relation to teak wood)? What is the dominant narrative about “community”³? Dolly drew on examples from PNG and the gold mines. She focused on anthropologist Matha Macintyre’s work where the notion of community is often flattened out to assume a homogenous identity, one that is predominantly governed by male decision makers. This logic and model is often adopted by the mining companies and other extractive organizations whereby any decisions about land deals such as royalties are solely made by male members. In this way, the money and financial matters that are struck with communities are solely given to male members of the community (Macintyre, 2011). This framework helped the workshop to reflect on the theme of community in the villages where timber is the main source of livelihood. By considering how men and women are equal partners in the timber plantation they own and also within the decision-making processes in the family, the participants in the workshop began to make connections with their context and reflect on their roles (as men and women in the timber plantation). Some of the guiding questions for reflection during the workshop were to think about their everyday activities through a gender framework - Where are the men and women working? What are narratives that help us understand different experiences of women, men, boys and girls?

A common misconception can be that visibility of women equals equality. For example, many people told us on our visit that women have strong visibility and voice in the sector therefore gender is not really an area of concern. Dolly highlighted the difference between gender visibility (of women) in the workforce does not translate to equality. That Laos women are courageous and strong and speak their mind are commendable traits if one sees gender equality as being able to speak to men or for oneself, but this is a narrow and problematic view of gender issues once ‘gender’ is further discussed.

An example of adopting gender framework in the tea plantation system highlighted this. In the context of the tea plantation, visibly is of an extremely feminised labour force (Chatterjee, 2001). Visibility does not recognise the gender representation affects; child mortality rates; dismal health care for pregnant mothers, implementing reproductive rights policies; maternity and paternity leave; healthy diet for lactating mothers; domestic violence; women not having inheritance rights. The social and political implications were presented and how this can work towards reproducing gendered roles. For example, working hours means children are unattended; there are female health complications, family life disruptions and often these are all blamed on the women folk.

The second example provided from Dolly’s research related to Palm Oil and the ways that companies prefer women. (Friends of the Earth International, 2008) In the context of Palm oil plantations: Companies prefer women workers to apply pesticides and fertilizers because they are considered to be more precise are thus exposed to the dangers of

³ What is a community? One understanding relates to the composition of the village: men/women/children etc. Whereas, the company’s understanding can be the composition of payment (wages or payments for wood).

working with pesticides, dangers which are seriously aggravated in the Indonesian oil palm industry by a lack of appropriate protective clothing and health and safety training.

Adopting a gender framework was described through tracing the “value” chain through gender relations. It is important as it helps understand gender and livelihood. There are a range of stakeholders and factors at play: local landholders; outside investors; the vulnerable poor; administration; state agencies; local development; global markets; players; rent seeking elite; policies.

Time was then given to the ways in which we understand gender. As we understand it “gender” is the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes. “Gender norms” are social norms that constrain the choices of men and women, and their associated social sanctions, encouraging forms of behaviour that confirm to the norms, and discouraging behaviour that does not.

A dominant framework for understanding gender is based on a biological one: natural, order of nature. Family: man the provider (hunter)/woman the caregiver (gatherer).

Participants were invited to reflect on how society shapes our understanding of gender roles? (I.e., in the local context: urban/rural...factory/plantation.....employed/caregiver).

Importantly gender involves understanding men and masculinities (an inclusive approach). Men are rarely mentioned in gender policy documents. A misconception exists that gender is only about women.

Gender is about the structure of social relations (the working dynamics between men and women) and a gender framework needs to be about understanding the social dynamics including men too. What we don’t want to do in creating a gender framework is stereotyping men as oppressors and women as the oppressed.

The language of women’s empowerment sees women as already empowered. Economic empowerment as a narrative is also problematic as it might justify spending capacity but this often does not solve the crisis of gendered violence and domestic abuse. Instead, an Oxfam report (2015) notes that as women become economically empowered, there is a risk that domestic violence might increase because men find that as a weapon to exert their power over the woman. In this regard, it is important to note that as we underline the importance of economic empowerment, there is a need to bring the household and the family unit as an important part of our analysis while framing policies and guidelines (Bolis and Hughes, 2015).

