



Reports

ASEAN-Swiss Partnership for Social Forestry and Climate Change (ASFCC)

Activity Report for Phase 1 (2012-2013)

Lao PDR

CIFOR ASFCC Team (Laos)

The report is based on several project documents that are not yet published, as well as authors' interpretations.

Reports

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Abstract

Meaningful and effective involvement of local populations in REDD+ projects is a challenge. REDD+ project planners often lack information on the resource management patterns that community members employ. Particularly, misconceptions about shifting cultivation (swidden) communities exist among governments and non-governmental institutions, leading to further marginalization of often vulnerable groups of swiddeners. Swiddening, forms an important livelihood option for many rural communities in Laos, and it is imperative that REDD+ and other land use management projects in the region incorporate an understanding of swiddening, including the various forms of social forestry and fallow management, in their planning and implementation if the aim is to conduct a successful project. It needs to be also noted that approaches that are termed “participatory” often seek to teach local communities new concepts or methods, but rarely emphasize learning from local communities about their own forest management related patterns and methods of conservation and change. Furthermore, many conservation and/or development activities and initiatives, whether REDD+ focused or not, underestimate the mobility of rural Southeast Asian communities and the information and resource networks in which they participate. These shortcomings have profound impacts on the efficiency and effectiveness of climate-change related activities, as well as the benefits that these communities can hope to realize from REDD+ initiatives. This project seeks to fill these gaps by understanding how local communities that rely at least partially on swiddening can participate more meaningfully in programs focused on promoting REDD+. The project will have two principal objectives: (1) To understand how existing horizontal and vertical social networks can serve to enhance opportunities and diminish obstacles for forest communities to participate meaningfully in and benefit from REDD+ and/or other PES projects; (2) To understand how local knowledge, practice, institutions, and landscape patterns, especially in swidden communities: (a) can be employed to harmonize REDD+ objectives with local practice and thus enhance REDD+ project outcomes; (b) can be enhanced in economic value and in social and political value by REDD+ project activities. The project will achieve these objectives using mixed methods and through collaboration with swidden communities and other relevant actors in Lao PDR.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background, review and scientific justification: Swiddeners and REDD+ in Southeast Asia

Throughout much of Southeast Asia, what remains of forests is found in areas where shifting cultivation or swiddening is practiced and where shifting cultivators (swiddeners) -- frequently disadvantaged minority peoples -- have traditional rights to land and resources (Mertz et al. 2009; Padoch et al. 2007). However, misconceptions about swiddening are common, mainly attributed to almost universal condemnation by both governments and non-governmental institutions (whether devoted to conservation or development). The vulnerable status of swidden populations (Cramb et al. 2009; Dove 1983; Fox et al. 2000; 2009) makes it imperative that REDD+ projects in the region incorporate an understanding of swiddening, including the various forms of forest and fallow management it commonly comprises, as well as of the communities themselves (Mertz 2009). Viengthong District in the northeast Province of Huaphan, Lao PDR, where swidden agriculture is widely practiced and REDD+ projects are planned, under study or in initial stages of activity, is an excellent site to focus on these important, linked issues.

One essential issue that tends to be missed or misinterpreted by both governments and non-governmental institutions is the mobility of swiddeners and the dynamism of their resource use. Despite the often dramatic histories of migration and change of many swiddening communities, they are frequently viewed as essentially "traditional", static, and locally bounded. The many economic and political changes that have frequently occurred throughout Southeast Asia have, however, embedded even seemingly remote rural households and communities in multiple social networks. These networks link people and places, including rural to urban settlements, individuals to organizations, peripheries to centers, yet often remain essentially invisible to outsiders.

For the implementation of a REDD+ project, information and resource networks are essential. First of all, the actual reduction in deforestation and forest degradation needs to be measured and reported within a REDD+ MRV system. An MRV system must also ensure that information gathered is fed into a carbon accounting system, and that it can be verified. The verified performance information will need to be further translated into a financial transaction inside a larger REDD+ system, and cost and benefit sharing mechanisms need to be in place to provide incentives to people, communities and institutions at different levels.

Hence, identifying and using the existing networks is key to helping communities access information and marshal resources to participate more effectively in REDD+ and other climate change-related activities. The existing networks could potentially serve as channels where the information related to carbon stocks in the swidden system is gathered and shared; through which monitoring data is reported to other levels; or where financial resources or other benefits are exchanged. However, the existing networks in swidden communities for information and resource exchange are not yet well understood, and knowledge gaps continue to exist.

2. Objectives and research approach

2.1. Objectives

This project has sought to fill the above mentioned gaps in knowledge by understanding how local communities that rely at least partially on swiddening can participate more meaningfully in programs focused on promoting REDD+. The project has two principal objectives:

1. To understand how existing horizontal and vertical social network structures can serve to enhance opportunities and diminish obstacles for forest communities and their members to:
 - a. Participate meaningfully in and benefit from REDD+ projects
 - b. Participate in and influence national and subnational REDD+ decision-making
2. To understand how local knowledge, practice, institutions, and landscape patterns of resource use, especially in swidden communities:
 - a. Can be employed to harmonize REDD+ objectives with local practice and thus enhance REDD+ project outcomes, including the effectiveness and efficiency of MRV activities
 - b. Can be enhanced in economic value and in social and political value by REDD+ project activities.

