

## Next step to better forest management on the local level

### First Village Forest Management Agreement signed in Houaphan province

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In the past, the government of Laos only gave limited financial support to Village Forest Management in the uplands of Laos. But with the emergence of REDD+ and increased opportunities for performance-based payments for sustainable forest management, the situation is changing. Now the first Village Forest Management Agreement has been signed.

In 2014, the Department of Forestry (DoF) estimated that operational forest management systems on the basis of management plans existed only in less than ten upland villages countrywide. Illustrating that despite its high level of relevance according to policy and strategy documents such as the National Socio-Economic Development Plan, operational village forest management systems in upland areas were still the exception.



The GIZ Climate Protection through Avoided Deforestation (CliPAD) project supports different elements to facilitate the process towards a functioning forest management system on the local level. It promotes the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) approach, Land Use Planning and Village Forest Management activities. CliPAD is intensively supporting local forest management systems in 70 villages in Houaphan province and finally, the efforts shows results.

End of September, the first Village Forest Management Agreement (VilFoMA) had been signed in Ban Lou, Xam Neua district. Village authorities from the Village Security, Forestry Unit, Land Use and Forest Management Committee, Elderlies, Youth Union and Women's Union participated in the signing ceremony. Local authorities such as the District Vice-Governor as well as representatives from the District Office of Natural Resources and Environment (DoNRE) and from the District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) also attended.



The ViFoMA scheme is a framework covering all generalised contractual issues related to village forest management. It is a binding agreement between the village and district authorities which sets out terms and conditions. Furthermore, it outlines both parties' rights, benefits and the agreed incentive obligations in relation to village forest management and conservation.

Adhering to the ViFoMA is supposed to result in a more sustainable use, protection and restoration of village forests and includes payments to make participation more attractive and reward performances.

In a first step of developing a Village Forest Management Agreement, national, provincial and district staff from both DoF and Department of Forest Resource Management (DFRM) line agencies jointly developed village forest management guidelines adapted to the local situation and capacities. The village forest management planning process collects, collates and analyses data on forest resources, conditions and dynamics to create a village forest management plan which stipulates the specific management activities.

Based on the assessment's results, the villagers and district authorities discussed the 5-year Village Forest Management Plan. It covers all the activities to be undertaken by the villagers to improve the management of their forest areas. It also serves as the basis for the final ViFoMA.

The ViFoMA is signed between the village and the district authorities in order to officially conclude the management responsibilities of the village for all their forest areas, in line with the forest law and other relevant legal documents. Furthermore, it creates a link from these activities to payments being made to the Village Development Fund.



Annual village forest operational plans break the 5-year plan down to concrete activities done over the year, including a budget plan for each planned activity. Such plans contain information on the specific forest zone, activities being implemented by whom and when exactly, planned output, who supervises and controls as well as associated costs.

In a general village meeting the villagers are requested to sign the minutes of meeting to either show their approval or disapproval of the annual village forest operational plan. After a general discussion and amendment of the annual operational plan, the document is signed and approved by the head of the village, representatives of the Village Land Use and Forest Management Committee as well as the district authorities. The approval is valid for one year and the budget is being transferred to the Village Development Fund account.

CliPAD is currently supporting provincial and district staff in the development of Village Forest Management Plans and ViFoMAs in other target villages in Houameuang and Xam Neua district, Houaphan province.

### **Further Information**

CliPAD project description

<http://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/17463.html>

GIZ Laos' engagement against climate change

[http://www.giz.de/en/downloads\\_els/Climate\\_Change\\_impact.pdf](http://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/Climate_Change_impact.pdf)

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