After morning tea participants were invited to discuss in small groups questions about how family roles are divided; what the distribution of labour in a timber plantation is; who makes decisions about land and lastly about decision making in relation to gender roles. A brief summary of responses is provided:⁴

*Q. How are the family roles divided?*⁵

It was commonly described that planning and discussing between men and women occurs equally, men are working outside in the fields or in outside labour and women take more household and child care responsibilities.

A Lao Loum female (62 years) described that whilst planning and household labour is equal divided, the wife has a greater role in deciding daily household spending priorities while men are mostly doing outside labour

A Hmong female discussed how she earns money from embroidery, while her husband works as a labourer, and in the fields they work together.

A Khmu male discussed that men make the daily plans, while his wife plans the food each day. He goes to work first as a furniture maker and has to organise the other workers. The wife looks after money and repays loans. Men and women work together.

'Men and women think together but men take the final decision.' **Khmu male**

It was noted by another group discussing this questions that men and women have equal rights. While men take responsibility for planning how the family will meet its income needs. When it comes to children's education, men and women both decide.

Q. What is the distribution of labour in a timber plantation?

One group summarised the distribution of labour as:

- The husband and wife agree together on the location of a new teak plantation
- The wife and children collect the seeds for sowing
- For planting the seedling nursery: the husband prepares the bed and the wife sows the seed
- For planting the seedlings between the rice: the husband digs the holes while the wife puts in the seedlings
- The maintenance of the plantation for the first 4-5 years weeding etc. is the chief responsibility of the husband
- Selling wood: if a trader comes to buy the trees then the husband and wife have to agree on the price
- When cutting the plantation, transporting the wood and putting on the truck it is necessary to hire labour and for the husband to assist, since the work is very heavy. Women take responsible of feeding the labourers.
- The wife is the holder of proceeds from sales.

⁴ Participant small group activity responses were summarised by Mr Stuart Ling.

⁵ This questions was given with prompts – "Describe a day: What happens in the home before going to work?; Who does what? (what are the men, women, boys, girls doing?); What are the types of work activities?; Who does what in the evening? (what are the men, women, boys, girls doing?); Sharing with the group; What were the main points/ issues your group discussed?"



Lao Loum female (about 35 years old)

It mostly seems that it is the men who make the decisions at the village level. When planting trees, we agree on the location together. But if the wife wants to plant something in which she has to invest time herself, then she has to ask her husband, especially if she has a lactating child.

Most conflicts in the village between husband and wife nowadays are over money. Both men and women can waste money – often on gambling and alcohol.

Q. Who makes decisions about the land?

Land ownership rights were described as equal between men and women. Inheritance is according to the wishes of the parents. However, if the land was inherited from the wife's family, then the wife has a greater say in its management. Conversely, if the land was inherited from the husband's family, then the husband has a greater say in its management. If it is property bought together after marriage, then the husband has a greater say. Maybe because women are shyer to speak out. Decisions to sell land are according to mutual agreement of the husband and the wife.

Decisions to plant timber are done according to mutual agreement of the husband and the wife. This contrast to some other crops, where it is gender related. E.g. the husband might choose to plant fruit trees such as pineapples, whereas the wife may choose to plant vegetables or other short-term crops. Decisions to harvest timber mostly this is the man's role, due to the level of heavy work involved in cutting and carrying the timber.

Q. *Decisions and family roles:*

- Speaking: men are recognised to the head of family, but they should consult their wives
- Negotiating: should agree together, otherwise there will be future family conflict
- Working: husband and wife agree together, usually there is a desire to earn money to support the family. Men do the heavier work, while lactating and pregnant women should take a rest
- Managing money: give the majority to the wife to manage, since she goes to market – but men keep a little for themselves (maybe one-third)
- Decisions on household expenditure: large items we should agree together

Khmu males, Lak 10 village (about 40-50 years old)

In my village, it is mostly the male who decides what to do. But if the wife does make a suggestion, then the husband should listen.

