LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

LAO - WATER INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SUSTAINABILITY, EFFICIENCY AND RESILIENCE (WISER)

ETHNIC GROUP ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

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Definitions

Disadvantaged individuals/groups. Refers to individuals or groups who, due to certain own circumstances such as their age, gender, disabilities, health, economic and ethnic status, and so forth, are more likely affected adversely by the project impacts and/or more limited in their ability to take advantage of project benefits. Disadvantaged individuals/groups are more likely excluded from, or unable to participate fully in the mainstream consultation process and may require specific assistance to promote inclusion.
In this project, disadvantaged individuals/ groups are defined as those who have the following characteristics: i) from an ethnic group, (ii) female headed household with dependents, (iii) landless/ limited productive land, (iv) frequent lack of male labor at home (e.g. migrant workers); (v) jobless, or limited economic opportunities; (vi) family member(s) with chronic illness, or disabilities; (vii) elderlies who live on their own; (viii) people living in an especially difficult circumstance, and (ix) people don't meet above criteria but are concurred by local community as vulnerable to poverty and need project's support to reduce their vulnerability. Disadvantaged individuals are usually from a poor, or a near-poor household.

Ethnic Groups. "Ethnic Groups" is used in a generic sense to refer exclusively to a distinct social and cultural group possessing all the following characteristics – in varying degrees:

- Self-identification as members of a distinct indigenous social and cultural group and recognition of this identity by others; and
- Collective attachment[1] to geographically distinct habitats, ancestral territories, or areas of seasonal use or occupation, as well as to the natural resources in these areas; and
- Customary cultural, economic, social, or political institutions that are distinct or separate from those of the mainstream society or culture, and
- A distinct language or dialect, often different from the official language or languages of the country or region in which they reside.

Information Disclosure. The process of disseminating project information to stakeholders toallow them to understand the risks and impacts of the project, and potential opportunities.

Meaningful consultation. Two-way process that (a) begins early in project planning process to gather initial views on project proposal and inform project design; (b) encourages stakeholder feedback, particularly as a way of informing project design and engagement by stakeholders in the identification and mitigation of environmental and social risks and impacts; (c) continues on an ongoing basis, as risks and impacts arise; (d) is based on prior disclosure and dissemination of relevant, transparent, objective, meaningful and easily accessible information in a timeframe that enables meaningful consultation with project stakeholders in a format culturally appropriate, and in relevant local language(s) and is understandable to stakeholders; (e) considers and responds to feedback; (f) supports active and inclusive engagement with project-affected parties; (g) is free of external manipulation, interference, coercion, discrimination, and intimidation; and (h) is documented and disclosed

[1] Collective attachment means that for generations there has been a physical presence in and economic ties to land and territories traditionally owned, or customarily used or occupied, by the group concerned, including areas that hold special significance for it, such as sacred sites.

by the Government. Under the EGEF, meaningful consultation refers to consultation in respect of land acquisition, economic displacement, and physical resettlement which is clearly stipulated in the Government's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for Land Acquisition and Involuntary Resettlement (LAR) and incorporates all the above elements.

Vulnerable individuals/ households. In this project, vulnerable individuals/ households are defined as those who live just above the national poverty line, including 1) the near-poor, and 2) those whose income is marginally above the near-poor line. People who are from Disadvantaged Groups (as defined in this project) are considered as vulnerable group (See definition for Disadvantaged individuals/groups). For Laos PDR, the WB proposes defining the near-poor as those whose daily per capita consumption lies between poverty line and 1.5 times the poverty line.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

DAE	District Agriculture and Environment Office
EGEP	Ethnic Group Engagement Plan
EGEF	Ethnic Group Engagement Framework
EPL	Environmental Protection Law
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
GoL	Government of Lao PDR
GM	Grievance Mechanism
IDA	International Development Association
MAE	Ministry of Agriculture and Environment
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOF	Ministry of Finance
PDAE	Provincial Department of Agriculture and Environment
PAH	Project Affected Households
PAP	Project Affected People
VMC	Village Mediation Committee
VRS	Village Resettlement Sub-committees
WB	World Bank
WUG	Water User Group

Executive Summary

The Ethnic Group Engagement Framework (EGEF) sets out how the Water Infrastructure for Sustainability, Efficiency and Resilience Project (WISER) will apply the World Bank's Environmental and Social Standard 7 (ESS7). The Project will rehabilitate the Nam Houm, Nam Suang and Nam Hin dams and associated irrigation systems. The framework guides screening, meaningful consultation, assessment of impacts, and preparation of site-specific Ethnic Group Engagement Plans (EGEPs).

Consultations identified concerns about irrigation interruptions, fishing and aquaculture, access to land and natural resources, and fair distribution of irrigation water. Yao and Hmong participants at Nam Houm and Nam Suang described differing water needs and livelihood priorities. Khmu participants at Nam Hin described reliance on reservoir fishing for food and income. The assessments will verify how impacts vary by location, gender, livelihood, language, tenure and access to water-user institutions.

