

Women involvement in village forest management

Recommendations for the VPA negotiations



Rural Research & Development Promoting Knowledge Association (RRDPA)



by

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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
DOFI	Department of Forestry Inspection
FLEFT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
GCA	Green Community Alliance
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GOL	Government of Laos
LIWG	Land Issues Working Group
LWU	Lao Women's Union
LFND	Lao Front for National Development
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
NCAWMC	National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Mother-Child
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
NSAW	National Strategy for the Advancement of Women
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PM	Prime Minister
PAFO	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
RECOFTC	The Center for People and Forests
RRDPA	Rural Research and Development Promoting Knowledge Association
Sub-CAW	Sub-Committee for the Advancement of women
TLAS	Timber Legality Assurance System
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreements

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I. Background

Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) are legally binding bilateral trade agreements that promote the trade in legal timber and timber products between the EU and targeted timber exporting countries. At the core of each VPA is a timber legality assurance system (TLAS), which verifies the legality of timber along the supply chain, from logging to transportation, processing, and export.

CSO involvement in FLEGT -VPA in Laos

Rural Research and Development Promoting Knowledge Association (RRDPA) is working with FLEGT Standing Office, Department of Forestry Inspection (DOFI) on Village Use Forest issues to support FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) process (FLEGT VPA). The EU and the Lao government have entered into formal negotiations in 2017 to conclude a trade agreement to make sure that any timber exported from Laos to the EU is legal, stop illegal logging and improve forest governance and regulation.

Timber Legality Definition (TLD) is one of the key components of FLEGT VPA in which Lao CSOs play an important role in developing TLDs together with the Lao government to fulfill the requirements of the EU. RRDPA is one of the key organizations who is actively involved in the TLD development.

RRDPA has completed conducting the research on village use forest (TLD4) which is focused on the timber supply chain at village level and the results of this research have been used to improve TLD4. However, there is very limited information on women's involvement in forest management and the impact of it on women specifically. Actually, women are directly involved in forest management as they are collecting NTFPs, firewood and the uses of timber for traditional use and public constructions in the village. Therefore, RRDPA would like to conduct research on gender issues in village forest management in order to address gender issues for influencing policy dialogue and improvement.

Aim of the research

Support RRDPA and the wider Lao CSO network to increase its understanding of gender issues in village forest management and share main outcomes of the research to facilitate discussions on gender issues in the FLEGT VPA. The research was divided in two main stages: desk study and interviews in Vientiane Capital and field visit in Thongmixay and Phieng districts in Sayabouly Province.

The research aimed to gather the existing information related to gender issues and women involvement in forest management both local and national level according to the existing legal framework and highlight any gaps, inconsistencies if any; clarify the roles of women in forest management according to legal framework and cultural norms; provide an update on the new law and regulations that support gender involvement

Methodology

A desk study was conducted in Vientiane Capital of all relevant literature including laws, decrees and legal material, project documents, gender and forestry literature, etc.

Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted in Vientiane Capital among NPAs, INGOs and international projects including GIZ, LIWG, LBA, RECOFTC, GCA, NCAW, AFC, etc. involved in FLEGT-VPA, TLD4, Village Forestry and gender.

The surveyor conducted field survey in Phieng and Thongmixay district in Xayabouly Province. In each district SSI were conducted with representative from DAFO, DONRE, LWU. The team visited Navane village in Phieng district and Nampeuy village in Thongmixay district.

II. The Meta Level: Norms and Traditional Roles of Women and Men in Laos

Gender equality is additionally influenced by ethnic background and the influence of **gender norms and traditional roles** is still seen as one of the major obstacles in achieving factual gender equality in Laos. The Lao-Tai group represents 67% of Lao PDR's population, along with three major non-Lao-Tai ethno-linguistic groups, namely the Mon-Khmer (21%), the Hmong-Lu Mien (8%) and the Chine-Tibetan (3%).

Many traditional norms within Lao-Tai cultures are favorable with regard to gender equality: women are often financial decision-makers, inherit land and property more often, and have gained equal access to education. The other three ethno-linguistic groups mostly have stronger patriarchal traditions and norms, limiting women's access to decision-making, property, education and throughout all sectors, as well as at the community level where women continue to struggle to participate on equal terms and in equal numbers.

