

## Project Brief

### 1. Project Outline

**Title: Mekong Region Land Governance**

**Country focus:** Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam

The Project office (Project Implementation Unit, PIU) is located in Laos.

**Project objective:**

Land is at the center of development in many countries, however along with this there are many challenges and Land governance is at the center of development challenges in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV), particularly for family farmers. Governments are presently revising their land policies in order to face these challenges. The project aims to assist the emergence of more favorable policies and practices and to strengthen the effectiveness of concerned stakeholders through cross-border learning, multi-stakeholder dialogue and regional cooperation.

**Funding Partners:** Switzerland, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC (USD 10m)

### 2. Project Benefits

The project benefits a wide range of stakeholders by establishing:

- A multi-stakeholder platform for **technical & financial assistance** for **capacity building, learning, networking & practical collaboration**
- Support to existing national land working groups
- Support to stakeholders to engage in cross-country exchange and learning at the regional level
- Access to **global expertise**
- Comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible **information & analysis** to the Government, as well as to Swiss, German, regional and other international land-related projects and stakeholders
- **Quick Disbursement Facility (QDF)** providing short-term funding to address specific stakeholder needs and windows-of-opportunity
- **Innovation Facility (IF)** providing medium-term funding for local, national and regional initiatives and projects.

### 3. Strategic orientation

Starting around 2000, governments in the CLMV countries began encouraging the conversion of land into capital, mostly in the form of long term concessions for industrial agriculture, mining, and hydropower, as well as road and industrial infrastructure. The large areas of land concerned and the pace at which land use is changing have resulted in family farmer tenure insecurity as well as significant environmental changes (increased deforestation and conversion of natural forests into

plantations). There is also a causal link between weak land tenure security and limited achievement towards several Millennium Development Goals (e.g. MDGs 1, 4 and 5).

These developments lead to a reduction of the land area available for family agriculture, to a significant reduction in access to natural resources that function as food safety nets (especially non-timber forest products and aquatic food), and increase vulnerability. Some farmer families are facing weakened food security and reduced income, and an increasing number are driven out of agriculture. Fewer jobs are created by concessions than the number of farmers who are displaced. The situation is made even more difficult when families do not receive fair compensation. Furthermore, governments do not always receive appropriate concession, lease fees and other revenues to maximize socio-economic benefits for poverty reduction. The Lao PDR government has decided on a moratorium on new concessions in order to conduct its own evaluation of the benefits and risks of concessions, comparing it e.g. with other options for agricultural intensification such as contract farming.

The *Voluntary Guidelines (VG)* on the responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (2012) represent an overall consensus and will be used as a reference and bench mark for this project. The project will strengthen the implementation of the *Voluntary Guidelines* in the CLMV countries, e.g. through specific capacity building measures with project partners.

There are a number of initiatives to improve family farmers' tenure security by a wide variety of stakeholders: government officials and elected representatives, private sector companies, development partners, farmer organizations and national and international NGOs. There are presently few initiatives to learn from and support each other, especially across borders in the Mekong region. This is where a regional project approach, complementing and supporting country level initiatives, will add particular value.

#### **4. Project Framework**

The project aims to strengthen the effectiveness of the reform movement, through two key strategies:

1. Supporting concerned stakeholders to be more effective, through peer learning, alliance building, and linking with regional and global initiatives.
2. Providing support to improved policies implementation, institutions and land governance practices so that farmer families have secure and equitable access to and control over agricultural land, forest and fisheries.

Although land use change and governance are strongly influenced by neighboring countries (not only China, but especially Vietnam and Thailand, and also Malaysia), there currently are no forums dedicated to land governance on GMS (Greater Mekong Subregion) or ASEAN level. The absence of this regional level land tenure discussion and policy forum is seen as a necessary tool for building more effective land governance for family farmers in the region.

The blueprint for the ASEAN Economic Community (ACE 2015) as well as the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community Blueprint is grounded in a commitment to social justice and rights based approaches. There is, thus, space to raise the profile and necessity of embedding secure tenure and good land governance within the blueprints, agendas and institutions of ASEAN.

## **5. Project Strategy and Implementation**

The project is currently conceived with a duration of 8 years (4+4). The project does not intend to create new structures, but instead aims to strengthen existing stakeholders and links with networks and initiatives. The qualitative changes and impacts expected to have been achieved after 8 years are as follows:

- Trustworthy, publicly available information regarding land tenure
- Representative, inclusive regional multi-stakeholder dialogues
- Functional learning alliances and exchange platforms
- Recognition of the Voluntary Guidelines as the benchmark for land governance reform
- Farmers know their tenure and use rights and how to claim and protect them
- Assessment of the gaps in tenure security & use rights, including of women and ethnic groups.