The Project will screen each activity for the presence of or collective attachment of groups meeting ESS7 criteria and assess potential benefits and adverse impacts. Impacts that require obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) are unlikely based on the information available at this stage. The Project will verify this during site-specific assessment and consultation. If impacts that require obtaining FPIC are identified, the Project will seek and document the FPIC process in accordance with Annex 2 before the relevant activity begins.

The Department of Irrigation Project Management Unit (PMU) will oversee implementation, with provincial Project Implementation Units (PIUs) leading field assessment and engagement. Where an EGEP is required and developed, it will specify the measures agreed with affected communities, including culturally appropriate livelihood support and equitable access to Project benefits. Compensation and livelihood restoration for eligible impacts under ESS5 will be delivered through the Resettlement Policy Framework and site-specific Resettlement Plans.

The Project will disclose plans and explain them in accessible formats and relevant languages before the activities they cover begin. The PMU and PIUs will track delivery, participation, grievance redress mechanisms and livelihood outcomes, and adjust measures with affected communities where monitoring shows that additional action is needed.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Overview

1.1.1 Project Rationale

The Water Infrastructure for Sustainability, Efficiency and Resilience Project (WISER) is designed to increase water security and enhance the resilience of selected water infrastructure to water-related climate risks. The Project will support the rehabilitation and improvement of critical water infrastructure, including selected high-risk irrigation dams and associated water conveyance systems, and will strengthen institutional capacity for dam safety and integrated water resources management.

The proposed infrastructure activities include the rehabilitation of Nam Houm and Nam Suang dams in Vientiane Capital and Nam Hin dam in Oudomxay Province, together with the rehabilitation and upgrading of associated irrigation conveyance and distribution infrastructure. These activities may require the use or acquisition of land and may cause impacts on assets, access, income sources, and livelihoods. As the detailed designs and the exact scope of such impacts have not yet been fully confirmed during project preparation stage, this Ethnic Group Engagement Plan is prepared to guide the preparation of site–specific Ethnic Group Engagement Plan for site–specific infrastructure subprojects.

1.1.2 Project Development Objective

The Project Development Objective (PDO) aims to increase water security and enhance the resilience of selected water infrastructure to water-related climate risks.

More specifically, the project aims to lay the foundations for irrigation dam safety and resilience in Lao PDR – through:

(i) Enhance the safety of most hazardous dams in Lao PDR
(ii) Improve the institutional, legal, and regulatory frameworks for the safety of dams and resilience of downstream communities
(iii) Improve the operation and maintenance of dams, reservoirs, and their associated water distribution systems, and
(iv) Provide critical decision-support tools and studies to underpin the safe operation of irrigation dams.

The project's primary beneficiaries would be farmers and rural households who are served by the rehabilitated irrigation dams and associated conveyance systems. Target beneficiaries would benefit from more reliable, efficient, and climate-resilient water service delivery for agricultural production and, where relevant, domestic water supply. The project is expected to reduce disruptions in water service, lower exposure to dam safety risks, and support more stable agricultural livelihoods and food security in the targeted areas. Secondary beneficiaries would include downstream communities benefiting from reduced safety risks, Water User Groups and local authorities with improved infrastructure management capacity, and national and subnational institutions that would gain stronger systems for dam safety, water resources planning, and inter-agency coordination.

The project will be implemented by the Department of Irrigation (DOI) within the Ministry of Agriculture and Envionment (MAE).

The project has the following four components:

1. **Improve and Sustain Water Infrastructure**
2. **Building Institutional Capacity for Integrated Water Resources Management**
3. **Project Management; and**
4. **Contingent Emergency Response Component.**

Details are provided below.

Component 1: Improve and Sustain Water Infrastructure (US$57 million, IDA)

This component would involve the rehabilitation and critical water infrastructure, including dams and its water conveyance systems to support multiple water uses including irrigation and domestic water supply. Beyond the necessary structural interventions, this would also include non-structural interventions related to the improvement of dam management, operation and maintenance through the development of as well as the installation of adequate monitoring systems for data collection to support informed decision-making. The component would include the following activities:

- **Sub-Component 1.1**: **Rehabilitation of multi-purpose water infrastructure.** Sub-Component 1.1 will finance the rehabilitation and repurposing of priority high-risk irrigation dams, specifically Nam Houm and Nam Suang in Vientiane Capital and Nam Hin in Oudomxay Province, while supporting structural rehabilitation to improve dam stability, seepage control, spillway and drawdown capacity, and sediment management, alongside installation of safety-related equipment and site improvements where needed. The sub-component will also establish a Panel of Experts to provide independent technical review and quality assurance of designs and oversight of rehabilitation works. Finally, the component will prepare site-specific plans for the operation and management of the dams, including Instrumentation and Monitoring, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Maintenance, Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP), as well as Water Allocation Plan that explicitly accounts for domestic water supply, irrigation, and environmental flow requirements, when applicable.
- **Sub-Component 1.2: Rehabilitation of irrigation conveyance infrastructure.** Sub-Component 1.2 will finance the rehabilitation and upgrading of irrigation conveyance and distribution infrastructure to improve the reliability, efficiency, and climate resilience of water service delivery from rehabilitated dams to farms. Investments will support the repair, lining, modernization, and, where necessary, selective expansion of main, secondary, and tertiary canals, control and measurement structures, turnouts, and associated conveyance assets to reduce water losses, improve flow regulation, and enhance equitable water distribution to irrigated areas. The sub-component will also support rehabilitation of on-farm water delivery interfaces and related infrastructure, where needed, to strengthen connectivity between bulk water infrastructure and agricultural production, while improving operational performance and service delivery to farmers.
- **Sub-Component 1.3: Establishing an Agriculture Water Management Center.** Sub-Component 1.3 will support the establishment of an Agriculture Water Management Center under DOI to strengthen the management, operation, and performance of irrigation infrastructure through improved data, analytics, modeling and coordination. The sub-component will finance the facility, systems, tools, and capacity building to support water allocation planning, infrastructure operation, hydrological monitoring,

and decision-making for irrigation service delivery, while enhancing coordination across national and subnational institutions responsible for water resources and irrigation management. Investments will also support the development of operational protocols, information systems, and analytical capacity needed to improve the efficiency, reliability, and climate resilience of water infrastructure management.

Component 2. Building Institutional Capacity for Integrated Water Resources Management (US$ 3 million, IDA).

This component will strengthen the institutional foundations for integrated water resources management. It will: (a) support the operationalization of the Dam Safety Law (2022) in the irrigation sector, including the establishment of regulatory, institutional, and technical arrangements and the creation of a Dam Safety Division within DOI; (b) support the National Water Management Committee to improve coordination among agencies with water-related mandates, including on dam safety, water allocation, and flood and drought risk management; and (c) support the preparation, updating, and implementation of river basin profiles and River Basin Management Plans in priority basins. Building on lessons from the Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project (MIWRM, P104806), the component will strengthen national systems for monitoring, planning, and managing water resources at the basin level, while improving coordination among relevant technical departments at central, provincial, and district levels.

- **Sub-Component 2.1. Operationalization of the Dam Safety Law (2022) in the irrigation sector.** The sub-component will support the operationalization of the Dam Safety Law (2022) in the irrigation sector by strengthening the regulatory, institutional, and financing framework for irrigation dam safety management. This will include development of irrigation dam safety regulations and related subordinate legislation, establishment of a dedicated Dam Safety Division within the Department of Irrigation and corresponding arrangements at provincial and district levels, strengthening inter-agency coordination on dam safety oversight and emergency preparedness, development of a young professionals program in dam safety engineering, and piloting of financing mechanisms to support the management, operation, and maintenance of irrigation dams.
- **Sub-Component 2.2. Strengthen basin-level planning, coordination, and management of water resources.** This sub-component will support the National Water Management Committee and the preparation, updating, and implementation of River Basin Profiles and River Basin Management Plans in priority basins to strengthen basin-level planning, coordination, and management of water resources. Activities will include clarifying institutional responsibilities for water resources management, improving inter-agency coordination and joint decision-making, supporting mechanisms for data sharing and knowledge exchange, undertaking technical studies and stakeholder consultations, and providing institutional support needed to advance integrated water resources management, improve water allocation and risk-informed planning, and strengthen the basis for coordinated management of flood and drought risks across sectors and administrative levels.

Component 3: Project Management (US$5 million, IDA).

This component supports the effective implementation of project activities and monitoring and evaluation of project implementation progress, outputs, and outcomes. It involves establishing the Project Management Unit (PMU) to oversee and coordinate project implementation, as well as setting up a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system.

Component 4: Contingent Emergency Response Component (US$0 million).

This component allows for the provision of immediate response to an eligible crisis or emergency, as needed. The CERC will allow the recipient to request the World Bank to reallocate uncommitted project funds, following an eligible crisis or emergency.

1.1.3 Purpose of EGEF

The EGEF was prepared to provide an implementation guideline for PMU and project workers to ensure when EG are present in subproject area, an EGEP is prepared and implemented in according with the following objectives – as described in the WB's ESS7:

- To ensure that the development process fosters full respect for the human rights, dignity, aspirations, identity, culture, and natural resource-based livelihoods of Ethnic Groups;
- To avoid adverse impacts of projects on Ethnic Groups, or when avoidance is not possible, to minimize, mitigate and/or compensate for such impacts;
- To promote sustainable development benefits and opportunities for Ethnic Groups in a manner that is accessible, culturally appropriate and inclusive;
- To improve project design and promote local support by establishing and maintaining an ongoing relationship based on meaningful consultation with the Indigenous.
- To recognize, respect and preserve the culture, knowledge, and practices of Ethnic Groups, and to provide them with an opportunity to adapt to changing conditions in a manner and in a timeframe acceptable to them.

It is noted that Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of affected ethnic groups that is not required for this project because the project will avoid financing subprojects that affect the Ethnic Groups as described under three circumstances mentioned in the WB's ESS7 (See Annex 2).