Gender-based power structures of matrilineal and patrilineal families and their ethnicity guide the decision-making process. In patrilineal villages men have more power and therefore control decision making about access to and use of land. In matrilineal villages women have higher status and more power and can therefore negotiate about their customary and formal land rights, including making final decisions related to land.

Customary law and women rights to land¹

Women's land rights are closely linked to customary gender-based power systems in their culture. Three variables, kinship, post-marriage residence patterns and inheritance practices, are vital for the customary rights on land for women and men. From a customary law perspective, women's land rights are determined mainly by whether a village is matrilineal or patrilineal in social structure.

In the matrilineal Lao-Tai, and partly in Mon-Khmer language speaking communities, the strong customary inheritance land rights for women are continued and sustained. The traditional system of matrilineal kinship and inheritance and matrilocal post-marriage residence protect the land rights of women. Matrilineal power structure provides women with higher status and more power and can therefore negotiate about their customary and formal land rights, including making final decisions related to land

In patrilineal villages, women only have access to land through marriage. Only sons can inherit land from their father/parents and divorce can result in loss of access to family land for women. Customary private land rights favor men or sons and limit women's ownership and access to

¹ Material related to matrilineal and patrilineal mostly was extracted from Somphongbouthakanh, 2020.

and control over land. In patrilineal customary law systems women are not included in land inheritance patterns.

Another significant influence on women's land rights is the agriculture system in which these are embedded. In lowland rice paddy systems, often inhabited by Lao-Tai language speakers, ownership is either individual or by household, whereas in upland agriculture systems ownership is communal/village, individual or a mixture of both. In the lowland areas, within matrilineal systems, women have specific individual land rights.

In upland areas, women and men may not have individual land rights but have access to communal land via their inclusion in a village or clan. Villages and household may also have land in both systems and thus women's land rights occurring in both. Safeguarding women's land rights requires first and foremost a clear recognition of customary land use right and identification of communal upland agriculture areas (including upland fallows, grassland, village managed forest) before assessing whether land use ownership on those communal areas is collective, individual or mix.

III. Macro Level: International and Regional Commitments & National Legislation and Policies

Lao PDR has a strong legal framework for promoting gender equality but significant gaps remain. The legal and regulatory framework in Lao PDR – including laws, Government instruction orders and administrative procedures related to business and trade – are **gender-neutral**.

The revised Constitution of 2003 and other laws explicitly state that women and men have equal rights in all spheres - political, social, cultural and in the family. Women's equal rights are also stipulated in the Family, Land and Property Laws; the Labor Law; the Electoral Law; and the Penal Law. The Law on the Development and Protection of Women (2004) is the most specific Lao legislation with regard to equal rights and access for women, and provided the framework for several later laws defining women's rights, and served also as a basis to form the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Mother-Child. The constitutional mandate to protect women's rights and interests is traditionally with the Lao Women's Union (LWU; Article 7 of Constitution).

The legal foundation for the promotion of gender mainstreaming into policies and regulations is strong. Laos has an elevated interest in adhering to international agreements relevant to gender mainstreaming. Laos has ratified and attempted to operationalize several international and regional conventions and treaties on gender. At the international level, Laos is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The ASEAN Declarations relevant to gender provide regional entry points, and the national framework to integrate gender into policies and strategies at all levels is broad and strong. Unfortunately, this strength might at the same time constitute a barrier for effective integration of gender into sector-specific legislation, including in the forestry sector.