The project has worked towards these objectives through collaboration with swidden communities, research groups and actors who are planning and implementing REDD+ activities in Lao PDR.

2.2 Research Approach

The project used a comparative approach to study existing social structures and embedded networks (including rural-urban ties) in swidden communities and beyond, in three sites in Viengthong District. The research focused on networks in which information and financial resources were shared. Information and financial networks were selected because they are core elements in the institutional architecture of a REDD+ mechanism, and will need to be understood across different levels and scales if the aim is to implement a functioning REDD+ project.

The assumptions were that most networks, including rural-urban ties, are of an informal nature, even though in most cases formalized network structures would be needed for a transparent, accountable and legitimized REDD+ mechanism. The hypotheses were that a) transaction costs would be lower if the establishment of REDD+ builds upon existing mechanisms, and b) existing networks and social foci are currently dominated by power asymmetries, thus information flows and financial streams can be monopolized or influenced by powerful actors. It was argued that there is a need to assess in which situations a mechanism such as REDD+ could build upon existing network structures, would need to be modified, or new structures should be created to ensure equitable outcomes.

In addition, organizations that are relevant to decision-making about forests and forested land, and which affect deforestation and forest degradation in the research area were studied, particularly in relation to: (1) their positions and perceptions on REDD+ , deforestation and swiddening; (2) their location in discursive structures and involvement in activities related to REDD+ and forests; (3) their networks of information and collaboration with regard to decisions over deforestation and forest

degradation. This information is expected to provide a deeper understanding of cross-level or “vertical” influence and information flows.

Mixed and participatory methods were used. Observations, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and interviews with qualitative and quantitative questionnaires were conducted at the local (community) level, subnational (district, province) and national levels. Three levels of research were used which are described in section 4 of this document, as well as in a more detailed internal methods document.



Figure 1. Focus Group Discussion on information and resource exchange

2.2. Research questions

The following initial research questions guided the research:

1. What networks exist through which resources, and information are exchanged? When, with whom, how and why are the resources and information exchanged?
2. Can these networks (as identified under question 1) be related to the need for multi-dimensional information and financial flows of a REDD+ system (specifically for reporting (R) and benefit sharing (B))?
3. Who in the community has access to resources and information shared through the selected networks?
4. How do the socio-economic factors, migration patterns and personal relationships influence access to information and resources?
5. What are the current swidden practices of the farmers, and how have they changed over time?
6. What level of knowledge on REDD+/PES is present in the swidden communities?

7. What are the organizational perceptions of challenges and opportunities for reducing emissions through avoided deforestation and forest degradation at a subnational level?
8. What are the horizontal and vertical information, financial and influence networks related to existing and planned measures to reduce deforestation and forest degradation?
9. To what degree do formal and informal hierarchy, power constellations, discursive practices, and new (financial) incentives, influence and shape the implementation of a mechanism such as REDD+?

3. Research team, partners and schedule

3.1. Research team and key partners

The ASFCC research team in Lao PDR consisted of members from varying scientific, professional and cultural backgrounds. It included a CIFOR senior associate, senior and principal scientists, a post-doctoral fellow, Master’s student/Intern, staff and students from the National University of Laos (NUoL) (senior, mid and junior level), and staff from the REDD+ Office, Department of Forestry (DOF), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Lao PDR, and Viengthong District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO). From the scientific background there were representatives from political, social, economic and ecological disciplines.

The key partners of the ASFCC-1 research in Lao PDR were thus the above mentioned national and local institutions; DOF, DAFO and NUoL.

Table 1. The ASFCC advisory and research team in the Lao PDR

Mr. ThongEth Phayvanh	Deputy Director General, Department of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Lao PDR
Mr. Sengrath Phirasack	Director, Village Forest Management and Livelihood Division, DoF, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Dr. Kinnalone Phommasack	Deputy Head of REDD+ Office, DoF, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Mr. Keoladom Phanhtavong	Technical staff of REDD+ Office, DoF, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Dr. Lamphoune Xayvongsa	Head of Department, Faculty of Forestry, National University of Laos
Mr. Khamphet Phomphoumy	Lecturer, Faculty of Forestry, National University of Laos
Mr. Sone Sayavong	Forest Resource Management student, National University of Laos
Mr. Dalath Voneveelai	Forest Resource Management student, National University of Laos
Mr. Robert Cole	London School of Economics, CIFOR intern
Dr. Moira Moeliono	CIFOR
Dr. Maarit Kallio	CIFOR
Dr. Maria Brockhaus	CIFOR
Dr. Christine Padoch	CIFOR
Dr. Jean-Christophe Castella	Consultant