Adverse impacts that require obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) are unlikely based on the information available at this stage. The Project will verify applicability through site-specific screening, social assessment, and meaningful consultation with affected ethnic groups during feasibility and detailed design. If FPIC is required, the Project will apply the procedure in Annex 2 before the relevant activity begins.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 National Laws and Regulations related to Ethnic Groups

With regards to issues related to ethnic groups, the following legal documents are relevant:

2.1.1 Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2015)

Lao PDR does not have specific legislation for its ethnic groups. However, the former 1991 Constitution and current adjusted Constitution of 2015 (chapter four, articles 34-51) guarantee that all Lao people have fundamental rights and obligations to develop the country.

The Constitution defines Lao PDR as a multi-ethnic State, with equality among all ethnic groups.

Article 8 states that: The State pursues the policy of promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have the right to protect, preserve and promote the customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation. All acts of creating division and discrimination among ethnic groups are forbidden. The State implements every measure to gradually develop and upgrade the economic and social level of all ethnic groups.

Article 13 states that the country's economic system is for the purpose of improving the living standards, both materially and spiritually, of Lao PDR's multi-ethnic people.

Article 19 emphasizes the importance of building schools to provide education for all, especially in areas inhabited by ethnic minority groups.

Article 35 guarantees that Lao citizens are all equal before the law irrespective of their gender, social status, education, beliefs and ethnic group.

2.1.2 Prime Minister's Decree No. 207/PM (2020) on Ethnic Groups

The Decree aims to ensure that ethnic affairs are managed according to the principles of:

- National unity;
- Equality among ethnic groups;
- Mutual respect;
- Mutual assistance;
- Participation in national development;
- Protection of legitimate rights and interests; and
- Preservation of ethnic identity within the constitutional and legal framework.

Compared with earlier policy documents, the decree moves beyond consultation and addresses development, governance, public services, legal protection, cultural preservation, and participation.

2.1.3 Guideline on Ethnic Group Consultation (2012)

A new national guideline on consultation with ethnic groups launched by the Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC) in 2012, was largely in line with the World Bank policy on Indigenous People (OP/BP 4.10). It aims to ensure that all ethnic groups who benefit from or are adversely affected by a development project, without regard to the source of funding, are fully engaged in a meaningful consultation process at all stages from preparation into implementation. The guideline also aims to ensure that the potentially affected ethnic groups are fully informed of project objectives, as well as their potential positive and adverse impacts on their livelihood and their environment, and provided with opportunities to articulate their concerns. The guidelines provides principles and processes to carry out meaningful consultations with, and obtain free, prior and informed consultation of, all ethnic groups affected by developments projects in a culturally sensitive manner. The guidelines consists of a) objectives and scope of the guidelines, b) consultation processes with ethnic groups at respective stages of development projects, c) consultation approaches and methods for different ethnic groups in a cultural sensitive manner, d) expected outcomes of consultation at each stage, and e) implementation arrangement and responsibility.

2.1.4 Ethnic Minority Policy (1992)

The Resolution of the Political Bureau Concerning the Affairs of Various Groups, especially the Hmong Minority (Hmong Policy 1981) adapted in 1981 was the first explicit statement of policy on ethnic groups since the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975. The policy also attempted to improve the living conditions of Hmong people, and to increase national security for the country as a whole. In 1992, the policy was adjusted and developed

into a resolution of the Administrative Committee of the party to become The Ethnic Minority Policy under the Resolution on Ethnic Affairs in the New Era, which applies to all ethnic groups throughout the country. There are no specific articles in it, rather it is an agreement on the principles that all ethnic groups should have improved access to services and that all discrimination must be eradicated.

The general policy of the GoL concerning ethnic groups was designed to:

- Build national sentiment (national identity);
- Realize equality between ethnic groups;
- Increase the level of solidarity among ethnic groups as members of the greater Lao family;
- Resolve problems of inflexible and vengeful thinking, and economic and cultural inequality;
- Improve the living conditions of the ethnic groups step-by-step; and
- Expand, to the greatest extent possible, the good and beautiful heritage and ethnic identity of each group and their capacity to participate in the affairs of the nation.

The policy calls for protection against and eradication of dangerous diseases and to allow ethnic groups to enjoy good health and a long life. The GoL is expected to provide appropriate investments to enlarge the health care network by integrating modern and traditional medicine.

The collection of data on the ethnicity of government employees, retired ethnic officials, the handicapped, and families of those killed in action is another activity called for in the policy.

Disseminating information in the remote areas is mandated, through many methods, especially, radio broadcasting in minority languages. The plan calls for engagement of specialist officials who speak minority languages and who possess knowledge of science, production, and socioeconomic problems. The question of where these persons are found is not addressed.

The Ethnic Groups Committee under the National Assembly is charged with the responsibility to draft and evaluate proposed legislation concerning ethnic groups, lobby for its implementation and implementation of socioeconomic development plans. Ethnic groups' research is the responsibility of the Institute for Cultural Research under the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MoICT). The lead institution for ethnic affairs is the mass (political) organization, the Lao National Front for Construction, which has an Ethnic Affairs Department.