Officially, Lao PDR is equipped with solid women's institutions. Laos has a strong legal framework for promoting gender equality and three solid women's institutions that complement each other. The national apparatus for gender equality and women's empowerment consists of three institutions, including the aforementioned NCAWMC, which supports the Government in researching policies and strategies for women's advancement. The Commission also coordinates the implementation of policies on gender equality and the elimination of

discrimination against women with national and international stakeholders. The Lao Women's Union and NCAWMC complement each other's work, taking a comprehensive approach to gender issues at the policy, institutional and practical level. Under the direct supervision of the National Assembly Standing Committee, the Women's Caucus is a committee for women parliamentarians which advocates on women's issues, leadership and decision-making

However, despite having a very advanced legal framework for gender equality, there is only very limited implementation of these laws due to lack of capacities, knowledge and budget. Because policies often do not consider gender or use sex-disaggregated data, the impacts of policies can at times differ from their intention: in reality, men and women do not enjoy the same equality.

Regulatory framework and Forestry Law 2019

As signatories to international legal instruments to promote women's rights and gender equality, Laos has enabling opportunities to support and promote gender mainstreaming across every sector, including forestry. We observe improved recognition of the importance of social and gender equity, as reflected in various global and regional initiatives but challenges and obstacles remain in terms of reducing gender gaps in the forestry sector.

The National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) VIII, as Laos' guiding strategic document, refers to environmental protection and natural resource management but its content is not specifically gender-differentiated. The cross-cutting section on Women's Development, however, offers several targets which directly or indirectly influence the forestry sector and therefore can be used for strategic decisions/communication of such decisions to "ensure gender equality in economic opportunities, including access to resources such as land, funds, technologies and basic infrastructure (electricity, roads, markets)", and the goal to "promote women to take up 20% of leading management-level positions"².

The main legal document in the forestry sector is the new Forestry Law. The current version (July 13th 2018). The Forestry Law 2019 is drafted in a gender-neutral manner and does not mention gender or women in any of its articles so that its provisions apply to both men and women, as well as businesses and organizations. It does not include any specific provisions that would assist women to overcome the traditional and other barriers to their engagement and control of economic activities. The references to families and family income generation in Articles 53, 63 and 71 would suggest that women would likely be regarded only as part of a (male headed) household. The current Forestry Law does also not reflect upon gender aspects in the land use sector.

Land law and women rights

Land tenure and property rights regimes determine how men and women access resources and affect efforts to improve forest management. Understanding the gender aspects of tenure rights Understanding the links between gender and tenure rights is necessary for improving the sustainable management of forest resources, enhancing livelihoods and addressing unequal power relations.

The new Land Law – with revisions by the National Assembly (2019) no longer includes the current protection clause for married women. Unfortunately, the safeguard to women's property rights was dropped in the Land Law 2019. The reference to joint ownership of husband and wife in case of matrimonial property is omitted which is a set-back of securing land rights for women.

² Lao PDR's National Socio-Economic Development Plan VIII 2016-2020

Individual property with legal land certificates can be used as legal collateral. Land tenure security constitute a critical constraint to the further participation of women in small business where land is necessary as collateral for access to finance. Women's lack of access to land ownership can hamper access to capital, as well as training and investment in improved processing and production techniques. The lack of knowledge of legal rights to land and joint titling to protect women's land rights within the household remains a major problem in rural areas. Limited access to legal information, and the predominant Lao cultural norm that men are considered the head of the family, which includes entitlement to land ownership, result in lowering the ability of women, especially in rural areas, to use land as legal collateral to obtain financial assistance.

Despite many attempts by civil society to have it reinstated during the drafting process, together with other suggestions that would advance the position of women in relation to land, none of them was accepted by the drafters or the National Assembly. Instead, the Land Law adopts the word "individual" throughout, which the drafters said would include both men and women. It is reported that the Law on Development and Protection of Women of 2004 is adequate to deal with the rights of women in relation to land. Unfortunately, omission of this article from the revised Land Law and others that safeguard equality in land rights decouples the Law from other Lao legislation that protect women's rights.

Women are also often not actively included in decision-making steps of Village land use planning (VLUP). Decisions on land and forest are usually taken by their husbands and the village authorities. The subsequent forest management plan (if developed) is then often seen as an even further specialized step which women perceive having even less access to due to women's lack of education, lack of technical knowledge and lack of confidence to participate in management decisions. Traditional gender norms of many ethnic groups further contribute to these dynamics.