3.2. Schedule of the work

Table 2. ASFCC-1 Research Activities in Lao PDR 2012-2013

No	Activity	Place	Date	Participant	Output
1	Selection of the field sites and partner development	Luang Prabang, Lao PDR	April -May 2012	Christine Padoch & Moira Moeliono	Trip report & initial site selection conducted. Meeting potential research partners in Lao PDR
2	Partnership development in Lao PDR	Vientiane, Lao PDR	February 2013	Moira Moeliono	Terms of reference, contracts, development of MOU between CIFOR & DOF Lao PDR, partnerships strengthened between DOF Lao PDR, CIFOR and National University of Laos
3	Partnership development, field preparation & the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) conducted in Viengthong District, Lao PDR	Vientiane & Luang Prabang and Viengthong District (Sakok, Muang Kao & Houay Muay Villages)	May 2013	Moira Moeliono, Maarit Kallio, Jean-Christophe Castella, Khamphet Phomphoumy (NUoL); Sayasith Kanyathi (DAFO), Ang Her (Driver and Hmong translation)	Trip report, FGDs conducted in three villages & background information collected, key informant interviews & transect walks
4	Data management for Laos	Laos	June 2013	Khamphet Phomphoumy, Jean-Christophe Castella, Moira Moeliono, Maarit Kallio	The systems/networks for the ego-network study selected & field notes documented & Lao language report written for the FGD trip
5	Organizational surveys conducted in Laos	Laos	July 2013- March 2014	Robert Cole, Khamphet Phomphoumy (NUoL), Keoladom Phanthavong (DOF), (Moira Moeliono)	Organizational questionnaires conducted, transcription of English language interviews started
6	Ego-network interviews in Laos	Laos	September	Robert Cole, Maarit Kallio, Khamphet Phomphoumy (NUoL), Keoladom Phanthavong (DOF), Somlina Sommithath (DAFO), Phet (driver, cook and additional logistics)	Ego-network questionnaires conducted in Sakok and Muang Khao Villages (transcription to start from January), trip report

No	Activity	Place	Date	Participant	Output
7	Ego-network interviews in Laos			Robert Cole, Khamphet Phomphoumy (NUoL), Keoladom Phanhtavong (DOF), Somlina Sommithath (DAFO), Sone Sayavong (NUoL), Dalath Voneveelai (NUoL), Phet (driver, cook and additional logistics)	Ego-network questionnaires conducted in Muang Khao & Houay Muay Villages, (transcriptions and translation to be started from January), trip report
8	Database development	Vientiane, Laos	November onwards	Robert Cole, Khamphet Phomphoumy (NUoL), Sone Sayavong (NUoL), Dalath Voneveelai (NUoL)	Arrangements in place for transcription, translation, data management, work on-going from January
9	Organizational surveys in the Province & District level	Viengthong District & Houaphan Province	December 2013	Robert Cole, Khamphet Phomphoumy (NUoL), Keoladom Phanhtavong (DOF), Keo (driver and additional logistics)	Trip report, surveys conducted, for transcription from January
10	Finalize the organizational surveys in Vientiane, Lao PDR	Vientiane, Lao PDR	January-March 2014	Robert Cole, Khamphet Phomphoumy (NUoL), Keoladom Phanhtavong (DOF)	Final report, surveys conducted, transcriptions on-going
11	Reporting back & feedback from the partners & planning for the ASFCC Phase 2	Vientiane, Lao PDR	February 2014	CIFOR team & Laotian key partners	Presentations, feedback notes & final activity report for the ASFCC Phase 1

4. Methods and tools

4.1. Site selection

Site selection was based on the following criteria:

1. Swiddening is a dominant land use in the community
2. Significant forest cover is present in the village area (including mature forest)
3. There are other specific characteristics of interest (e.g. presence of maize plantations as an external driver of change, proximity of a natural park etc.)
4. Village is a study site of the I-REDD Project, or in the same area as the I-REDD Project sites, which allows for improved synergies between the two projects, minimizing double work done, and strengthening the use of data collected by the two projects.

In addition, we also considered ethnic diversity in our selection, with a preference for villages that were multi-ethnic or consisted of ethnic minorities. The three study locations are Ban Sakok, close to Viengthong district center; Houay Muay, close to Muang Xone (new administrative center), and Muang Kao (see section 5 for full description of study sites).

4.2. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) (Level I)

In total 9 Focus Group Discussions (FGD), differentiated by gender and age (women, men and young people), were conducted in the three selected villages in Viengthong District. The FGDs were conducted in order to get a basic understanding on:

1. The environmental, economic and social characteristics of each site.
2. The existing resource and information exchange systems and embedded networks (within the community and beyond), including when, with whom, how and why the resources are exchanged.

A 'system' in this study was defined along the following dimensions: (a) resources that are exchanged (money, information, skills, material); (b) actors (who is exchanging resources); (c) purpose (why are the resources exchanged); (d) social foci and tools facilitating the exchange (where, when and how the exchange is done). As such systems can be identified also through the identification of institutions with their structure or rules, actors, resources, relations and exchanges. These systems and the embedded networks were the bases for the follow-up ego-network surveys as described in the following section (4.3).