2.1.5 The 10th Five - Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2026-2030)

The 10th Five-Year Plan aims to implement the Resolution of the 11th Party Congress and to continue the implementation of the Party's Development Strategy 2026 -2030 and Vision 2030.

The Plan's motto is "Guided by unwavering ambition, we drive bold development—championing an independent and self-reliant economy, making the most of every potential, and propelling socio-economic progress in a swift, sustainable, and green direction."

The 10th NSEDP aims to:

- Build an independent and self-reliant economy.
- Achieve rapid, sustainable, and green economic growth.
- Improve macroeconomic stability.

- Continue poverty reduction and improve living standards.
- Strengthen climate resilience and environmental sustainability.
- Enhance governance, public administration, and institutional capacity.
- Improve human capital through better education, health, and skills development.
- Promote digital transformation, innovation, and productivity, and
- Strengthen regional and international economic integration.

There are six priority development areas proposed under this plan, including:

1 Building a stronger, independent, and self-reliant economy.
2 Improving human resources and social development.
3 Promoting sustainable natural resource and environmental management.
4 Strengthening governance, the rule of law, and public administration.
5 Enhancing infrastructure, connectivity, and digital transformation.
6 Deepening regional and international cooperation and economic integration.

2.1.6 Land Law (2019)

Land Law (Amended), No. 70/NA (adopted on 21 June 20219, effective since 28 August 2020). The amended law introduced several important reforms, including:

- Modernized land administration, including improved land registration, cadastral surveys, and land information management.
- Recognition of secure long-term land use rights for Lao citizens, legal persons, organizations, and collectives.
- Improved provisions on land acquisition and compensation, requiring compensation where land use rights are affected for public purposes.
- Clearer land classification and land-use planning to strengthen sustainable land management.
- Recognition of communal and customary land, including provisions that support recognition of communal land use in appropriate circumstances.
- New provisions for foreign investment, allowing limited temporary ownership or land-use rights under specified conditions, including certain investment projects and condominium ownership arrangements.

2.1.7 Law on Handling of Petitions (2015)

The revised Law on Handling of Petitions 012/NA approved by the National Assembly on December 5, 2014 and the President in 2015 provides provisions of objectives, principles and process of applying and handling different types of grievance, petition and complaints that may be raised by citizens. The Grievance Redress Law divides grievances into three categories as follows:

1) Proposals is to be applied to and resolved by concerned authorities.
2) Grievance is to be applied to and resolved by judicial institutions and court
3) Petition is to be applied to and resolved by Provincial and National Assembly

The Law on Handling of Petitions 012/NA, 2015, which has superseded the old version of Law on Grievance dated November 5, 2005 applies and protects rights and interest of all citizens and entities, state organizations, community and individuals with the aim to ensure justice, social security and order.

In addition, the following laws and regulations are applicable to the project, including:

- **Land Law** (No. 01/97 NA/1997, Amended as No. 70/NA, 2019)
- **Law on Resettlement and Vocation** (No. 204/P, 2018)
- **Public Involvement Guideline** (2012)
- **Guideline for Consultation with Ethnic Groups** (2012)
- **Law on Handling of Petitions** (No. 07/NA, 2005, amended 05/NA, 2016)
- **Ministerial Instruction No. 8030/MONRE on Environmental and Social Impact Assessment** (ESIA) and Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) of Investment Projects (2013)
- **Environmental Protection Law** (No. 29/NA, 2013, Amended as No. 53/NA, 2024)
- **Water and Water Resources Law** (No.02-96/NA, 1996. Amended in 2017)
- **Forestry Law** (No.6/NA, 2007. Amended as Law No. 64/NA, 2019)

2.2 Relevant International treaties and conventions

The Constitution of Lao PDR has been amended to incorporate human rights principles outlined in the international treaties and conventions of which Lao PDR is a signatory party. Chapter four, articles 34 to 51 explain the basic rights of Lao citizens. In addition, basic rights as delineated in international instruments are included in many other national laws, such as the law on the protection of the rights and the interests of children, 2006 (see Table 1). The GoL set up the National Human Rights Research Centre in Vientiane, whose main objective is to support, encourage, and implement human rights within the country. Its mandate also considers the carrying out of research on ethnic groups. The Centre was approved by decree, No. 95, dated 11/07/06 and by Prime Minister's decree, No. 137, dated 24/07/2006. The Lao PDR has been a member of the International Labour Organization (ILO) since 1964. Though the country has ratified a total of eight ILO Conventions, including five of the eight ILO core Conventions, Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples has not been ratified.