Gender disparities in land titling and women lack of involvement in VLUP could become more noticeable after VPA implementation. Due to discriminatory practices in rural areas, women often do not have their names registered in land use right certificates. With the VPA implementation, this could hinder women's ability to make decisions regarding timber harvesting.

Gender was completely ignored in both land and forestry laws and villagers are excluded from the decision-making process regarding leases and concessions of forest land. When drafting the implementing decrees and regulations, it should be made clear that the provisions relate to both men and women, to ensure that officials and villagers take into account the rights of women to gain access and control over economic assets. The recommendations on gender made in relation to the Land Law could also apply to the Forestry Law.

IV. Micro Level: women in involvement in village forest management

Literature on gender and participatory forest management appeared to focus on three areas: factors affecting women's participation, strengthening women's bargaining power to improve the quality of their participation and the implications of women's participation for sustainability.

The ability to participate and the terms of participation are shaped by a number of factors, including rules of entry, social norms, perceptions, and the assets and attributes of those affected.

Gender differences in forest-related knowledge & use of forest and forest products

Access to different plant and tree resources in different societies, is complex and characterized by nested and overlapping rights that are politically, socioeconomically and culturally determined.

Agroforestry activities are often gender-differentiated. Generally, both women and men derive their knowledge from their specialized roles and the gender-specific ways in which they access forests and trees, which products they harvest and how they use them, what markets they access, and how they rely on forest products for their livelihoods. Women and men often have highly specialized knowledge of forest flora and fauna in terms of species diversity, location, harvesting and hunting patterns, seasonal availability, uses for various purposes, and conservation practices.

Women spend usually more time in the forests and have a more detailed knowledge of the status of the forest resources. Women's knowledge tends to be linked more directly to household food and nutrition needs, as well as to health and culture, compared with men's knowledge. Women are often able to identify a broader range of plant species (i.e. trees, vegetables, vines, bushes and herbs) and usable plant parts (i.e. fruit, bark, leaf, seed and root) than men.

Such knowledge is particularly important in times of natural disasters and food crises when the collection and sale of forest products by women often become critical for household survival. In addition, women's gathering role means they have highly specialized knowledge of the forest, the trees, biological diversity, and conservation practices. Women also collect firewood for fuel, a time-consuming activity that often leaves them with little time for school, work, or other productive activities.



Women use of forest resources is usually centered on management and use of firewood, forest food, medicinal plants, etc.

Barriers preventing women participating effectively in forest management

- Decision-making in the sector shows that community forest management is dominated by men, not only because most forestry officers are male, but also because of the limited participation of women in forest user committees. Women's exclusion from decision-making is due to social, logistical, and legal barriers as well as male bias among those promoting community forestry initiatives. Being less represented than men in associations and other organized groups, women have less opportunities to speak out and the lack of women's representation at any decision-making level often results in a lack of consideration of women's needs and potentials in the forestry sector.
- The Forestry agencies might possess only limited awareness on the relevance of gender-responsive measures in their sector and usually lack concrete understanding of gender mainstreaming and if they often have a gender focal point, this gender resources person is rather under-utilized.
- Security is also a concern for women who are more vulnerable if they travel long distances or travel by themselves. It is more difficult to find female forestry staff willing to travel to remote villages for safety concerns and family considerations. This is even more relevant knowing that women living in remoter villages are often the ones who would open up most to female staff for reasons of culture and lack of confidence.
- Women's work burdens within the household and time-consuming reproductive work, taking care of children, elderly, disabled, preparing meal for family, especially in remote villages limit the time women can allocate to forestry and agroforestry income-generating activities. This means that some women may have little interest in forest management and casual attempts to include women can simply add to their labor burden
- Social norms, the gendered division of labor and gendered behavioral norms, as well as gendered spaces and species, all limit women's participation in decision making and participation in forest management. These social norms and cultural practices constrain women's visibility, mobility and behavior, even when they are members of informal or formal group.
- Although women have significant roles in agriculture and forestry, they have less access to, and control of land, farming and forestry-based inputs and outputs. Women's rights to forest and tree products tend to be restricted to products that are not profitable or have little commercial benefits
- Lower education status is also often mentioned as the key reason for Lao women's low levels of confidence, which strongly effects their willingness to aim for leading positions in their communities and to be active change-makers in their families and villages. all women groups showed high interest and willingness to participate in forest management and decision-making much more than they currently do but felt insecure about their lack of education.
- Language can also be a barrier if only Lao is spoken in meetings since some women from certain ethnic groups do not or not sufficiently understand. Ethnic women remain the most socially-disadvantaged group in Laos. Few are engaged in the formal economy, and only a quarter are literate. They are less likely to speak the Lao language and are therefore less able to engage in the markets, participate in public meetings and access information critical to their livelihoods

