

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: SERD / SEAE

<b>TA No., Country and Name:</b> TA 4339-LAO: Study of Gender Inequality in Women's Access to Land, Forests, and Water			<b>Amount Approved:</b> <b>\$250,000</b>	
			<b>Revised Amount:</b> <b>\$250,000</b>	
<b>Executing Agency:</b> Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry		<b>Source of Funding:</b> Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund	<b>Amount Undisbursed:</b> \$83,721	<b>Amount Committed:</b> \$166,279
<b>TA Approval Date:</b> 20 May 2004	<b>TA Signing Date:</b> 12 October 2004	<b>Fielding of First Consultant:</b> 22 March 2005	<b>TA Completion Date Original:</b> 31 May 2006	<b>Actual:</b> 31 December 2006
			<b>Account Closing Date Original:</b> 31 December 2006	<b>Actual:</b> <b>30 November 2007</b>
<p><b>Description:</b> The project supports primary research into patterns of gender inequality among ethnic communities in selected areas in Lao PDR, in terms of the evolution of ethnic women's rights and levels of access to land, water resources, and forests. It examines ongoing changes in traditional gender based patterns of access and the impacts of such on livelihoods, and on women's position in the household and community. The Project supports the training and sensitization of staff of provincial and district agriculture offices. The Project is linked to the counterpart Nam Ngum Basin Development Project and covers the provinces of Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, and areas included in the now dissolved Xaysamboun Special Zone. It targets the poor districts in these provinces with more than fifty percent ethnic minority population, and high levels of poverty. The components include (a) analysis of ethnic minority tradition and practice with regard to women's rights and access to land, forest and water resources, and their role and participation in community decision making, (b) assessment of capacity building needs among Government of Laos (GOL) agencies to carry out gender analysis and implement gender sensitive land forest and water allocation and management programs, (c) recommendations to build capacity among GOL agencies for gender mainstreaming, (d) identification of measures to develop ethnic minority women's capacity to participate effectively in development programs, (e) identification of pilot activities in conjunction with counterpart project, to organize and train ethnic minority women's groups through workshops in these provinces, (f) translation of key project outputs in local languages for dissemination through local workshops and mass organizations.</p> <p><b>Expected Impact, Outcome and Outputs:</b> The expected impact is to identify ways to reduce poverty and improve gender equity among ethnic minorities in the Nam Ngum Basin.</p> <p>The outcomes are as follow: (i) To increase awareness among government agencies and ethnic communities, of the extent and impacts on poverty of prevailing gender inequality in access to land, forest, and water resources among ethnic minority communities, (ii) to design solutions to the issues of gender inequality and poverty among ethnic communities, and (iii) to institutionalize gender responsive programs within government that can help to address these issues.</p> <p>Outputs were expected to be: (a) improved policy environment on gender equality in access to resources; (b) increased awareness among government agencies and ethnic communities of the links between gender inequality and poverty, and increased support for gender equity in matters of access to such resources; (c) implementation of gender responsive policies and programs, and (d) strategy to institutionalize such policies through the counterpart project.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The first phase of the project was a study of secondary materials on customary rights to land and other natural resources, the gender division of labor and related rights of access and control over different resources in upland Lao PDR.</li> <li>2. The second phase of the research consisted of ethnographic study of gender issues, in terms of ethnic minority rights and access to land, forest and water resources, gender patterns of resource allocation, management, and rights under customary laws of ethnic minority communities in the project area. The research focused on nine villages of Hmong, Khmou, Phong and Phouan ethnic groups. The villages were selected based on whether they were traditional, recently resettled, mixed or not. Research was carried out by three teams of local researchers who spoke the ethnic languages. They were trained in ethnographic research and were supervised by experts. Training workshops were also held including staff of provincial and district agriculture and forestry offices, Lao Women's Union (LWU) and Lao Youth Union.</li> <li>3. The major research findings include the following: a) traditionally, symbiotic gender relations prevail among ethnic communities pursuing livelihoods based on swidden farming systems; b) with the loss of swidden systems, the traditional symbiotic gender division of labor and control over resources, can be destabilized; c) ethnic women can lose out through changes in livelihood systems, as swidden farming becomes more difficult to sustain; d) under such circumstances, men can dominate new cash cropping systems given their traditional contacts with the external sphere, while women remain confined to swidden farming, and lose out at both levels, through neglect of the one and lack of access to the other; and e)</li> </ol>				