But in most cases, the husband decides what he is going to do for the day. For example, he will say that today I am going to work in construction, and then the wife will be OK. Generally, the husband takes on more difficult tasks (heavy work).

A husband should ask his wife before he goes out drinking. If she says no, the husband shouldn't go, because it will then lead to problems within the family.

If the husband goes to work, he will give the money to his wife to manage. Then he will ask for money if he needs it. Since the wife is responsible for buying the daily food (salt etc.) then she needs the money. But usually he keeps a little bit for himself.

Hmong female (about 35 years old)

I decided myself to go and work in Pila's mill. I was able to go because my youngest child (of five) was old enough to start school. While he was still young I could only do embroidery, with which I could make 20,000 kip/day, but in the mill I can earn 50,000 kip/day.

However, the men working at the mill can earn up to 80,000 kip/day, depending on how long they have worked. Mostly they do the heavy work, but there are some people doing the same work as me and they earn 80,000 kip/day, whereas I can only get 50,000 kip. I don't understand why there is such a difference.

In Hmong culture pregnant women still are expected to work, because we have so many children we can't afford to take a rest for each one.

Some of the issues shared by participants arising from these discussions were that pregnant and lactating women in Hmong culture still have to work hard, because they have many children. As well as that women don't have the same opportunities as men to get pay rises in the wood processing factory.

Overall participants were able to share their thoughts and reflections. There was additional time given to small group feedback and reflections. Lunch was shared immediately following the group session. The decision was made not to conduct the evaluation, given time constraints.



WORKSHOP 2 SUMMARY, NUOL FORESTRY DEPARTMENT, VIENTIANE 17TH OCTOBER 2018

A total of 37 people participated in the first workshop, excluding the team and facilitators.

The workshop team delivering the workshop was: Dolly Kikon (UoM), Tania Miletic (UoM), with translation and facilitation support from Dr Khamtan Phonethip, Ms Phisouta, Mr Boun (NUoL) and Stuart Ling (ACIAR). Stuart also provided the summary notes from the group discussions.



Table 2 summarises the workshop attendees, including the 37 participants by group.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS, NUOL 17TH OCTOBER 2018.

Organisation	# men	# women
ACIAR Project people – Laos	2	1
ACIAR Project people – Australia	0	1
Year 3 Forestry Students	8	12
Past students	0	3
University Lecturers	1	8
Companies	1	3
Australian – Other	0	2
Ministry	0	1
Total participants	12	31

The morning began with opening remarks from Professor Latsamy Boupaha, Dean NUoL, Faculty of Forest Science. She noted the importance of gender as well as reiterated the three project objectives of VALTIP3. Professor Latsamy

reflected on the fact that previously men and women played a much more equal role in society, but as the economy has developed, men have been able to control more of the economic resources and increase their leadership and status relative to women. Women work harder, but men have to the political power – this is not just confined to Laos: it is a global issue.

In the plantation wood value chain, men and women are capable of playing all the roles. Although men tend to do the heavier work and women do the detailed work. But men receive more for their work (higher salary, wages).



Women have traditionally played a greater role in managing the family finances. But the family suffers if men, who earn most of the income, do not pass this onto their wives. So the advent of paying salaries by bank transfer (rather than cash) to government employees has really helped women, since they can now see how much their husbands earn and can plan for its good use.

Due to the large number of participants, the introductions facilitated by Dr Tania Miletic, focused on a brief introduction of people's names and who they are representing. Dr Dolly Kikon presented a similar presentation to Workshop 1 (See Workshop 1 Summary for details).



The groups were asked similar questions to discuss in small groups. The summary of small group discussions is provided:

Q. How are the family roles divided?

One group described that morning tasks such as Housework (cooking, cleaning), Preparing children for school, Bathing children, were the primary responsibility of women. While gardening, feeding pets and livestock, taking children to school were shared by men and women. Men were primarily responsible for washing the car, bike.