A participatory approach and a set of tools were used during each FGD. The specific steps followed were:

1. Historical axis was used to understand what main past events in the community's history have influenced and altered their economic situation, well-being (economic and social), and land-use; and what main impacts resulted from these events.
2. Discussion and visualization on what resources (information, financial, material and skills) are exchanged within the community and with outside actors. What tools, events, social foci facilitated this exchange? When and how often do these interactions take place, and for which main purpose(s)?
3. Identification based on these concrete examples of what resource exchange "systems" exist in the community.

4. Ranking the importance of each system identified (using visualization and verbalization techniques) for the community's social and economic well-being. (Ordinal ranking is used, but more than one system can have the same importance.)
5. Discussion and visualization of some of the selected networks more in detail.

Each FGD took approximately two hours to conduct. Material used included: big & small papers, stickers, tape, markers, snacks & tea & coffee. Each FGD was recorded in order to be able to check unclear points. In addition to this report, a more detailed trip report has been prepared based on the FGD trip. Also notes and photos were taken during the FGDs, and the raw material stored for future needs.

4.3. Ego-network questionnaires (Level II)

Drawing from the information gained from the FGDs, the household level ego-network survey sought to gather data aimed at answering the following questions:

1. How are resources and information exchanged within and beyond swidden communities?
2. Who in the community has access to resources and information shared through the selected networks?
3. How do socio-economic factors, migration patterns and personal relationships influence access to information and resources?
4. Can the selected networks (see below) be related to the needs for multi-dimensional information and financial flows in a REDD+ system (specifically for reporting and benefit sharing of REDD+)?
5. What are the current swidden practices of the farmers, and how have they changed over time?
6. What level of knowledge on REDD+/PES is present in the swidden communities?

Based on the FGDs, the three most strongly related and/or strongly influential networks over potential REDD+ activity in the study villages were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Within the system/network there are links to different actor groups that would be/are relevant for the implementation of REDD+ (e.g. GOs, NGOs, donor agencies, etc.).
2. The system/network includes benefit or finance sharing elements, as benefit sharing (monetary and non-monetary) will be part of a REDD+ design.
3. The system/network has a link to government agencies or other actors that conduct monitoring or reporting activities such as collection of statistical information, since an MRV mechanism for REDD+ will have reporting structures.
4. The system is related to land use change (especially related to changes in forest cover). The similarity with a REDD+ mechanism would be that REDD+ intends to influence forest related land use change.

There were a limited amount of external actors operating in the area that have included any monitoring or reporting in their activities. Thus the systems selected for the detailed ego-network surveys were chosen on the basis of fulfilling the above mentioned criteria as well as possible, but not all of them in all cases. The selected systems, and their relation to the selection criteria are described in the Table 3.

Table 3. Description of the selected systems for the ego-network study in Lao PDR

Name of system	Criteria 1 Actors (potential)	Criteria 2 Benefit sharing	Criteria 3 Monitoring & reporting	Criteria 4 Land use change
1. Livelihood development and poverty reduction projects	Community leaders and residents (membership dependent on the nature/criteria of the project), government and international organization staff at national and subnational levels	Information and production inputs for livestock and crops, credit, repayments and income, hard infrastructure	Potential monitoring via village committee, residents and project visits (data yet to be analysed)	Contribution to strengthening permanent agriculture/alternative livelihoods to reduce overharvesting/conversion of forest
2. Maize contract farming	Cross-border, provincial and district traders, provincial and district government, community leaders, residents	Information and production inputs, hard infrastructure in form of dirt road construction for harvesting, raw product, credit, repayments and income	Subnational government agricultural data, traders' accounting	Conversion of upland rice and available redundant land (e.g. boundary forest between neighbouring cultivated areas) to maize, marketization of lands that were previously partially (or in some cases wholly) for subsistence
3. Nam Et Phou Louey National Protected Area (NPA)	Community leaders and residents, government and international organization staff at national and subnational levels, NPA staff	Information, occasional employment, ecological benefits of regenerating protected area	Monitoring via NPA and government structures, project visits, research, including some involvement by villagers	Direct regulation of access and subsequent regeneration of protected areas, swidden practice altered by reduced fallow cycles

Ego-network questionnaires were conducted with the household heads of 40 randomly selected households per community to the extent possible. Where household heads were absent for work or other purposes, replacements were commonly members of the village committee.

The survey questionnaire included the following distinct sections:

1. Basic socio-economic attributes of the informant and household, including any formal roles and organizational memberships that the respondent may have
2. Household ties related to each selected system/network
3. Household links to urban centers and other migration destinations
4. Experiences related to REDD+ and PES (Payments for Ecosystem Services)
5. Swidden practices.

The main hypothesis tested was that specific socio-economic factors and migration experiences, as well as kin ties to specific people determine actors' access to existing informal and formal structures across communities, between them and in rural-urban interactions. This access to informal and

formal structures and networks influences the community member's access to information and resources.

The field team digitally recorded all household interviews for transcription and translation, as well as taking detailed notes during the process. Key informant interviews were also carried out in addition to the household sample, including village leaders, farmers and traders. These were also recorded where possible, while in some cases notes were taken instead.

