

Evaluation of the Development Process of Village Forest Management Planning in Lao PDR:
“Case study at Kuay villages, Sangthong district, Vientiane capital”

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1. Introduction

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) adopted community involvement in forest management in 1989, while the First National Forestry Conference announced the new forest policy orientation toward sustainable forest management. The Government of Lao PDR created a National Forestry Action Plan (NFAP) in 1990 and formally accepted it one year later to secure the direction of the new forest strategy. It was the first forest development initiative to promote community-involvement in forest management (Chanthirath, 2000). The Land Use Planning and Land Allocation Policy was another crucial tool that recognized locals' rights to benefit from and manage natural resources, it was another essential piece of policy that helped build community-based natural resource management in the 1990s. It also promoted locals' involvement in the management, planning, and preservation of the forest. Although specific lessons and experiences have been derived from the above forest policies, those lessons and experiences have not been widely documented, consulted, and coordinated (Manivong and Sophathilath, 2007). Thereby, the "Land Use Planning and Land Allocation Manual" (LUP-LA), which was officially acknowledged by the Lao government, established specific procedures for LUP-LA at the village level. Therefore, following the new policy on the creation of village clusters which to gather a number of villages into a network structure where villages can collaborate and use each other's strength, the agricultural lands that have previously been claimed and used by individual and households were not intervened by LUP-LA (Fujita and Phanvilay, 2004). it is necessary to revise this manual. By doing so, the manual will be in line with the duties and obligations shared by the land management sectors and the agriculture and forestry sectors in the management and use of agricultural and forestry land (MAF, 2010). In this regard, the task of land registration and titling falls under the purview of the land management sector, while the task of developing plans for the management and use of agricultural land and forest resources based on the situation and potential of each area or region is specifically the responsibility of the agricultural and forestry sectors. In order to undertake the improvement of this Manual, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has entrusted it. The overall objective of new manual "Participatory Land Use Planning" (PLUP) is to specify appropriate procedures and steps which can be implemented at village and village cluster levels in all local areas with different features throughout the country. Finally, PLUP was officially approved in 2010 (MAF, 2010). However, according to the formal responsibilities of Forest Department on forest protection, conservation, and management, as well as improvement of local people's livelihood. In 2012, the Department of Forestry has established the village forest management division to play an important role in developing the village forest management planning (VFMP) guideline which integrates and refers to the methods and approach of both LUP/LA and PLUP. The aim of this is to describes the procedure and methods as a unified tool for the forest and related sectors at the local level across the country to develop VFMP that include both aspects of forest management and livelihood improvement activities at the village level (DoF, 2013).

Forest policies instrument in terms of local right, Land Use Planning and Land Allocation (LUP-LA) and Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) have been applied throughout the country, as well as the evaluation on the results and progress of each initiatives have been conducted. However, the Village Forest Management Planning(VFMP) have been already completed 1,366 villages, which covered 91 percent of Forest Department's strategic plan to complete (VFMP) for 1,500 villages from 2015 to 2020 throughout the country, the VFMP's evaluation has not been conducted yet. Therefore, the objectives of the master thesis are (1). identify the gaps between the legislation and actual implement of VFMP, (2) identify the participation, perspective and the perception of the villagers on VFMP implementation.

2. Methodology

This research conducted both review work and field survey. The detailed research method is as follows.

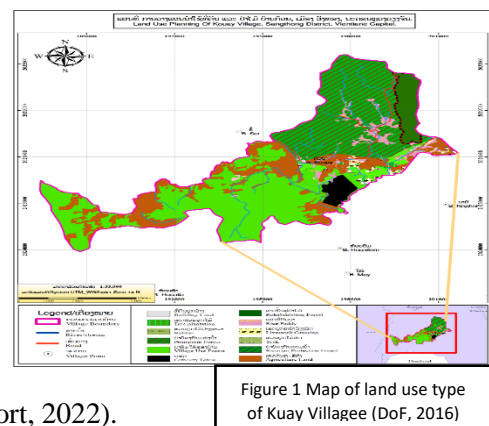
The review works: The academic papers, legislations, and official documents were collected and reviewed to understand the context of Village Forest Management in Lao PDR for clarifying the challenges and limitations of its implementation.

