The Government of Sweden has provided technical assistance to the Government of Lao PDR in the Natural Resources Sector since 1977. Until the mid 1980s the assistance focused on support to the Department of Forestry and two State Forest Enterprises. From 1985 assistance was expanded to include support for the establishment of a Forestry Training Organization including the Forestry Technician School at Mouang Mai. In the late 1980s the Lao Swedish cooperation was further expanded to cover shifting cultivation stabilization and nature conservation. During the first half of the 1990s the cooperation gradually changed to institutional building/strengthening of the Department of Forestry at the centre and in selected Provinces.

The co-operation is based on the premise that national ownership of bilateral programmes will contribute significantly to sustainability after the programmes have been completed.

In more recent years the programme has addressed sustainable land use aspects in the village development context with the view that community participation in partnership with government services will enhance the potential for sustainable management of forest and agricultural resources.

The Phase IV of the Lao Swedish Forestry Programme (LSFP) (1996-2001) has concentrated on three aspects of institutional building; competence development, model development and research management. The development efforts have covered a process of formulating, improving and disseminating models (methods and procedures) in four main areas including Participatory Village Development and Sustainable Land Use, Participatory National Bio-diversity Conservation Area Management, Natural Resources Management and institution Building. Monitoring and gender mainstreaming have been incorporated as cross cutting efforts in the model development work. The development activities have been performed in partnership with national, provincial and district administrations and with village communities in response to Lao policies.

This document is one in a series of resulting documents, which have been produced in both Lao and English languages to assist and provide knowledge and ideas to personnel responsible for policy, planning and implementation of agriculture and forestry development programmes. It contains lessons and experiences learnt during the programme. I encourage the personnel of departments and agencies to study and assess the content of the documents and apply the relevant parts depending on local conditions.

I wish to commend the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for its continued support during four phases of technical assistance to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the LSFP personnel and advisers, who have made a major contribution this development and documentation.
ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

1. Intended Audience of this Document

Policy makers, programme planners at central and provincial levels and the donor community

2. Explanation of the System

Natural Resources Management Initiatives comprise three components: Provincial Natural Resources Management, National Forest Inventory and Contributions to Development of National Protected Area Management Strategies. The term 'Initiatives' is used to indicate that no complete solutions or ready systems are presented for macro level planning of the sector. The initiatives are however relevant starting points for continued efforts aimed at sustainable use of Natural Resources.

You are now reading the 'Natural Resources Initiatives System' description

   Systems

   Components

   Manuals/Guides

   Case Studies

3. Purpose of the Document

- To provide an overview of the three components of the Natural Resources Management Initiatives
- To make information and ideas available to personnel involved in developing policy, planning development programmes and providing donor assistance to the Lao PDR.

4. Information provided in this Document

- Explanation of the components, objectives and ownership of the initiatives
- Discussion on gender mainstreaming and gender responsiveness in the initiatives
- Experiences and lessons learnt during the development of the initiatives
- Monitoring procedures
- The relevance of the initiatives to government laws, policies and regulations
- An assessment of sustainability and affordability of the initiatives in the Lao context

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1. Background and Justification

Lao PDR is one of the few remaining countries in the region, which still maintains rich natural resources and bio-diversity. High priority has been given to the management and conservation of its resources and over one fifth of the country's total land area has been devoted to bio-diversity conservation under either national, provincial or district status.

Development and conservation are equally important. The natural resources of Lao PDR are important assets, which have to be managed and used wisely and sustainable. Balancing development with conservation is a difficult but necessary challenge that is addressed through the 3 components of the Natural Resources Management Initiatives (NRMI) introduced in this document.