- Women also face barriers to active participation in the formal economy. Barriers include: limited access to capital (including agricultural and forest sector inputs), skills, finance and market information; poor infrastructure in rural areas that precludes women's ability to travel to central market towns; poor labor retention; and limited access to raw materials. As a result of women's tenure insecurity, women remain dependent on their male partners to handle decisions related to land ownership, including gaining access to finance.
- The supply chains are male dominated at every node, with men having more power than women, more knowledge about markets, prices, timber species and policies. The wood processing sector is considered to be a 'male' sector unfit for women. Women's roles are confined to office support or to tasks that are not considered too physically demanding, including sanding, cleaning, finishing and packing of wood products, but they are occasionally involved in timber sale (as this is perceived as more administrative work). The net result is that women's participation in the sector is low, between 3-10 % of the workforce, with low levels of engagement in key decision-making areas, except for some involvement in the sale and management of timber to traders.³

Perceived benefits of women involvement in forest management

The virtual absence of women from the decision-making bodies can lead to significant gender inequalities in the distribution of costs and benefits, and a range of observed or potential inefficiencies in functioning of the overall system. On the other hand, increased women involvement in forest management can yield great benefits for them and their whole community:

- Improves the control of illegal activities, decreases the incidence of conflict in user groups, on forest sustainability. Women's participation for example enhanced forest regeneration and reduced illegal harvesting due to improved monitoring, etc.
- Representation in decision making bodies
- Gender-balanced groups and female-only groups tend to sanction less and exclude less because of their inherent characteristics and modes of operation, perform consistently better in all forestry functions (e.g. the protection of plantings, forest regeneration, biodiversity and watersheds and the allocation of forest-use permits and capitalize on the complementary roles of men. When women constitute one-quarter to one-third of the membership of local forest management institutions, the dynamic changes in favor not only of the consideration of women's use of and access to forest resources but also towards more effective community forest management decision-making and management as a whole. The greater inclusion of women in rule-making in forest user groups could reduce the tendency to break rules by those not previously engaged in formulating the rules, reduce disruptive conflict over forest access and use, and strengthen the ability of such groups to contribute to the goals of promoting the ecological health of the forest and supporting socially equitable decision-making within communities.
- Women can mobilize people for collective action, and enable better access to information and services from external agents. Greater involvement of women in forest governance may thus help ensure that forest policy and planning is more sensitive to the food security needs of communities. Improves the control of illegal activities, decreases the incidence of conflict in user groups, on forest sustainability. Women's

³ Executive summary - Laos: Diagnoses and regulatory assessment of SmEs in the Mekong Region

participation for example enhanced forest regeneration and reduced illegal harvesting due to improved monitoring, etc.

- Women show more intrinsic interest in protecting the surrounding forests.

Common challenges in mainstreaming gender in forestry

- Inadequate budget allocation
- Lack of evidence-based research on gender and gender-disaggregated data prevents planners and decision-makers from understanding the heterogeneity of forest communities and women’s contribution to sustainable forest management
- Limited technical expertise on gender, including gender analysis, within key forest institutions, thereby hindering effective implementation of sectoral gender strategies and action plans
- Limited budget allocation to coordinate and undertake gender mainstreaming activities
- Gender mainstreaming budgets are lumped in with other budget lines within the development sector.
- Deep-rooted gendered norms and cultural prejudices reinforce forestry as a male domain and the notion that women cannot engage in forestry activities and professions.
- Gendered norms and cultural prejudices reinforce forestry as a male profession Governance and institutions, including socio-cultural, economic and political factors

V. Opportunities for women involvement in timber supply chain

Women’s participation in supply chains is usually limited to harvesting and small-scale retail trade, while men dominate larger businesses and tend to engage in higher value chains. As processing become more capital-intensive, or as the scale increases, women’s participation tends to decrease. Women’s participation also diminishes when the distance to the trading location increases, often due to socio-cultural norms.