In the evening, women were responsible for going to market and helping children with homework; women and men picked up the children and socialized (though men did this more than women). Men were also responsible for village meetings.

“Overall women have a far busier day – please remember this next time we come late to work!”

Q. 2 What is the distribution of labour in a timber factory

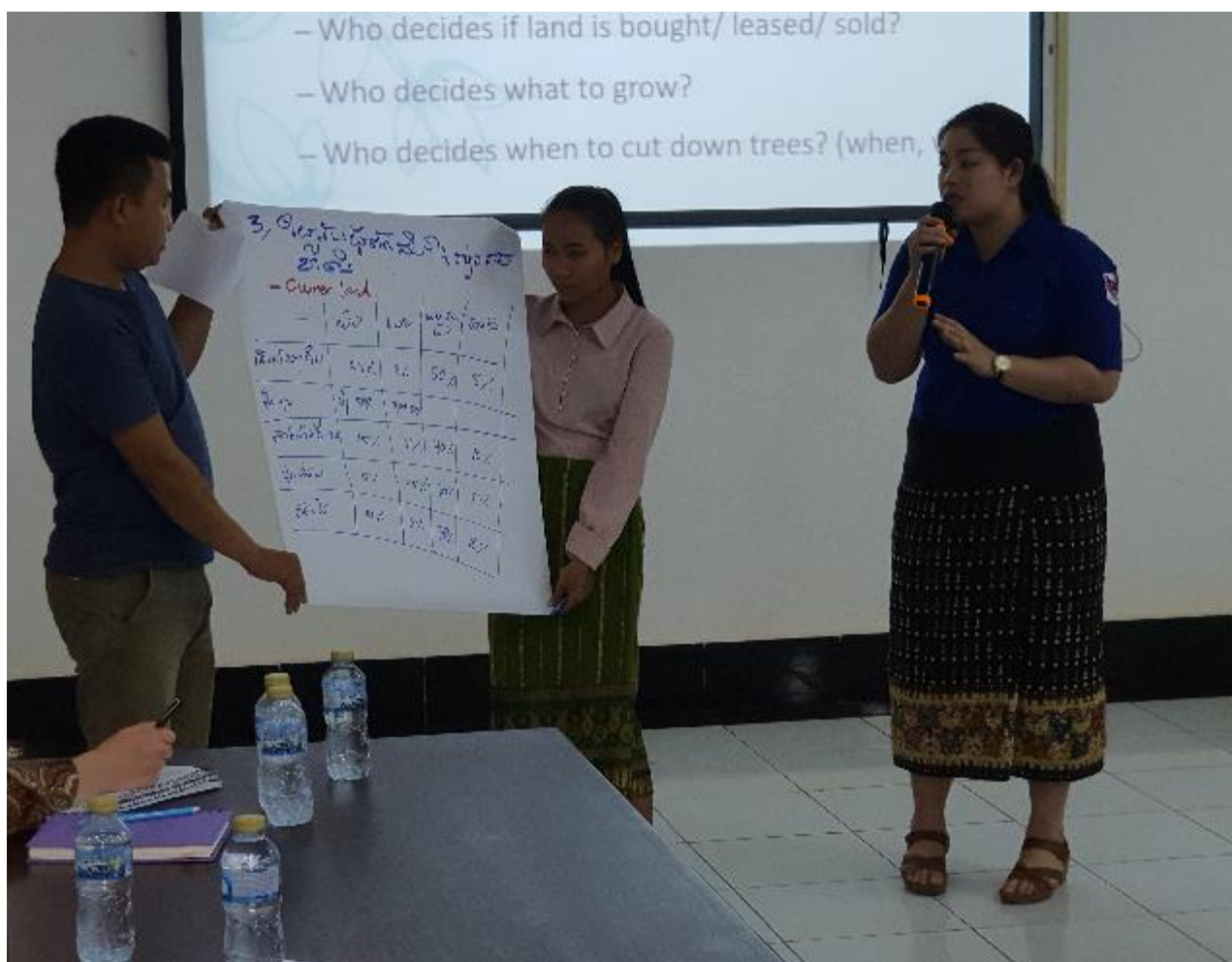
The group summary for this question described a feminisation of skills: “Men and women are capable of all tasks in the mill, but for some of the finer work (sanding) then women pay more attention to detail (men rush and damage the surface). For management and policy making within the mill we can see that more and more women are becoming involved.