Participation in the three selected networks unsurprisingly varied significantly by location. Households in Ban Sakok are more likely to be linked to livelihood development and poverty reduction projects owing to the large number of projects that have operated in this location, although differentiation between projects was often unclear, and most were associated with the Poverty Reduction Fund. Meanwhile such projects have less reach in Muang Kao by comparison due to its remoteness, and in Houay Muay extension activities have aimed to support local livelihoods following the resettlement of the village in the late 1990s. All villages are strongly affected by maize contract farming, with most respondents involved in this network in some way, although the level of benefit depends on proximity to major collection points, the ability to mill and transport the harvest and access to sufficient additional land to provide for household consumption. Variations and determining factors within the study sites for participation in networks will be identified more fully in forthcoming analysis. Further site descriptions can be found in section 5, below.

4.4. Organizational network survey (Level III)

An organizational network survey has been carried out since July 2013 at national level in Vientiane capital and subnational levels in the Huaphan provincial capital of Samneua and Viengthong district to study the following initial research questions:

1. What are the organizational perceptions of challenges and opportunities for reducing emissions through avoided deforestation and forest degradation at national and subnational levels?
2. What are the horizontal and vertical information, financial and influence networks related to existing and planned measures to reduce deforestation and forest degradation?
3. To what degree do formal and informal hierarchy, power constellations, discursive practices, and new (financial) incentives, influence and shape the implementation of a mechanism such as REDD+?

The survey was administered to high ranking representatives of pre-identified organizations and actors ranging from local government and private sector representatives, to those of national governmental and international non-governmental organizations. After interviewing the initial set of pre-defined actors, snowball sampling was used. The relevant actors and organizations selected for the study were those who: (a) were most influential in making decisions and implementing activities that affect forests or forested areas; or (b) distributed information relevant to forests and forested land in the research area. The actors were defined by a review of project reports, administrative hierarchies etc. and verified during an initial scoping trip in the research area. The selected actors were of several different categories (private sector, government, INGOs, research, unions and civil society organizations) and active at various levels (national, provincial and district). Actors could also be specific departments or subgroups in a larger organization (e.g. specific forest department units). The aim was to have a highly ranked official or expert representing the organization during the interviews.

The organizational questionnaire had three distinct sections. The first section identified the type and some specific characteristics of the organization, including their major organizational interests. The second section identified actors' positions regarding policy challenges and opportunities. The third section focused on networking among the identified organizations. In the third section, the

questions referred to the influence of other organizations, exchange of information, sources of scientific information, organizations with opposing positions, and organizations with whom there is collaboration. Most interviews were recorded and are in the process of transcription and translation. Several respondents would not permit interviews to be recorded, in which case detailed notes were also taken. The data will be analyzed using qualitative methods and social network analysis, while some initial observations are presented in section 6.

5. Description of study sites

5.1. Final selection and locations of ego-networks study sites

The research sites in Viengthong district for the focus group discussions and ego-networks survey were selected based on the criteria described in section 4.1. In addition, one major reason for selecting Viengthong as the study district was the existence of a natural park (Nam Et – Phou Louey National Protected Area) in the area. Furthermore some REDD+ and PES projects had been planned or implemented in the area, but Viengthong district was still developing in the implementation of these projects. Yet, many relevant questions remained to be studied before such projects could be implemented in an effective, efficient and equitably way. In addition, as mentioned in section 4.1, another project CIFOR was partnering, namely I-REDD, was operating in the area. The ASFCC project was planned to be implemented in the same area as I-REDD in order to diminish double work and improve collaboration among these two projects and partners.

After visiting several villages in the area, three study villages were selected to enable comparison between sites with different ethnic groups and different levels of access to different services, although the number of villages was limited by the time and resources available. The selected villages were Sakok, Muang Kao and Houay Muay (Table 4).

Table 4. Description of the selected study villages in Viengthong district, Houaphan province, Lao PDR.

Village name	Number of households	Number of inhabitants	Main Ethnic group
Ban Sakok	64	335	Majority Khmu, minority Lao Loum
Muang Kao	85	524	Majority Tai Daeng, minority Lao Loum
Houay Muay	147	1135	Hmong



Figure 2. The research villages in the Viengthong District, Houaphan Province, Northern Laos.



Figure 3. The location of the Houaphan Province and the research sites in Lao PDR.

5.2. Description of Sakok Village

Ban Sakok (Sakok village) is located in the core of a protected area established in 2000 (Nam Et – Phou Louey National Protected Area). Since then the use of land and forests by the villagers has been severely restricted. The main land use practice and livelihood of the people in Ban Sakok, however, remains a combination of upland shifting cultivation (swiddening) of rice and paddy. Maize is increasingly planted in the same upland rotational systems, expanding in wide areas of land formerly used for rice and buffer areas between cultivated plots. The village area is surrounded by secondary forest, and different kinds of agroforestry systems and gardens. Additional income is gained by selling NTFPs and maize.