As a result of the First National Conference on Forestry held in 1989 and as part of the Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP) process (1989 onwards), the land areas of Lao PDR were defined for different uses. Certain areas were identified for production, others were seen as important for the protection of watersheds and others were identified as important for the conservation of biodiversity. As part of this process, discussions on how to improve management of production forests were also initiated, leading to the termination of the former, so called State Forest Enterprises (SFEs) in 1993, and to the introduction of trials on village forestry and joint forest management. It also led to the set up of a Protected Area System in 1993, that today comprises 20 National Bio-diversity Conservation Areas (NBCAs) and numerous provincial and district conservation areas.

The management, use and conservation of natural resources in line with the polices mentioned above firstly requires relevant and up to date information on the resources. Secondly, it requires plans for their management and monitoring of their actual use. Finally, it requires data and information from outside the system because the use and conservation of resources is dependent on and/or will guide other development efforts such as hydropower development, infrastructure development as well socio economic development.

The development of a system to address these issues has been a major task of LSFP phase IV in partnership with MAF, DoF, NAFRI and provincial and district authorities. As this field of work is complex, it has been agreed to label the efforts Natural Resources Management Initiatives rather than Systems. This means that it is recognized that there is considerable work ahead to develop a sound system for sustainable use of natural resources.

Results and ideas from work with development of the initiatives will provide important inputs into future sector strategy development efforts.
2. Objectives

Goal

The overall goal of LSFP phase IV, **Improved productivity and sustainable use of forest and agriculture land, in combination with conservation and protection of target areas**, has consistently guided the development effort.

It should be noted that balancing both the use and conservation of resources has been stressed throughout the development of the initiatives. Although their overall objective is development, the needs of sustainable use and conservation are also fully addressed.

Purpose

The purpose of these Natural Resources Management Initiatives is to provide the Government of Lao PDR with appropriate approaches, procedures and methods for the sustainable management and conservation of natural resources.

3. Components

The NRM Initiatives comprise the following three components

- Provincial Natural Resources Management (PRONAM)
- National Forest Inventory (NFI)
- Contributions to Development of National Protected Area Management Strategies

It should be recognized that other complementary efforts are also required. These include the formulation and implementation of a Forest Management Planning relevant to Lao conditions and the initiation of a Forestry Certification process. A Forest Management Planning System could be incorporated into PRONAM.

Appendix 1 illustrates how the components contribute to and support the overall goal of the LSFP.

**COMPONENT OBJECTIVES**

**Provincial Natural Resources Management Planning - PRONAM**

To provide macro level decision-makers at Provincial and Central levels with a suitable methodology and set of tools for planning sustainable natural resources management in a manner which meets both national development imperatives and conservation needs.

**National Forest Inventory (NFI)**

To provide decision-makers at central and provincial level with a database on the land and forest resources of Lao PDR including their composition and condition at national, regional and provincial levels for use in planning their sustainable management.

**Contributors to Development of National Protected Area Management Strategies**

To provide macro level decision-makers with appropriate policy and legal frameworks, workable strategies, relevant information and appropriate bio-diversity monitoring systems for the management of NBCA's and other protected areas.

4. End Users and Target Beneficiaries
All three components focus on macro planning issues, strategy development and long term planning. This means, that end users are located for example in the Prime Minister's Office, the State Planning Committee at central level, and the Governor's Offices in the Provinces. End users are also located in technical agencies at the central level including the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Department of Forestry and the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute. At the provincial level, Provincial Agriculture and Forestry (PAFO) and Provincial Forestry (PFO) are important end users.

As the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources is an essential precondition for sound social and economic development, the ultimate target beneficiaries are the people of Lao PDR.

5. Gender Responsiveness

With their primary focus on technical and policy issues at national level, the NRM Initiatives involve few specific gender activities. However, a number of features that promote a ‘gender and development’ approach have been incorporated, including:

- Use of and requests for gender-desegregated data in reports or policy papers.
- The incorporation of social and gender issues in developing describing and disseminating models, methods and manuals for National Protected Area Management and PRONAM.
- Monitoring the impact of interventions on both women and men.
- Wherever possible, aiming at a gender balance in teams and working groups.
- Due consideration of gender in the selection of candidates for training and study visit opportunities,
- Provision of training in gender awareness and social and gender analysis is NBCA and Provincial Planning staff in collaboration with the Gender and Development Unit,
- The appointment of a team member as 'Gender Focal Person' with responsibility for enhancing gender sensitivity at all stages of the planning process.

