

Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region 3 (ILM-MR 3)

Land-related policies and practices in the Mekong Region are being improved to give smallholder farmers more secure land tenure and safeguard livelihood

Context

Rapid social-economic transformations in the Mekong Region in Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam have resulted in significant changes in land use patterns and increasing pressure on natural resources. However, this growth has not been uniform, and many rural communities, particularly smallholder farmers, have been left behind. These communities frequently face critical challenges in securing their land and resource rights, crucial to their livelihoods and cultural identities.

The legal and policy frameworks on land governance in the Mekong Region present opportunities for smallholder to protect their land ownership and use rights. However, regulations are often complex and contain gaps or even contradicting clauses. In some cases, laws and regulations are inconsistent or poorly enforced, resulting in corruption and other abuses of power. This has resulted in significant land grabbing, displacement, and marginalization of smallholder farmers and other vulnerable groups. In this context, “Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region” (ILM-MR 3) supports the promotion of better land governance policies and practices, particularly emphasizing the recognition of customary tenure and regulating responsible agricultural investment.

Objective

Smallholder farms have secured and equitable access to and control over agricultural land and forests in the Mekong Region.



Land conflict resolution by using map in investment concession
Kasi District, Vientiane Province. Photo: ©GIZ/Khankeo Oupravanh

Project Title	Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region 3 (ILM-MR)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Co-funded by	The Government of Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Government of Luxembourg.
Project regions	Lao PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia
Leading executing agency	Land Equity International/GRET
Duration	2023– 2025

Approach

This project is a contribution to the Mekong Region Land Governance Project (MRLG). MRLG is jointly funded by the Government of Switzerland, through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) with additional co-financing from Germany and the Government of Luxembourg.

MRLG aims to contribute to the improvements of policies and practices regarding land tenure security for smallholder farmers through working with different alliances consisting of members from government agencies, civil society and academia. Alliance members are supported in developing evidence-based policy recommendations, fostering policy dialogues and piloting activities on community level.

The alliance follow regional or national-level workstreams to facilitate improvements towards policy and practices across two thematic areas:

- Customary Tenure
- Responsible Agricultural Investment

In most cases, influencing policy focuses on improving laws, implementation decrees and regulatory mechanisms. In cases where there is a disconnect between policy and effective implementation in the

field, practice influencing will focus on improving the effective implementation of the policy at the local administration level and strengthening of communities so that they know their rights and how to defend them.

Impact

The third phase of the project began in January 2023 and is building upon the results of the first and second phase.

In the field of Customary Tenure Recognition, piloting of various approaches of community mapping, land use planning, conflict resolution, and land surveying in Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam directly benefited 80 rural communities (over 70,000 persons). In addition, policy changes were supported in Lao PDR in the recognition of customary tenure rights in the three forest categories. In Vietnam the development of an official handbook on Guidelines on Community Forest Management was supported, and on the regional level of ASEAN Guidelines on the Recognition of Customary Tenure in Forested Landscapes were formally adopted in October 2022.

In the field of Responsibility Agriculture Investment (RAI), the project created a number of research-based knowledge management products, such as on different models of agricultural investments and their impacts on smallholder farmers. Several policy recommendations were derived from this and shared with relevant stakeholders. More specifically, cooperation with private sector investors resulted in seven of them integrating international RAI standards into their procedures.

Phase 3 of the project will build on these achievements and further support and consolidate ongoing change processes.

In Lao PDR, with the support of BMZ since January 2024, the project has been closely working with the Ministry of Planning and Investment, along with the provincial and district-level departments, to promote tenure security in land investments, contract farming, land lease, and the implementation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in investment project. A total of 13 companies have been actively engaged in implementing activities aligned with the RAI principle.

Gender Mainstreaming and Land Management

A strong correlation between improving women's land rights and reducing poverty has been found. Women often face discrimination in both traditional and formal land tenure systems.

The ILM-MR project ensures that funded project and activities specifically target vulnerable groups. A crucial element in securing land tenure for small-scale farmers and ethnic minorities in this region is to ensure that women have secure and equitable rights to land.

Together with this, in response to this situation, most of the activities currently funded by the project are targeted at poor and vulnerable groups, including women.



About GIZ Laos

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Please visit www.giz.de/laos for further information.

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Other important links <https://www.mrlg.org/laos/>

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