To compensate for restrictions caused by the national park, as well as to address long-term poverty affecting the area, Ban Sakok has received numerous development projects aiming to reduce poverty via alternative income earning options for the people, while decreasing the need for clearing new land from the protected area. In fact, so many projects providing different subsidies had visited and worked in the village that it was hard for the villagers to distinguish among them. The alternative income earning options and rural development initiatives of these projects included for example livestock management, weaving, improvements in schools and education, health services and infrastructure. The close location of the village to the road in theory provides relatively good access to markets and other services, but villagers remain somewhat dependent on middlemen to collect produce to trade in the district center (Viengthong, located about one and a half hours away by car on a good paved road) and beyond.

At the time of the focus group discussion (May 2013), Ban Sakok comprised 64 households and 335 inhabitants from 2 ethnic groups: Lao Loum (8 families) and Khmu (65 families).

5.3. Description of Muang Kao Village

Muang Kao is an old village, established in 1870. The village is located in the buffer zone of the national protected area. In Muang Kao the main land use practice and livelihoods of the people were similar to Sakok, namely some upland shifting cultivation (swiddening) of rice combined with lowland paddy. Maize was also introduced in the village in 2004, and is widely grown although not to the extent of Ban Sakok relative to available land. The villagers also collected NTFPs from the surrounding forests, had several types of vegetables and fruit trees in agroforestry systems, as well as some cash crops (in addition to maize) such as chili.

Several poverty reduction projects had also provided different sorts of subsidies for some of the people, especially livestock, as well as hard infrastructure in the form of administrative buildings and improved water sources. The village remains, however, not so well connected as Sakok village and still lacks grid electricity. It is presently reached by a 5 hour car journey from Viengthong district center on a poor road that is being upgraded to a sealed road over the next three years. While the remote location has restricting effects on market access and new income earning options, many villagers were better off than those in relatively accessible Ban Sakok. One reason for this appeared to be the ability to sell produce directly to buyers in Muang Xone (halfway between Muang Kao and Viengthong district and soon to be a new district in its own right), thereby gaining higher prices including for maize. The situation may change quite quickly due to the new road that is being built, or in some parts expanded, through the village that will greatly ease access to Viengthong district center (and thus all the way back to Luang Prabang), and the Vietnamese border to the east.

5.4. Description of Houay Muay Village

Houay Muay was created in 1997 by merging three villages that were relocated under the government program to move isolated hamlets to new locations nearer roads and administrative centers. The dominant ethnic group in the village is Hmong. At the time of the relocation this village consisted of 37 households and 332 people. Today the village consists of 147 households (1135 people), which makes for a nearly 240% increase in the population during the last 16 years (1997-2013).

The relocation of the remote villages significantly changed these people's lives. Access to the road provided several new income earning opportunities, and access to schools, health dispensaries and electricity also improved the quality of life. During FGDs, the villagers divided the most important events and their impacts into the ones that happened as they were relocated and the subsequent events, such as new income earning options and access to modern technologies. Most of the people (70%) in the village lived in a permanent house, even though initially, when the people were moved to the new location, none had a permanent house. The construction of permanent housing was booming in 2001-2004, mainly funded by selling livestock.

The main land use system and livelihood in the former Houay Muay location was shifting cultivation (swiddening) of rice, mostly in the old locations (sanam or remote production areas) of the villages resettled to form present day Houay Muay. Many households in the new location still have some household members staying in the sanams working on the swiddens at various points of the year, transporting the output to new Houay Muay and nearby Muang Xone to trade. Thus the village was characterized by multi-locality. Often some school age children stayed in the new village to go to school, while the parents and non-school age household members were working in the sanams. This caused several problems, as even very small children were sometimes left to take care of themselves and even their younger siblings. The villagers did not, however, consider this as a real problem, and were quite used to their life in different locations, although it was pointed out that inadequate land supply in the new location was a factor in the ongoing use of the sanams. Mobile phones had improved the communication between these locations, while the dirt road leading from new Houay Muay, via the sanam areas, to the provincial capital Samneua is being upgraded prior to paving, which will cut journey times to once complete.

The villagers also had paddy land close to the road that was allocated to them after resettlement, as well as collecting some NTFPs and planting vegetables and trees in different systems. A valley area was also allocated to the resettled villagers, which now contains mixed crops including cassava, maize and banana. Livestock was considered as the most important income earning option for the people, as is traditional for Hmong people. The national protected area was not initially mentioned during any of the three FGDs, and was only mentioned while really probing on the subject. The presence of the NPA was not considered as a problem, the villagers claimed they helped conserving it, and in return they also received some poverty reduction and development projects in the village, such as for livestock and weaving.

6. Initial results and discussion

6.1. Progress of the research

Most of the planned field work for the first phase of the ASFCC research project has been completed during 2012-2013. Workshops, communication, data management, and initial data analyses took a place between January-March 2014. During that period further national-level organizational interviews were also carried out in order to offer more complete sample for the organizational study. The second phase of the ASFCC project starts simultaneously in January 2014 and continue for 3 years (until 2016). In the second phase more detailed research will be conducted on food security, migration and carbon stocks in swidden land-scape and communities in Viengthong District.