formal systems of land titling can actually deprive women both of land access as well as livelihoods. Land traditionally exclusively owned by women, may be lost to them by being recorded under the names of men or jointly with men. There is thus need for consistent ethnographic research and knowledge production in which the ethnic groups themselves are fully involved. Planning and implementation of development policies and programs should follow ethnographic knowledge rather than precede it.

A training and dissemination plan was prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Two training workshops were organized for provincial and district staff.

**Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities:** Consulting services (international 5 person months, national 12 person months), surveys, fieldwork, training workshops; the consultants were recruited, and carried out their work as per their Terms of Reference. Secondary literature survey was done by the consultants. A training plan was prepared and Government officials in the provinces and target districts were trained in gender sensitive ethnographic research methods. They along with the consultants carried out village and household surveys. The researchers lived among ethnic minority communities for the duration of field research, and undertook participatory research. The findings of the research were documented in a report, which assessed that ongoing changes in land and forest allocation, land and resource use patterns, and development of settled irrigated paddy cultivation as the dominant production mode, combined with 'male' access to 'new' land use rights, and rights over water resources being developed, have led to subtle changes in the gender division of labor, and gender roles and status. This has led to increasing marginalization of women and their growing poverty. Among the ethnic groups, all except the Hmong have tended to fare badly as a result of these changes. Both social and economic instability have resulted among such communities, particularly those that have been resettled in mixed villages.

**Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of results:** The research was well done, and ethnographic methods were used. Local researchers including members of the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO), District Agriculture Forestry and Environment Office (DAFEO), and LWU, were trained in such research methods and the significance of the local knowledge to be created. Local ethnic communities participated in the research process. The reports produced by the Project are of high quality. The training of government staff was well received. The performance of the Consultant was deemed to be satisfactory.

**Overall Assessment and Rating:** The TA is rated as partially successful. This rating is based on the following reasoning. It is highly relevant given the condition of several ethnic groups in Lao PDR. These groups are facing loss of livelihoods owing to rapid changes in the agricultural sector priorities of the Government. This is leading to changes in land and forest allocation and use. Due to the efforts to contain and end shifting cultivation, without a participatory and well planned process of developing sustainable livelihood options, several ethnic communities are facing impoverishment and loss of cultural moorings, Women are worse affected owing to loss of traditional roles and legitimacy thereof, and their inability to access new resources and opportunities. Gender inequality is growing among such communities and exacerbating poverty. The Technical Assistance (TA) is also very relevant and timely in this regard.

However, it has been found to have been partially effective in achieving its objective of influencing policy making and programming. It has been effective in training and sensitizing PAFO and DAFEO staff in participatory methods of development research, as well as in demonstrating to them the negative outcomes of sudden disruptions in ethnic economic systems and cultures. However, it has been less effective until now, in disseminating these messages widely through a program of training at various levels. But now the outputs of the TA are expected to be sustained. Through the ADB-assisted Northern Region Sustainable Livelihoods Through Livestock Development Project, findings of the TA are to be used in sensitizing staff to ethnic and gender concerns. The project is almost entirely geared towards ethnic groups, and hence the findings of the TA will be highly relevant. In addition, the recent government effort to strengthen the Lao Institute of Culture as a research organization geared towards ethnic minority research is an encouraging development. The outputs of the TA will be shared with the Institute and will be disseminated through it.

**Major Lessons:** Such TAs need to find support within government structures for a hearing. It is important to ensure that project managers and decision makers are fully briefed about the ongoing research and its outputs and support the dissemination and utilization of the outputs for government staff and other stakeholders. Translation of the outputs into Lao and dissemination to communities are important in order to maximize the use of the knowledge generated by the research.

**Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions:** It is recommended that the research outputs be utilized for the sensitization of DAFEO staff working under the Northern Region Sustainable Livelihoods through Livestock Development Project (NRSLDP).