6. Experiences and Lessons Learned

The development of these initiatives has taken place during a period of significant change and important policy development. The most notable changes include:

- Rapid population growth.
- The decentralization process.
- A period of reorganization, including reducing the number of staff at central and provincial levels.
- A move towards a market economy.
- Lao PDR's entry into ASEAN and the associated rights and responsibilities.
- The Southeast Asian economic crisis.

These changes are creating new opportunities and threats for the use and conservation of natural resources. The government therefore is in a process of searching for options to balance short and long term goals. Although this situation has made development of the initiatives more complicated, it nevertheless means that they are now more essential than ever and that the major lessons learned so far have immediate relevance for policy development.

- The afore-mentioned population growth and economic and policy changes have resulted in increasing pressure on the country's natural resource base. Trade in natural resources, both legal and illegal, is increasing often facilitated by infrastructure development. This is increasing the demand for control and monitoring of resource use at a time when the Government is encountering difficulties in providing appropriate funding for staff, salaries, and equipment. Although the initiatives described here provide some solutions, budget constraints remain a significant bottleneck.
- A considerable amount of information on Natural Resources has built up due to the efforts of LSFP and many other projects and programmes. Although this wealth of information now needs to be used, it is not always easy to access. Making information more widely available is a major and urgent task for the future.
- There is an increasing awareness and knowledge of the importance of natural resources, and how resource use and conservation link both with each other and with socio economic development. This has been achieved through education and training inputs provided by LSFP and many other projects,
and channels such as the media.

- Decentralization of authority has meant that local officials are now responsible for decisions for which they often lack the appropriate tools and skills. Although the production of simple natural resources management methods and tools of the three initiatives has improved capacity development, much work in this area still remains to be done.

- The initiatives emphasize co-ordination and cooperation among different agencies. Although essential, this is always a time-consuming task and is not always seen as a high priority by the agencies concerned. The initiatives help overcome this problem by providing an enabling environment for communication and exchange and have demonstrated that sharing information is beneficial to all the parties concerned.

- Lessons from the National Protected Area System development efforts have clearly shown that when conservation is conducted in isolation from national development imperatives it fails to achieve its full potential. As multiple and increasing demands for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, hydropower, irrigation and bio-diversity conservation are being placed on the natural resource base, the need for a planning framework capable of objectively analyzing and integrating the diverse needs and trade-offs among these components becomes increasingly necessary. By providing a methodology for planning sustainable natural resources management while also meeting both conservation needs and economic development imperatives, PRONAM fills this void in a timely fashion.

- Experience has shown that a national protected area system covering over 13 percent of the land area cannot be effectively managed under a single category of protection (NBCA). The initiatives have demonstrated the need for a multiple level system of protected areas which reflects both the very significant differences which exist among the various NBCAS, and also the multiple uses to which many of these areas are or could be put.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective monitoring and evaluation are crucial for the sustainable management of natural resources. The feedback from reality and stakeholders forms the basis for revision of plans, policy and even the legal framework. Accordingly each component under the initiatives includes specific tools for monitoring and evaluation which are specially adapted to specific component needs. NFI is essentially a monitoring method in its own right for use by central and provincial government. Through the National Protected Area System information from individual NBCA's is obtained and used to monitor biodiversity values at the national level. PRONAM's resource inventory is the heart of a natural resource management monitoring system which tracks the extent utilization and condition of agricultural, forestry, wildlife and aquatic resources at the provincial level.

There is no such thing as a perfect M & E system and development of further M & E procedures and methods is required. Monitoring under the initiatives has the dual objectives of allowing decision makers to measure to what extent actual achievements are meeting stated objectives, and also enabling corrections to be made in response to events that are initiated outside the control of the system.