Figure 1 - International treaties and conventions in Lao PDR

No	Name of Convention	Date of Signature	Date of Ratification/ Accession
1	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	7 December 2000	29 September 2009
2	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	15 January 2008	29 September 2009
3	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	29 September 2008	Not yet ratified
4	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	Not yet signed	Not yet ratified
5	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	21 September 2010	26 September 2012
6	Convention on the Rights of the Child		8 May 1991 (a)
7	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	17 July 1980	14 August 1981
8	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	7 December 2000	13 February 2007
9	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination		22 February 1974 (a)

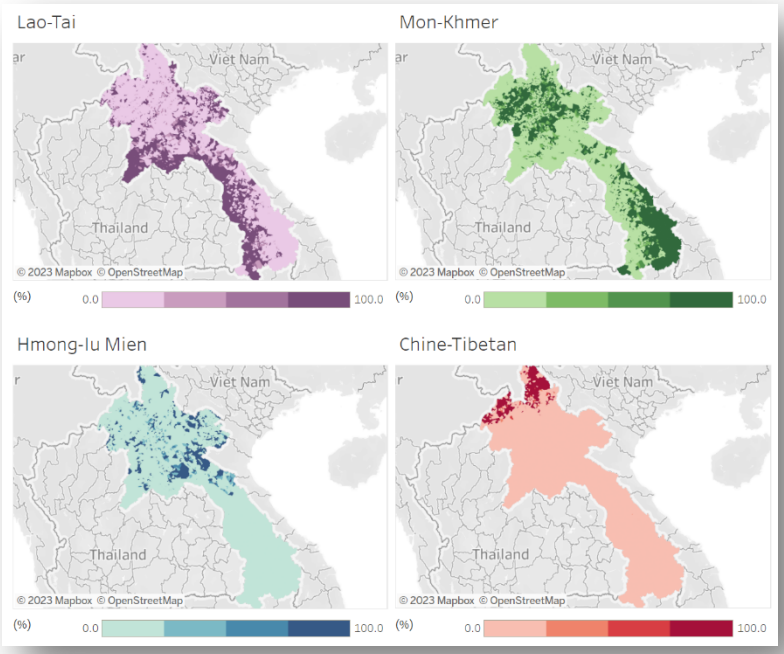
10	UN Convention Against Corruption	10 December 2003	29 September 2009
11	UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples		13 September 2007

3. SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILES OF ETHNIC GROUPS

3.1 Ethnic groups in Laos PDR

Lao PDR is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in South East Asia. The country's population is 6,492,228 by national census in 2015. Of the total population, 49.9% was females and 50.1% was males. The ethnicity of Lao is categorized into four broad ethno-linguistic families. The Lao-Tai is the largest group, accounting for 67%, followed by Mon-Khmer (21%), Hmong-Iew Mien (8%), and the Sino-Tibetan (3%) (See Table below of dominant distribution of each ethno-linguistic family across the country.

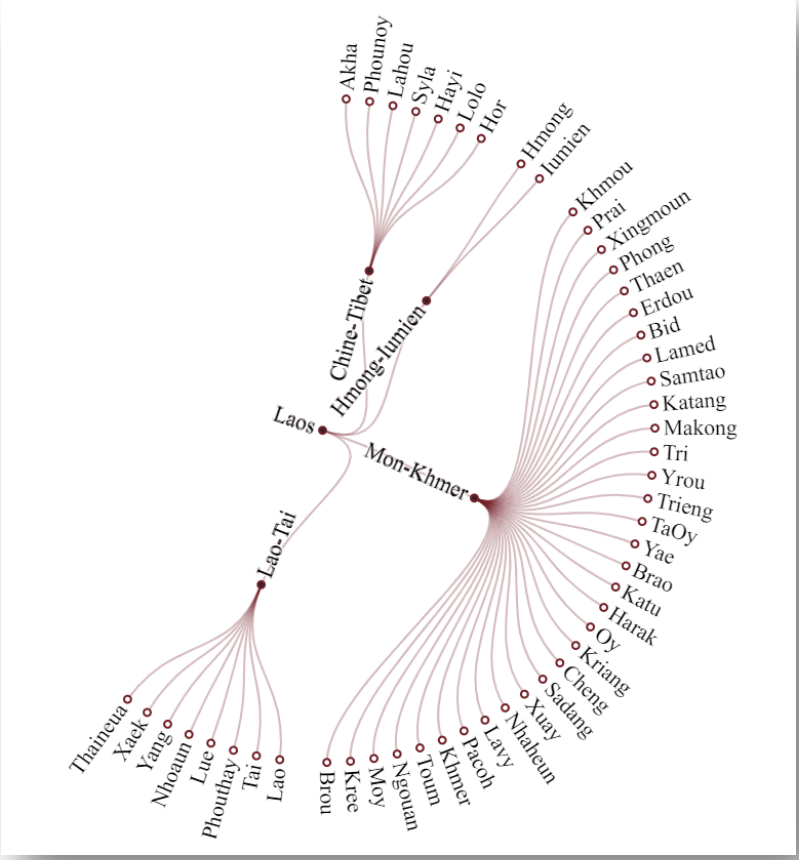
Figure 2 - Distribution of four broad ethno-linguistic families



The Lao-Tai ethnic-linguistic family (the larget group) is composed of eight individual ethnic groups. They inhabit mostly the lowland areas. The Mon-Khmer family includes 33 individual ethnic groups. There are two ethnic groups belonging to the Hmong-lu Mien ethno-linguistic family, and seven groups belonging to the Chine-Tibetan family. Both Hmong-lu Mien and Chine-Tibetan peoples have traditionally inhabited the uplands of Laos. Buddhism is the most common religion in Lao-Tai groups, while animism is prevalent in non-Lao-Tai groups[2].
The above four ethno-linguistic families encompass 49 distinct ethnicities which has over 200 ethnic sub-groups.