Empowering women through forest committees because when women constitute one- quarter to one-third of the membership of local forest management institutions, the dynamic changes in favor not only of the consideration of women’s use of and access to forest resources but also towards more effective community forest management decision-making and management as a whole. The greater inclusion of women could reduce the tendency to break rules by those not previously engaged in formulating the rules, reduce disruptive conflict over forest access and use, and strengthen the ability of such groups to contribute to the goals of promoting the ecological health of the forest and supporting socially equitable decision-making within communities. Women, mobilize people for collective action, and enable better access to information and services from external agents. Greater involvement of women in forest governance may thus help ensure that forest policy and planning is more sensitive to the food security needs of communities.

The table below displays the opportunities for women involvement in timber supply value chain based on literature review, interview with informants at central, provincial, district and village level.

Activities	Opportunities form women
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Village forest committee	Women could be member of the VFC but they have little knowledge As member of the VGC, women can increase women participation, disseminate information among women, raise capacity and ensure women participation in meetings and consultations
Forest land allocation and demarcation	women could eventually join the timber inventory team and of course the land owner if the timber is cut on private land
Forest management plan	Women can participate in meeting in decision making altogether with LYU, LFNC, LWU, etc. regarding VFMP. Women can be fully empowered in decision making process
Forest harvesting	Women can be involved in monitoring the forest harvesting to ensure that the harvest conforms to the management plan Women can be involved in patrolling and controlling or emergency issues with forest.
Tree marking	Women could join the timber listing on log landing 1 or 2 given that its located in the village surrounding. Women could be involved in marking the trees and calculate the number of m3 to ensure transparency.
Selling timbers	Women could be appointed members of the timber selling committee and be involved in the negotiation about the timber bidding and sale
Fund management	Women should be among the committee who decide about the use of the fund Follow up to ensure that 50% of the fund goes to women Women could also act as treasurer/accountant

VI. Recommendations to support women involvement in Village Forest management and the FLEGT-VPA Process

The Lao FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) process is still in the negotiation phase, with expectations for its ratification and signing in 2020. Despite the relevance for gender- and ethnicity-sensitive inclusion in areas concerning production and village forests, and the implications of the VPA on forest governance structures, the FLEGT VPA negotiations completely lack a respective gender lens.⁴

In a 2018 gender analysis, the GIZ-FLEGT program in Laos pointed out that most FLEGT-VPA meetings were predominantly led by senior men. If social issues were raised, it was mostly initiated by the represented CSOs, and had a rather general focus on people's benefit-sharing⁵. A gender imbalance at decision-maker levels, combined with generally low gender knowledge, is a significant barrier to successful integration of gender aspects into Laos' forestry sector as a whole.

Linkages between Gender and FLEGT have been left mostly unexplored but still, the VPA can open a major door for greater involvement in decision making from community level upward for women.

⁴ Compare: FLEGT VPA process in Lao PDR 2018

⁵ GIZ/Bode 2018

Government

1. **Support existing gender structure:** The political commitment seems currently particularly high and should be capitalized on. The approach should be two-fold: utilizing the existing gender structures (MAF's Sub-CAW, LWU on all levels) while at the same time actively involving senior and technical staff to foster a Government culture where gender is increasingly mainstreamed.
2. Work should be undertaken with the Lao Women's union and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Sub-Commissions for the Advancement of Women to build understanding of gender issues in FLEGT-VPA, mainstream these issues in national policy processes and build understanding within sectoral ministries of the gendered implications of legal and regulatory frameworks.
3. **Gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation systems** to provide gender-disaggregated data and information in the forestry sector to support policy-planning and assist in the development of policies based on the existing heterogeneity of local communities, including gender roles, rights, concerns and capacities to acknowledge and promote women's contributions in sustainable forest management.
4. **Gender-responsive budgets.** Adequate financial resources are vital for developing and implementing gender-sensitive forest policies and programs not lumped with other budget lines within the development sector, as this would create confusion resulting in siphoning of resources for activities not related to gender.
5. Ensure that women are entitled to 50% of the fund for village development (35%/65%) based on the NCAW recommended target
6. Ensure women participation in all stages of Timber supply chain by set up minimum requirements for women participation in village level institutions (Village Forestry Committee, timber selling committee).