The Field survey: (1) The preliminary data collection: After developing all questionnaire forms, the data collection has been done by the team from the Faculty of Forestry Science (FoFS), National University of Laos (NUoL) in August 2022, because of the difficulties for my travel to Lao PDR.

(2). The main survey: The main field survey was conducted from October to November 2022. The informants for the main data collection were different sectors, such as at central level the Village Forest Management Division, and Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) were interviewed, and at local level the District Agriculture and Forestry (DAFO), and Kuay Village were interviewed.

3. Research site

Kuay Village has completed VFMP in 2016 (DoF, 2016) and the forest area is consisting of provincial protected area 2,317.85 ha and village forest use area 1,195 ha, so it's appropriate to conduct a research for master thesis. Kuay village is located in the northern part of Sangthong district, Vientiane capital, around 33 kilometers away from the central point of the district. The total area is 6,904 ha, the total population of around 769 people, with 354 people being ladies. In this village, there are 14 units, 159 households, and 158 families. Regarding the total families, there are 152 families are accounted as sufficient, 5 families are accounted as moderate, and one family is insufficient (Village report, 2022).



4 Results

4.1 The differentiation between the principle of VFMP and actual implementation have been identified through the interview and data analysis: (1). A half-day orientation meeting has been organized to explain the objectives and the function of VFMP, as well as discuss and identify the existing customary and other land use types, village authorities (Village chief, village police, and front unit) and selected villagers participated, While guideline was required a full-day meeting which villagers should participate as much as possible. the differentiations between the guideline and actual implementation are 1) the period of the meeting (1 day and a half day) and 2) only village organization were participated (as mentioned in guideline villager should participate as much as possible in orientation meeting together with village organization) ; (2). Village's maps were presented and explained to villagers for a final review and explained the legend of the maps. As observed once asking about maps, the villagers who participated in map presentation were not fully understand the map, and as seen the maps with the responds of interviewees, it's seemingly like the villages forest use area was overlapped to the individual land of villagers (as mentioned in guideline the village map should be based on the consensus and understand by all villagers), and the signboard setting was not covered the whole village forest use area. (Kuay village); (3). After the Village Forest Management Plan of target village was approved, the dissemination meeting has been organized as last step to explain the function, roles and regulation of VFMP, but the low number of villagers attended this meeting was reported , even though a copy right was given to village chief, but it's not guaranteed that village chief will further explain to villagers (as explained in the guideline a full participation of villagers and village organization are required to attend) ; (4). As agreed, upon by the VFMP

designation. Seedling production, tree planting, and forest patrolling were determined into VFMP. All activities have been supporting by a project, but it was not confirmed that villagers will continue implementing; (5). The monitoring procedure such consultation meeting, visiting target villages and report system were all accounted as a outstanding manner, but it was somehow reported that the law enforcement was still lacked in implementation, due to when the illegal logging or other threatening events were found in the area, only admonishing with a minimal fine payment have been made as a solution.

4.2 The participation, reasons for participation and non-participation, and the perception and perspectives in joining VFMP implementation. (1). According to 35 households interviewed, 7 households were the member of the village’s organization and the other 28 households were randomly selected. As explained by interviewees and analyzed from the actual implementation of VFMP principle, and the level of participation (1) Information sharing; (2). Consultation; (3). Collaboration; (4). Join decision-making; and (5). Empowerment according to Bouthavonget al., (2017). The weakest level is (1) and the Strongest level is (5). As resulted, (A). Villagers received the information about the function and objectives of VFMP, and villagers provided the information of socio-economic and land use types. So, this stage was accounted as “Information sharing”, (B). Villagers participated in field survey, areas marking and signboard setting together with the DAFO staff. So, this stage was accounted as “Collaboration”, (C). Villagers have proposed their notion for activities design, review the details of VFMP comments/agree, Village chief sign on VFMP, participate in dissemination meeting. Nonetheless, the decision was finally made by DAFO. So, this stage was accounted as “Collaboration”, (D). After the VFMP has been approved by district governor, villagers were allowed to take the lead implementation all activities e.g. Seedling production, tree planting, and forest patrolling. So, this stage was accounted as “Empowerment”, (E). As village chief were responsible for reporting, direct called and consulted with government agencies for monitoring process. So, this stage was accounted as “Consultation”. (2). The 17 hh for business owners, 5 hh for not enough men power and 6 hh for no information access were accounted for the 28 hh who did not participate in VFMP implementation, while the responsibility and gained some incentives were accounted for the 7 hh who participate in VFMP.