“We can see that the rise of new technologies in the milling industry have improved the opportunities for women since there is less heavy labouring required. These technologies require new skills which workers, including women, need to acquire.”

Some observations were: Women are more patient and pay greater attention to detail than men; Men are stronger than women; There are certain tasks in which women can replace men, but men cannot replace women; If women receive greater opportunities and clear instruction then they are capable of out-performing men.

Question 3 Who makes decisions about the land? One group provided the following table:

	Husband	Wife	Husband and wife	Family
Ownership	25%	20%	50%	5%
Inheritance	50%	50%		
Decision to buy/sell	15%	5%	70%	10%
Plant trees	5%	25%	70%	5%
Cut trees	20%	8%	70%	2%



“For decision to buy/sell, the husband has higher responsibility because he is better at speaking out; For decision to plant trees, the wife is higher because she plays a greater role in gardening/cropping; For cutting trees, the husband is higher because he has the strength, equipment and technical skill to harvest them.”

Decisions and gender roles

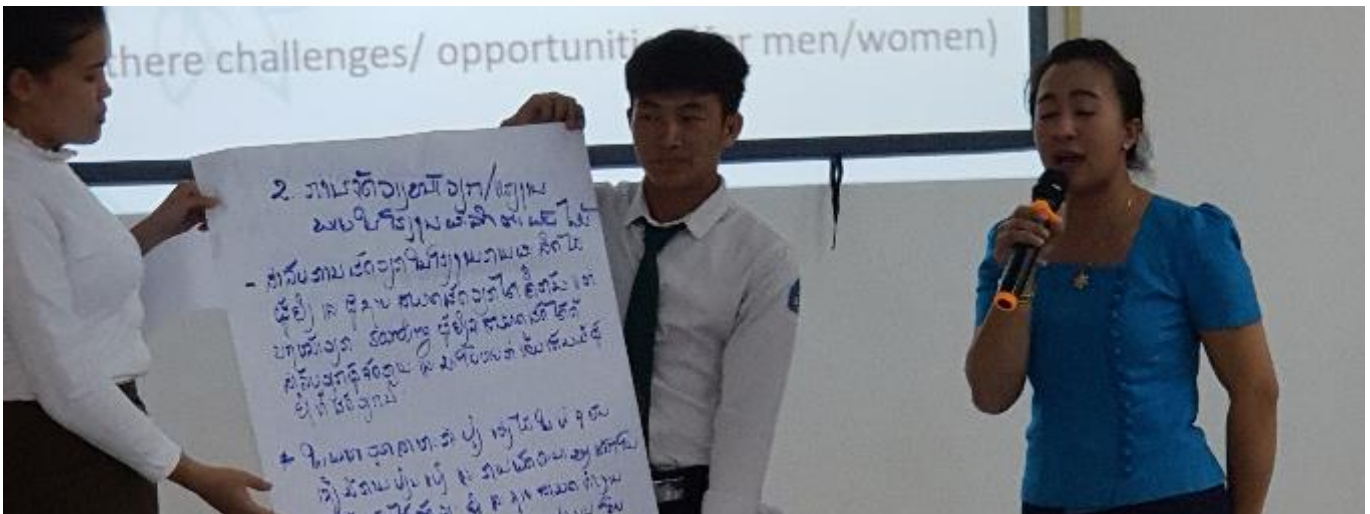
“When deciding on the design for a house, husband and wife should agree together, as the number and location of the rooms is important.”

“Wives take control of smaller household spending such as food. A husband will often go to the market and buy what his wife tells them they need.”

