Advancing the SDGs in Lao PDR through FPIC-Based Land Registration

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SUMMARY

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - in particular SDG 15: Life on Land, which calls for the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems – requires governance systems that secure tenure rights, promote equity, and empower local communities. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) provide a global framework for this purpose, emphasizing transparency, participation, and non-discrimination in land governance. Translating these principles into practice, the KfW financed Land Management Project Laos (LMPL) integrates the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) into the country's Systematic Land Registration (SLR) process to make land governance more inclusive, participatory, and socially legitimate.

A cornerstone of this approach is an awareness-raising methodology that ensures communities – particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities and women – can make informed and voluntary decisions regarding land registration. Awareness activities are designed as participatory dialogues rather than one-way communication, using local languages, culturally adapted tools, and visual materials to enable understanding across diverse literacy levels. These sessions create safe spaces for collective reflection, discussion, and internal decision-making before consent is sought, thereby strengthening both social cohesion and local ownership.

To ensure this process is meaningful, LMPL established Community Engagement and Awareness Teams, comprising district officials, civil society organizations, and members of the Lao Women's Union. Through targeted capacity-building and training programmes, these teams learn to apply FPIC principles in practice – addressing power dynamics, gender inequality, and ethnic diversity in village contexts. Training modules cover inclusive facilitation, environmental and social safeguards, conflict management, and the Do No Harm-approach, building empathy and accountability within

local government institutions.

An integrated social and environmental screening system – implemented in a mobile app – supports this work by identifying potential risks or grievances early, enabling facilitators to adapt engagement strategies. The methodology thus bridges formal procedures and customary decision-making practices, creating an evolving model for participatory governance that can be replicated in similar contexts.

The paper will address how these awareness-raising methods and capacity-building efforts can contribute to more inclusive, rights-based land governance in Laos, and how they advance the broader objectives of both the VGGT and the SDGs. By empowering communities to participate meaningfully and training authorities to engage responsibly, LMPL contributes not only to SDG 15, but also to gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) – linking land rights to social inclusion and sustainable development.