[2] Minority Rights Group. 2018. "World Directory of Groups and Indigenous Peoples: Laos." Accessed 23 July 2018.

Figure 3 - Distinct ethnicities under four ethno-linguistic families



Source. Trees of ethno-linguistic groups 2018. Created by: Open Development Laos. Source: Douangtavanh Kongphaly. 2018. "List of all ethnicity in Laos." License: MIT

3.2 Ethnic Groups in Project Provinces

3.2.1 *Overview of Ethnic Groups in Vientiane Province*

Vientiane Province is one of the most ethnically diverse provinces in central Lao PDR. While the Lao Loum (ethnic Lao) constitute the majority population, the province is also home to significant populations of Khmu, Hmong, Iu Mien (Yao), Tai Dam, Phuan, and several smaller Tai-speaking groups. These ethnic groups belong primarily to the Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, and Hmong-Iu Mien ethno-linguistic families, reflecting the province's diverse cultural and ecological landscapes extending from the Mekong lowlands to mountainous uplands.[3]

The **Lao Loum (Lao-Tai)** are the dominant ethnic group in Vientiane Province and are concentrated mainly in the fertile plains and river valleys. They traditionally practice wet-rice cultivation, maintain permanent villages, and predominantly follow Theravada Buddhism, often combined with traditional spirit worship (animism). Lao Loum communities generally

[3] Lao Statistics Bureau. *Results of Population and Housing Census 2015.* https://www.lsb.gov.la/phc/

have better access to markets, infrastructure, education and government services than many upland ethnic groups[4].

The **Khmu**, belonging to the **Mon-Khmer linguistic family**, are the largest non-Lao ethnic group in Vientiane Province. They are primarily distributed in hilly and forested districts, where livelihoods depend on a combination of upland agriculture, paddy cultivation where feasible, collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), livestock raising, and seasonal wage labour. Khmu communities retain strong customary institutions, village leadership structures, and rich indigenous ecological knowledge, particularly regarding forest and watershed management. Although many Khmu households have increasingly adopted lowland farming practices, traditional spiritual beliefs and ceremonies remain important components of community life[5].

The **Hmong**, belonging to the **Hmong-Iu Mien linguistic family**, mainly inhabit the higher elevation areas of the province. Historically practicing shifting cultivation, many Hmong communities have transitioned toward permanent agriculture, including maize, rice, fruit trees, and commercial crops. Hmong society is characterized by strong clan-based social organization, distinctive language and cultural traditions, and continued observance of traditional ancestral and spiritual practices alongside growing adherence to Christianity in some communities. Many Hmong villages have experienced improved road access and market integration over recent decades while still facing relatively higher levels of poverty and geographic isolation compared with lowland Lao communities.

The **Iu Mien (Yao)** are present in smaller numbers, generally in upland districts alongside Hmong communities. Their livelihoods are based on upland farming, livestock, forest resources, and increasingly off-farm employment. The Iu Mien maintain distinctive cultural practices, including elaborate ceremonial traditions, ancestor worship, and the use of the Mien language. Traditional knowledge related to medicinal plants and forest resource management continues to play an important role within many communities.[6]

Several **Tai-speaking minority groups**, particularly Tai Dam (Black Tai) and Phuan, also occur in parts of Vientiane Province. These groups generally reside in valleys and lower foothills, practice irrigated rice cultivation, and share many cultural similarities with the Lao Loum while maintaining distinct dialects, traditional clothing, festivals, and cultural identities. They are generally well integrated into the provincial economy and public administration while preserving important elements of their cultural heritage. [7]

3.2.2 *Overview of Ethnic Groups in Oudomxay Province*

Oudomxay is a mountainous province in northern Lao PDR. It had an estimated population of 327,622 in 2024. Provincial sources identify the Khmu as the largest ethnic group and the Lao

[4] Open Development Laos. *Ethnic Minorities and Indigenous People in Laos.* https://laos.opendevelopmentmekong.net/en/topics/ethnic-minorities-and-indigenous-people/
[5] Schlemmer, G. (2017). *Ethnic Belonging in Laos: A Politico-Historical Perspective.* https://hal.science/hal-01853834
[6] Lao Front for National Development (LFND) classification of ethnic groups and related World Bank/ADB safeguard documents describing ethnic composition in central Laos.
[7] Lao Front for National Development (LFND) classification of ethnic groups and related World Bank/ADB safeguard documents describing ethnic composition in central Laos.