“Mostly my father goes to village meetings, since he is an educated government staff member, while my mother finished school early.” Student

Sometimes men and women take decisions that lead to family conflict such as:

- The level of financial support/love that a husband or wife gives to their respective relatives, or whether the other spouse respects our own relatives. This is not just about money, but also about time.
- The amount of socialising, the time it wastes and the money it costs especially for men (drinking, food, women). Maybe 70% of socialising time is used by men, and only 30% women. It gives women more work at home in looking after children and elderly relatives
- The expectations for each child is different, and they are treated differently. One spouse may want to have their child to study to be police or a soldier, and the other spouse wants them to do something else.



Participants were also asked to reflect on and share idioms on gender:

‘The man is the front feet of the elephant, the women is the back feet’ means that the man is always in the front as leader, and the woman follows in his footsteps.

‘As a mirror reflects a beautiful face, a good husband reflects his wife’ means that behind every successful man is a woman.

‘A husband makes the sauce, and the wife sews his eye’ means that a husband and wife will always help each other.

‘The husband is a gem, the wife is an angel’, means that the marriage will be sustainable.

WORKSHOP REFLECTIONS

Both workshops and the visits to factories, which were insightful in their own ways, offered considerations for how gender and forestry could be further explored and integrated into the project and related activities.



Workshop 1

Whilst, trading and craft remain other ways to earn money, the central means is with the plantation economy. Everyone said they had some land and teak growing in the area. The teak plantation was seen as a 'bank account' and always security to go back to.

We felt that the Ban Kok Ngiu village growers and factory work in the rural areas, were influenced by the casualisation of work and a gender framework will help look at the impacts on gender relations in a transition economy.

Participants sharing indicates that how the village structure is set up is very strongly aligned towards the timber plantation. The ethnic set up, the social and political set up in the village is really consolidated around timber and shows the significance of the local economy it brings. Profit, monetarisation of timber to the village level, at the prioritisation of other types of trades (such as embroidery, that are less profitable).

Of interest was how, through the plantation economy, gender relations (both men and women) have been able to form their own groups and their own narratives. There is great value in grounding future research or consultations in the narratives of diverse experiences of women and men and from different ethnic backgrounds in understanding gender relations. We were told this was the first workshop/ project activity that Hmong women in the village had attended.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATION:

We encourage the Project Team continues to seek ways to continue to engage and hear from the diverse experiences of community growers.

What seemed missing was a more elicitive, grounded approach to understanding gender relations in the forestry, including how to make it a sustained and integrated part of the ACIAR project.

We encourage the adoption of enhanced ways to model inclusivity. For example, in terms of selection of participants, are there complementary ways to the village heads, (who can select), that can enhance diverse participation?

GENERAL RECOMMENDATION:

Whilst it is important to follow and advance national policies and international agendas for gender equality, implementation of gender-focuses activities need to be contextually-grounded.

UN agencies, under the lead of UNFPA and UN Women, continue to collaborate with Government of Lao PDR to develop national legal and planning frameworks around gender equality and women’s empowerment. Strengthening national institutions to monitor and implement laws and action plans such as: National Strategy on the Advancement of Women and the National Action Plan on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children.⁶ We were also directed to a range of publications on gender in Laos and in relation to forestry. (e.g., PROFOR, 2017) There is a range of perspectives, that broaden our lenses on gender equality and inclusion. For example, cultural anthropologist Faming (2018) discusses how national policy and its projects to reduce the gender gap merely served to re-position individual men and women into the ethnic Lao socio-cultural hierarchy based on the *phu nyai* (literally “big man”) concept.

Whilst it is important to follow and advance national policies and international agendas for gender equality, these can be translated down to implementation of ‘discrete’ activities that may not address or can even harden cultural, social or systemic processes that give rise to inequities.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATION:

Gender frameworks provide transformative opportunities and need not be seen as ‘tick box’ or a required training activity.

We also reflected on the way that ‘gender’ in a project cycle too often is equated with ‘training’. The idea that there is no gender problem in Laos was anecdotal but repeated in several situations during the visit. What does this mean? There is value in exploring this further, and from an interdisciplinary lens.