The field work that took a place in Lao PDR during phase 1 was as follows: 9 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) have been conducted in three communities (women, men, and young people) in April-May 2013. The data from the FGDs was further used for selecting the networks/systems for the detailed household level surveys that were started in September 2013, and were finalized in November-December 2013. As described in section 4.3, the networks where local people exchanged resources or information that were selected for the detailed ego-network surveys included: (a) livelihood development and poverty reduction projects; (b) maize contract farming; (c) and Nam Et Phou Louey NPA. Farmers were also interviewed on their socio-economic characteristics, experiences on migration, land use practices and knowledge of REDD+ and PES.

In addition, organizational surveys were conducted in Vientiane, Viengthong district and Samneua capital of Huaphan Province from June 2013 until March 2014. To date interviews have been conducted with 32 organizations, including government organizations of different levels, INGOs, private businesses and local level representatives. The following section (6.2) presents some initial results and points from the field work conducted during 2013.

6.2. Tentative findings

6.2.1 Ego-networks survey

Embedded within the networks examined in the household surveys, three main forms of social network can be identified at the village level:

1. The traditional horizontal (kinship and neighborhood) network
2. The top-down administrative network exemplified by the creation of the NE-PL national protected area
3. The bottom-up consultation process that was developed by the Poverty Reduction Fund and other projects that prioritize issues with villagers.

These three kinds of network are interconnected with village heads and committees playing a very important role, linking vertical and horizontal networks as information brokers and resource providers, and as the focal points of most activity at village level. In terms of the function and impact of the three selected networks, maize contract farming, driven as it is by huge cross-border demand, would appear to be the most efficient of the three and with the broadest impacts on people and land. While further analysis is needed, the livelihood development and NPA networks show structures through which REDD+ could function, the question remains whether/how these can offer avenues for broad participation at community level. The comparison with the market-driven maize network meanwhile offers means to consider the types of process REDD+ is competing against if it is to incentivize maintenance of standing forest by poor upland farmers.

6.2.2 Organizational survey

To date interviews have been conducted with 32 organizations as summarized in table 5, below.

Table 5. Summary of organizational survey interviews to date

Level	Organization category	Number of Organizations
National	Government	6
	International organizations/ donors	11
	Private sector	4
	Unions/civil society organizations	2
Province	Government	3
	International organizations/ projects	2
District	Government	3
	Private sector	1
Total		32

A key immediate observation on the data as it stands is the bias towards international organizations at the central level, which is reflective of the high workload of all government departments, making appointments difficult to schedule. This will be corrected over January to March 2014 however, to ensure greater balance in national versus international perspectives. Further input will also be

sought from the private sector and civil society, while recognizing that the latter is not highly active in Laos.

When asked to summarize drivers of deforestation and degradation in Laos and/or their project focal area, many respondents referred to the same key drivers, but with diverse additional or underlying drivers as demonstrated in figures 5 and 6 below (note that these are drawn from available transcripts to date at the national level only, and do not represent the entire sample).

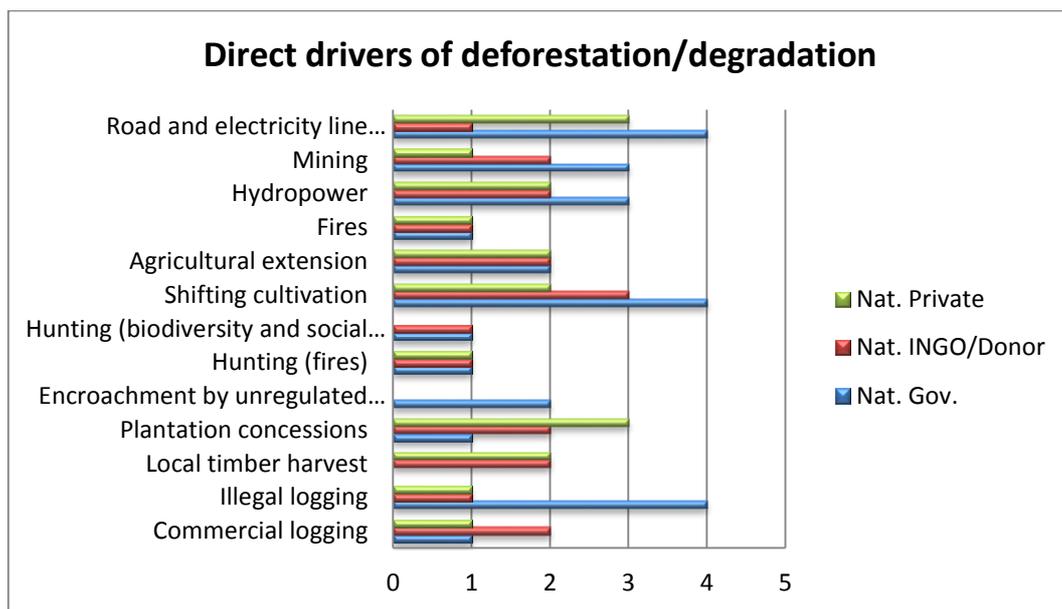


Figure 4. Organizational perceptions on direct drivers of deforestation and degradation