8. Relevance to Forest Law, Policy, Rules and Regulations

The forest law of 1996, which defines the principles for the management and use of forest and forest land and the Prime Minister's Decree 164 of 1993, which gives the NBCA's their present status are important parts of the legal framework for the NRMI's.

The TFAP/NFAP has been an important guiding policy document. The Government's Strategic Vision for the Agricultural Sector has recently also been an important reference for developing the initiatives.

While laws broadly reflect Government thinking and policy, rules and regulations are necessary to implement such policy. The LSFP has therefore also assisted the Government in developing Rules and Regulations. Under the umbrella of the NRMI's rules and regulations for protected areas have been drafted with IUCN and LSFP support.

One of the major aims of the NRMI's, is to provide Government with facts, knowledge and ideas for refinement of laws, policy etc. Work therefore started from the present level of Policy and laws. Refinements are to be made by decision-makers based on feedback on consequences of the actual use of natural resources.
9. Sustainability and Affordability

Sustainable development is the overall justification for the NRMI's and indeed, without proper information about natural resources and relevant policies, procedures and methods, it is impossible to discuss sustainability rationally. Without a concerted effort on the description and quantification of natural resources and their status and distribution, it is similarly impossible to consider sustainability issues.

In regard to the sustainability of the NRMI's themselves, effort has been made to adjust ambitions and sophistication to levels appropriate to national capacity. Use of advanced computer technology is partly a precondition for implementing some activities of NRM, but it is not crucial for all activities. Lao staff have had appropriate training and suitable equipment is in place. The issue of backup and maintenance of the computer systems has been raised as a potential threat and does warrant further attention.

Co-ordination between institutions is potentially a more serious problem, as lack of coordination will have a negative impact on sustainable management of resources. The initiatives are built on the basis that interaction is required between institutions and organizations, along both horizontal and vertical lines. To make this happen in a sustainable way, it is necessary to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and engagement of these in leadership positions. Bureaucratic administrative procedures can be significant constraints to progress.

Over the long term no country can afford not to manage its natural resources. Affordability is therefore a major issue. The NRMI's have, as a starting point, tried to make better use of natural resource investments already made. The NRMI's also aim at attracting interest for further investment. There is a far better chance of attracting such investment if it is shown that efforts so far are logical and that additional input required can be mobilized. The assumption is that continued support will be provided from outside to further develop the NRMI's into a more complete natural resource management system.

In terms of Government spending on control and monitoring of natural resources, there are at least short-term difficulties to overcome.

10. Additional Supporting Documentation

A list of supporting information, including consultants reports, field reports, technical documents (manuals and guides), working papers, discussion papers, conference papers and research reports is provided in each component description document, i.e., for Provincial Natural Resources Management, National Forest Inventory and Contribution to Development of National Protected Area Management Strategies. The majority of these documents are in English language.

A similar list of reference documents is also provided in the LSFP Phase 4 CD ROM presentation.

11. Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

- DAFO: District Agriculture and Forestry Office
- DFRC: Division of Forest Resource Conservation
- DoF: Department of Forestry
- FIPC: Forest Inventory and Planning Centre
- GOL: Government of Lao PDR
- IUCN: The World Conservation Union
- LSFP: Lao Swedish Forestry Programme
- LUP: Land Use Planning
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>MAF</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<td>NAFRI</td>
<td>National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute</td>
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<td>NBCA</td>
<td>National Bio-diversity Conservation Area</td>
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<td>NFAP</td>
<td>National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute</td>
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<td>NFI</td>
<td>National Forest Inventory</td>
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<td>NRM</td>
<td>Natural Resources Management</td>
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<td>PAFO</td>
<td>Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office</td>
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<td>PFO</td>
<td>Provincial Forestry Office</td>
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<td>PRONAM</td>
<td>Provincial Natural Resources Management</td>
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