⁶ See: UNDP (2019) Lao PDR, SDG Goal 5: Gender Equality

We value the interdisciplinary nature of this gender and forestry workshop initiative. Non-forestry people can invite a different kind of perspective. We heard from some ACIAR team members that— ‘gender has been done’, ‘women here are assertive’, ‘lots of women in the factories’ with gender visibility a focus and fair work access and practices.

Understanding gender relations and how approaches within projects and community settings can support gender equity and social inclusion is an ongoing process. It is a methodology and needs a sustained approach to integration and that is contextually grounded.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

All stakeholders that are engaged (Australian and international partners) in the project should have an understanding of gender frameworks and how one’s own positionality in relation to the project also influences gender relations.

Factory Visits:

In Luang Prabang we visited the small but productive processing mill. We were shown the developments made for drying and processing wood and we were informed about the types of wood products and market.

In Vientiane, we visited Burapha Agro-Forestry Co. Sawmill factory, which was described as an exemplary factory influenced by the Swedish management models and Laos context. The Sales and Factory Manager, Jérôme Mérian, at Burapha Agro-Forestry Co. discussed existing policies that support engagement of women and men in the factory.

The factory work tells us stories of qualitative experiences. From the factory floor, we could see the fine work of women, that nimble hands are required to do all the correcting, sanding, patient detailing, and in some ways it reproduces the narrative that men are impatient and aggressive and that women are patient and careful. However, it may also be that women are cheap labour, or that some tasks are paid differentially and these can intersect with gendered production roles. This may not be the case, and certainly the policies and practices of the factory we visited was of a high standard.

The technical work and innovation ‘heavy work that men do and light work women do’. It shows us what women do and what men do biology and the social process come together in sync. The Manager at Burapha Agro-Forestry Co. said: *“The faster we press for technical innovations the faster women can become technicians. Pressing buttons rather than needing to engage in hard labour.”* He was saying this, because now it’s decided on the physical strength of the workers. A question may be to explore if the value of that work paid that is done mostly by women reflected in how the pay is structured across roles in the factory? Even in a model factory, there are questions to be explored.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that the Project leadership goes beyond minimum inclusion of gender considerations and strive to implement initiatives that benefit both the university partners, industry partners, growers and workers.

In the recommendations section below we suggest some additional consideration is given to aspects of gender equity and social inclusiveness to enable the various stakeholders to plan for development and implementation of appropriate policies that will benefit the project and the women, men, girls and boys involved with the timber industry across the value chain. It goes beyond visibility and indicators of gender equity to consider a broader suite of considerations.



RECOMMENDATIONS

For ACIAR VALTIP3 Project Leadership in collaboration with University Partner NUOL:

Encourage an integrated and sustainable approach to gender and forestry knowledge generation and practice:

- I. Support the development of a Master degree- level course on gender and extractive industries. This will enhance knowledge and capacity both for students and faculty.
 - a. Develop a MA course, with a specialisation in gender and plantation economy/ timber.
 - b. Develop a Diploma-level course on gender and forestry.
 - c. Develop a Professional Development module on gender and forestry for Ministry Officials, Consultants, NGO staff and other stakeholders.

- II. Increase contextually grounded knowledge on gender and forestry in Laos through participatory or grounded methods to explore gender and forestry research that deepens and develops knowledge and practice in relation to gender equity in Laos.
 - a. In collaboration with University Partner NUOL in Lao PDR create a scholarship for MA student/s to undertake focused research on a gender-related topic.
 - b. Ensure the primary advisor is a Laos national and forestry academic.

- III. Development of guidelines or policy frameworks for gender equity and inclusion in relation to timber factories.
 - a. Examine policies and consider what are effective practices to be encouraged across industry partners (this could be a MA research topic for example).

