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Community forestry models in Asia-Pacific

Village forestry in Lao People's Democratic Republic

Infosheet

In Lao PDR, community forestry is called “village forestry”. The legal instruments supporting village forestry are the 2019 Forestry Law and the 2021 Department of Forestry Technical Guidelines on Village Forest Management Planning. Regulations under the Forestry Law will be designed to detail the rules on village forestry. The village forestry model is implemented in alignment with Lao PDR’s broader process for participatory land use planning. The responsible authority for village forestry is the Village Forest Management Division in the Department of Forestry of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Key requirements

Who is eligible?

All families in a village with forest and forestland that the district authority has allocated to the village authority for long-term and sustainable use are eligible to participate in village forestry activities. This is according to a village forest management plan, the forest management and protection contracts and other relevant laws. The Forestry Law does not define the terms “community” or “village”.

Allocation process

1. The District Office of Natural Resources and Environment, along with other district-level agencies, such as those responsible for home affairs, transportation and public works, and the District Agriculture and Forestry Office prepare a participatory land-use plan with inputs from villagers.
2. The district governor approves the participatory land-use plan.
3. The District Agriculture and Forestry Office and the Village Administration, particularly its Village Agriculture and Forestry Sub-unit, identify and demarcate the village's subcategories of forest, based on the approved participatory land use plan. The subcategories are: village use forest; village conservation forest; village protection forest; degraded forest land; and other forest areas.
4. The Village Agriculture and Forestry Sub-unit and villagers develop a village forest management plan, including an annual operational plan, based on the approved participatory land-use plan. The Village Administration facilitates this process and the District Agriculture and Forestry Office provides technical support.
5. The Village Administration and villagers approve the village forestry management plan.
6. The District Agriculture and Forestry Office, then the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office and, finally, the district governor review and approve the plan.

Main elements



Duration of tenure

- The Forestry Law does not specify the duration of tenure but refers to “long term” allocation of forests and forestland.



Type and condition of forest

- Any forests within the village territory can be allocated for village management and use, based on the participatory land use plan and allocation of forests and forestland approved by the district authority.
- Village forestry can include three types of forests:
 - Protection forests, which include water resources, riparian forests and roadside forests
 - Conservation forests, which include sacred forests and cemetery forests
 - Village-use forests.
- The law does not specify the condition of the forest.



Type and duration of management plan

- A village forest management plan is for five years and is renewable.
- They also have annual operational plans.



Internal governance

- The Agriculture and Forestry Sub-unit of the Village Economic and Financial Unit is the management committee of the village forest. Its main duties include reviewing and disseminating village regulations on the use of village forests and forestland, organizing villagers to protect and manage forests and taking a lead role in preventing encroachment and other incidents.
- The village head or deputy head are part of the Agriculture and Forestry Sub-unit and lead decision-making on village forestry.
- There is no specific mention of the composition of the Agriculture and Forestry Sub-unit in the legal framework.



Gender and social inclusion

- The Forestry Law 2019 has no provisions related to gender or social inclusion.
- The Forestry Strategy 2035 aims to ensure that at least 35 percent of people participating in forestry work are women.



Community-based enterprises

- The Forestry Law 2019 has no provisions related to community-based enterprises.
- The Forestry Strategy 2035 includes promotion of and support for wood processing at the community level.



Benefit-sharing mechanism

- The Forestry Law 2019 has no provisions on benefit-sharing.
- The Forestry Strategy 2035 states that equitable benefit-sharing is part of the system established for sustainable co-management of production forests with the participation of local communities.



External support

- The District Agriculture and Forestry Office provides guidance for the management of forest and forestlands. In addition to monitoring and inspecting the Village Agriculture and Forestry Sub-unit’s implementation of forest and forestland protection, tree planting and forest rehabilitation, the District Agriculture and Forestry Office provides guidance for the Sub-unit to do so, in accordance with the village forest management plan.
- Other sectors and stakeholders have the right to contribute to the management, protection, development and inspection of forests and forestland according to their roles, rights and duties as prescribed by law. There is no specific provision for support to village forestry by other stakeholders.



Conflict-resolution mechanism

- The legal framework does not mention a conflict-resolution mechanism to use in the event of disputes related to village forestry.



Rights and responsibilities of community members

Members have rights to:

- manage, protect and use, including customarily, the forest and forestlands the state has allocated to the village.
- harvest timber for public or family use from village-use forest with prior permission from the Village Administration.
- harvest and sell non-timber forest products.
- sell planted trees, timber and non-timber forest products.

Members must:

- participate in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of an approved village participatory land-use plan, village forest management plan and village forest rules, including those concerning benefit-sharing and conflict resolution.

Members cannot:

- transfer rights over the forest to other parties.
- commercially harvest timber from trees planted under the village forestry management plan.
- hunt.
- construct buildings.
- mine sand, stones and so on.

Links with climate change policies and targets

- The Forestry Law 2019 recognizes the “key roles of forests and forestlands in national socio-economic development and climate change”, but it has no specific provisions related to climate change mitigation or adaptation.
- The 2009 Lao PDR’s National Adaptation Program of Action includes a project to strengthen the capacity of 600 village forest members to plant, care for, manage and use their forests. The project’s anticipated long-term outcomes were the sustainable use of forest products and increased watershed protection from village forests.
- The 2021 Lao PDR’s National Strategy on Climate Change mentions participatory forest management as one of the actions taken to improve the country’s response to the changing climate, under the climate mitigation and resilience measures undertaken.
- The National REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) Strategy published in 2021 seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and to promote forest restoration and plantations to contribute to socio-economic development and the national program for climate change mitigation.
- In 2021, Lao PDR’s updated Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement on climate change stated that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment is translating 2018 National Land Allocation Master Plan to subnational level to cover the integrated management of natural resources, including participatory sustainable forest management through the formulation of village forest management plans.

Read more

- RECOFTC, *Special Report: How community forests boosted pandemic resilience across Asia-Pacific*, www.recoftc.org/special-report/community-forestry-boosted-pandemic-resilience
- RECOFTC, *Special Report: Communities are improving lives and landscapes in Southeast Asia through social forestry*, www.recoftc.org/stories/special-report-communities-are-improving-lives-and-landscapes-southeast-asia-through-social
- Find out more about RECOFTC’s work in Lao PDR at www.recoftc.org/lao-pdr



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