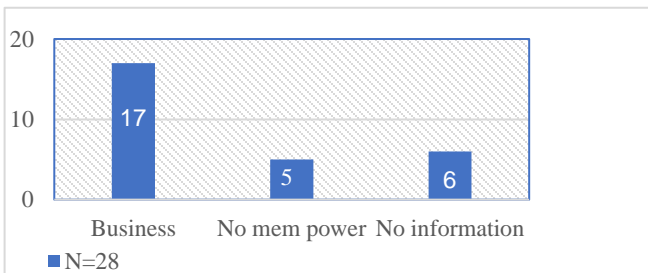


Figure 2 : Reason why Non-participation Source : Questionnaire survey in Kuay village

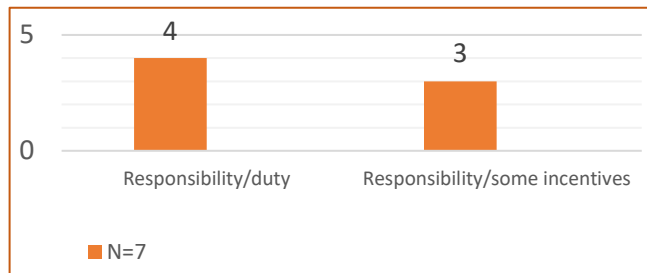


Figure3 : Reason why participation Source : Questionnaire survey in Kuay village

4.3 (1). Regarding the point of view of the respondents, it is an appropriate program in protecting and restoring the forest areas, which is a benefit for the environment surrounding the village and increasing biodiversity and forest resources that can offer emergent subsistence and income generation for villagers in the future; (2). Regarding the perception of villagers on VFMP, the villagers who participated in all processes of VFMP development have a better understanding than the villagers who did not participate in the processes, in terms of the concept of the program, the village’s boundary, forest areas demarcation, and activities determined in VFMP. The villagers who did not participate in the development process seemingly did not fully understand the concept of VFMP and did not even know the classification of forest categories or where the timber can be used

5 Discussion

- **Gap between development principle and actual implement:** (1). Orientation: Low participants leads to the low level of understanding and become a barrier for all villagers (e.g. Royer et al., 2018; Arts and Koning, 2017); (2). Mapping: Inadequate maps presentation and unclear demarcation will become a difficulty for villager to identify the areas; (3). VFMP approval: Low participants also in dissemination meeting might be a difficulty for all villagers to recognize and comprehend the concept, function and rules of VFMP (e.g. Royer et al., 2018; Koning, 2017); (4). Implementation: Currently all activities were support by a project, it was not really sure that villagers will continuedly implement after project ending (e.g. Bowler et al., 2012); (5). Monitoring: Lacking of institutional and regulation enforcement when the illegal activities have been found in the area (e.g. Fisher et al., 2018);
- **Non-participates:** 1. Business, 2. insufficient men's powers, 3. lack of information (e.g. Naik, 1997); **Participates:** 1. Responsibility (formal duty), 2. receive some incentive. if the responses were trustable, the forest protection and restoration tendency might be lustily greater operated (e.g. X. Sengkhamyong et al.); If villagers have low interests (forest protection and restoration will not effective), forest areas will be at risk of being encroached or other threatening activities “short or long terms future” (e.g. Nayak and Berkes, 2008).
- **Perception of villagers:** The limited comprehension, acknowledged that the program was owned by the government (Phiri et al., 2012); No benefits or income generation, prefer a daily consumption (Phiri et al., 2012); Business owner and farming were the first option (e.g. Matta and Alavalapati, 2006).
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- 6 **Conclusion** (1). Lower interest of local people, relying on project funding, limited state agency is the major determinants to the development of VFMP. (2). Business activities of individual household is a key factor in determining local people interest on VFMP program; (3). If the local people’s interest is low or the responsible agencies don’t have enough adequate system, effective implementation of VFMP is in question. (4). The demarcation and boundary system should be revised due to the uncertain delineation on village forest use area; (5). The awareness raising on law and regulation should be increased

References:

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