- IV. Continue to encourage and acknowledge leadership for and by women in the sector.
 - a. Acknowledge women in leadership and influence in the political (systemic) as well as social and economic spheres. It was seen as a strength for example to have Professor's Barbara and Latsamy as leaders in this project. Both commented on the influence on female students who are encouraged to study and develop careers in the industry.
 - b. Acknowledge and encourage women's influence beyond the private sphere, as decision making and engagement in the socio-political life of the community was not as prominent.
 - c. Acknowledge the importance of intersectionality of gender experiences and seek to understand the range of barriers to participation of women. For example, understand the socio-cultural hierarchy among women based on differences in sex, ethnicity, and social class in Lao society.

These recommendations, especially in relation to course development, may only be initiated in this stage of VALTIP3. However, the integration in to the university curriculum and structure can become part of the ongoing sustained program of work with the community, industry partners and the university.



For ACIAR VALTIP3 Project Team:

Increase understanding of and support to the enhancement of gender equity through the Project Team's internal planning, training and project development:

- V. Consider opportunities to discuss and make explicit the dominant narratives about gender and forestry, and gender analysis within the project.
 - a. Conduct a project discussion or gender analysis amongst diverse team members and partners. For example, we came across a dominant narrative that gender has been 'done' while project leadership suggested a 'gender lens' is only being initiated.

- VI. Seek an ongoing approach to reflecting and building capacity to understand gender relations and the intersectionality of gender and the sector across different stakeholders.
 - a. Broaden the scope of gender from 'gender' only in relation to the Lao PDR project context (community and partners) to the more comprehensive transnational project focus (Australian and Laos) and inclusion of all stakeholders.
 - b. Include Consultants in gender training or gender analysis activities.
 - c. Promote a range of tools and resources to promote gender awareness and reduce unconscious bias.

- VII. Consult and engage with community members such as the Farmers Group Members.
 - a. Enhance participatory approaches that value and provide opportunities for discussion and engagement in project development or evaluation.
 - b. Consider ways to enhance the participation of women and men from the diverse ethnic groups involved.

GENDER TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Sex	Biological and physiological characteristics of men and women
Gender	The set of social attributes associated with being male or female learned through socialization rather than the biological differences between men and women, boys and girls. Gender therefore is a social construct that defines what it means to be a man or woman, boy or girl in a given society – it carries specific roles, status and expectations within households, communities and culture. Individuals may also self-identify as neither male nor female, or both male and female.
Gender roles	Gender roles are shaped by the different social and cultural contexts in which they exist. Factors like country/region, ethnic group, age, economic class and religion all affect which roles and responsibilities men and women, boys and girls are expected to have.
Gender relations	Gender relations are the ways in which a society defines rights, responsibilities and the identities of men and women in relation to one another. Gender relations are based on power and negotiations, and gender roles are closely linked, influencing their definition and development.
Gender equity	The process of being fair to men and women. Equity leads to equality. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women’s historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field.
Gender equality	The equal enjoyment by women, girls, boys and men of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same but that their enjoyment of rights, opportunities and life changes are not governed or limited by whether they were born female or male.
Gender mainstreaming	The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action in all areas and at all levels. This means making both the concerns and experiences of women and men an integral dimension of all agriculture and rural development efforts.
Gender analysis	Gender analysis seeks to understand the differing priorities, needs, activities and responsibilities of men and women, boys and girls at multiple levels, across different life stages in the various roles they play.
Empowerment (Women’s and Men’s)	Awareness raising, building of self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate discrimination (including gender) and inequality. People empower themselves.
Reproductive role	Reproductive role refers to childbearing and rearing responsibilities and domestic tasks done by women to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force. This includes not only biological reproduction but also the care and maintenance of the work force (male partner, oneself and working children) and the future work force (infants and school-going children). This work is usually unpaid.
Productive role	Productive role refers to the work done by both men and women for payment in cash or in kind. For women in agricultural production, this includes work as independent farmers, peasant wives and wage workers. The work is both paid (but often underpaid) and unpaid.
Gender and Inclusion Transformative Approach	Program or research approaches or activities that seek to build equitable social norms and structures in addition to individual gender and inclusion equitable behaviour by addressing the fundamental causes and sources of inequality.

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