CSOs

1. **Support national consultation and dialogue** at national and subnational levels to discuss relevant issues, for example, gender gaps in existing forest policies and practices to facilitate stakeholders representing different interests to participate in policy-making and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the existing institutional and legal frameworks to promote gender equality in TLD4 and FLEGT-VPA.
2. Mainstreaming gender into FLEGT-VPA processes. Gender mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and the goal of gender equality are central to all activities including policy development, research, advocacy, legislation, resource allocation and planning, implementation, and monitoring of programs and projects.
3. **CSO are involved** in FLEGT-VPA but **lack legal knowledge to contribute to policy formulation and improve legal framework** as shared by DOFI representatives. The involvement of Lao lawyers to provide expert advice is urgently needed. CSOs involved in policy improvement including revision of Decree 0535 and FLEGT lack legal expertise to properly support the process and contribute to policy and law.
4. CSOs need to be able to point to how the relevant decree and regulatory framework impact on the men and women in the communities they work with and point to how the existing texts impact on the ground.
5. **Mainstream gender in the VFMP training** manual to ensure to involve women in each key step of the process upstream. If women participation (requiring minimum number of women and modality of participation (FDG or else) is written in the manual this will de facto become a requirement and improve field level inclusiveness.

6. Since women traditionally possess deeper understanding about the forest resources, spend considerable time in them as users, and are more likely to show interest in forest protection, educational measures at community level should particularly target women
7. Targeted support is needed to enable women to build confidence to take on more prominent management positions in village management committees, and to strengthen their capacities on financial and business literacy
8. Collect gender-disaggregated data in the VLD4. There must be good coordination between government agencies and civil society to develop a gender-disaggregated database. This is important because inadequate gender-disaggregated statistics compounded by limited technical capacity on gender analysis hinder informed policy making.
9. Some CSOs criticize the lack of transparency among the secretary who should record the content of the negotiations and share it with the stakeholders. All 23 CSOs that are member of the committee don't have the opportunity to participate and voice their concerns. All together they would have more weight and would provide recommendations and actions to do, but until now they are mostly involved in training.
10. Since effective women's participation is hindered by their inability to read and speak Lao, information targeting rural women should be in their native languages. Most of the ethnic language don't have written script, this means that the information should be provided orally by producing IEC material and involving ethnic interpreters.
11. Dissemination at community level about gender equality and rights, relevant regulations and laws relevant to TLD4 and the rights to sell timber from VUF.
12. Advocate for mainstreaming of gender that has been completely ignored in both land and forestry laws. When drafting the implementing decrees and regulations, it should be made clear that the provisions relate to both men and women, to ensure that officials and villagers take into account the rights of women to gain access and control over economic assets. The recommendations on gender made in relation to the Land Law could also apply to the Forestry Law.
13. Support capacity development for government and forestry officials, decision-makers, policy formulation and development committee members and task teams on gender and FLEGT-VPA including gender sensitization, gender analysis and gender mainstreaming to promote understanding on the heterogeneity of forest-dependent communities and inclusion of women's concerns in forest policies and programs.
14. Regularly conduct community surveys to monitor gender issues to identify areas where women play a stronger or weaker role in the timber value chain, and to develop training for women on technical and business skills to enable them to meaningfully participate in the modernized timber value chain.
15. Assess the risks and impacts of the modernization and legalization of timber value chains and enforcing forest management laws often restricts forestry activities of rural households, such as small-scale timber production; collection of fuel wood, medicinal herbs and mushrooms on women.