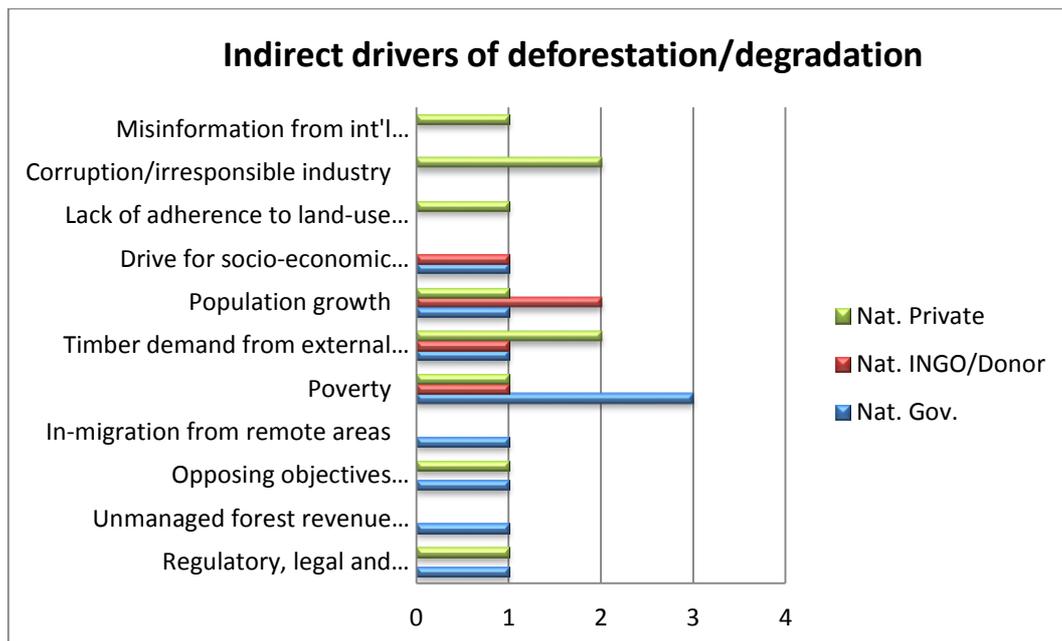


Figure 5. Organizational perceptions on indirect drivers of deforestation and degradation

When considering resource/information/power networks active in the REDD+/forestry policy landscape in Laos, the most commonly cited central actors are the Department of Forestry (DoF) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Department of Forest Resource Management (DFRM) of the recently established Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. These two agencies are responsible for the forest estate in Laos, in terms of production forest in the case of DoF, and protection and conservation forest in the case of the recently formed DFRM, which hence holds the majority mandate for REDD+. Potential organizational networks for REDD+ in Laos are thus in a kind of transition as DFRM begins to take on a majority role, while DoF continues to be supported by the REDD+ Office on matters relating to production forest. Once the restructure is complete, networks will extend from these agencies from central to district unit levels.

Apart from this transition of organizational networks, some respondents also pointed out divergences between those working on forest policy and the major influencers of deforestation, particularly the gap between forestry sector agencies and those at provincial and district level with capability to grant land concessions or direct land and resource use in other ways, effectively bypassing policy. Finding ways to bring these seemingly separate networks together is an obvious important step for any potential REDD+ project. Further points emerging from the available data to date relate to sometimes opposing goals and realities in terms of the national and international views and objectives on REDD+, with deficits particularly in terms of technical capacity that may require long-term processes of change to address. Meanwhile a certain level of fatigue is also present in terms of the technical demands of REDD+, unfulfilled funding and lack of functioning pilots as yet (although some projects are more advanced than others). The capacity issue seems amplified at provincial and district levels, where some key actors that would potentially be directly involved with implementation do not feel a high enough level of understanding on REDD+ at this time.

7. Conclusions

Between 2012-2013 the ASFCC project has made a significant effort to collect quality data in Lao PDR via Focus Group Discussions, household and organizational surveys that have been conducted by the team. The data management and analyses is underway, and the final results of the research will be available in 2014. The tentative results presented in this report underline the importance of understanding local livelihoods, land management systems and changes that are underway to make the right policies and implementation strategies for REDD+ or other programs with the dual intention of decreasing deforestation and forest degradation and improving local livelihoods. They also point to what may prove to be important divergences in terms of priorities, goals and what are felt to be the main challenges and opportunities among actors in the REDD+ landscape, which will be better understood with deeper analysis once all data are available.

The research results will contribute significant knowledge related to how potential REDD+ projects or other projects aiming to improve local livelihoods and diminish deforestation and forest degradation could be implemented effectively, efficiently and equitably. This is an important consideration in the Lao context as poverty alleviation and decreasing deforestation and forest degradation are high on the development agenda in Laos, in which numerous trade-offs are present that can be considered more fully via better understanding of the actors involved at different levels, and how local communities might effectively engage in REDD+ schemes.

8. ASFCC Phase 2 and next steps

Till March 2014 ASFCC Phase 1 will be finalized.. Phase 2 of the ASFCC project will continue working and further strengthening the knowledge especially on food security, migration and carbon stocks in swidden communities in Viengthong district; all important aspects for successful implementation of REDD+ or PES projects.