Loum and Hmong among the other main groups. The province is also home to Akha, Yao (Iu Mien), Phou Noi, Phouthai, Lao Houy (Lanten), and Phouan communities, among others, with distinct languages and cultural practices.

Many Khmu and Hmong communities live in upland areas, where rainfed rice cultivation has traditionally been an important livelihood activity. Lao Loum communities are generally concentrated in river valleys, where wet-rice cultivation and livestock raising are common. Livelihoods and dependence on land, water, and other natural resources vary by village and household.

For WISER, the site-specific social assessment for Nam Hin will verify which ethnic groups are present in, or have collective attachment to, the subproject area. It will assess how households use farmland, irrigation water, and reservoir fisheries and identify language and other needs for meaningful consultation. The findings will inform the assessment of potential impacts and the design of culturally appropriate mitigation and livelihood support.

3.3 Ethnic Groups in Project sites

3.3.1 Nam Houm Subproject

Dao/Yao Ethnic Group is the major ethnic group living within the Nam Houm subproject area.

Livelihood-Related Cultural Practices

Publicly available sources do not provide detailed livelihood data specifically for Dao/Yao households in Naxaythong District. Ethnographic research on Mun or Lanten Yao communities elsewhere in Laos shows that livelihoods have historically been closely linked to family-based agriculture, mobility, trade and changing patterns of permanent settlement. These livelihood systems have evolved in response to state administration, infrastructure development, market integration and changes in access to land and natural resources.

Accordingly, any description of the present livelihoods of Dao/Yao households in Naxaythong—such as rice cultivation, livestock raising, wage labour, small-scale trade or collection of natural resources—should be confirmed through village-level consultation and household socioeconomic surveys rather than assumed from studies of northern Lao communities.[8]

Land Tenure

The available ethnographic literature indicates that changes from mobile or rotational agricultural systems to more permanent settlement have affected how Mun or Lanten Yao communities use and relate to land.[9] However, the sources reviewed do not document the

[8] Estevez, Joseba, and David A. Palmer. "Ritual, War, and Opium: Infrastructural Sedimentations in the Ethnohistory of the Mun (Lanten Yao) of Laos." *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 58, Issue 5, pp. 1299–1341. Published online by Cambridge University Press, 9 June 2025. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-asian-studies/article/ritual-war-and-opium-infrastructural-sedimentations-in-the-ethnohistory-of-the-mun-lanten-yao-of-laos/427FA87AD24C2327E37558A65A54622B

[9] Estevez, Joseba, and David A. Palmer. "Ritual, War, and Opium: Infrastructural Sedimentations in the Ethnohistory of the Mun (Lanten Yao) of Laos." *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 58, Issue 5, pp. 1299–1341. Published online by Cambridge University Press, 9 June 2025. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-asian-studies/article/ritual-war-and-opium-infrastructural-sedimentations-in-the-ethnohistory-of-the-mun-lanten-yao-of-laos/427FA87AD24C2327E37558A65A54622B

customary land-tenure arrangements of Dao/Yao households specifically in Naxaythong District.

Under the Lao PDR Land Law, land is under national ownership, while individuals, families, organizations and other eligible users may hold legally recognized land-use rights. The law provides the general statutory framework for land registration, use, transfer and inheritance that applies to households in Naxaythong District.[10] Whether Dao/Yao households also follow distinctive customary rules concerning inheritance, ancestral land or allocation of family land requires local verification.

Social Organization and Clan Identity

Research on Mun or Lanten Yao communities in Laos indicates that ritual and cosmological traditions are closely connected to collective organization and cultural identity.[11] Clan affiliation, relationships with ancestors and the role of ritual experts form part of this wider system of social and religious organization. [12]

These characteristics may also be relevant to Dao/Yao families living in Naxaythong, but the strength and form of clan organization in the district should be established through consultation with local elders, household heads and ritual practitioners. It should not be assumed that every Dao/Yao settlement follows the same organizational arrangements documented among Lanten communities in northern Laos.

Kinship Networks

The ethnographic sources reviewed indicate that Mun or Lanten Yao social and ritual life is maintained through relationships among households, relatives, ritual specialists and the wider community.[13] Kinship relationships are important to the organization of ceremonies and the continuation of collective cultural practices.

However, the reviewed sources do not provide direct evidence concerning the geographical extent, economic role or present-day operation of Dao/Yao kinship networks in Naxaythong District. Village-level research would therefore be needed to determine whether families maintain active kinship ties with Dao/Yao communities in other districts or provinces and how these ties support labour exchange, marriage, ceremonies or assistance during hardship.

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[10] Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. *Land Law No. 70/NA*, adopted 21 June 2019 and promulgated in 2020. English-language resource available through Open Development Laos.
https://data.laos.opendevelopmentmekong.net/laws_record/presidential-decree-on-the-promulgation-of-land-law-revised-2019

[11] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project*. Research programme concerning Daoism, collective organization, ritual life and cultural identity among Mun or Lanten Yao communities in Laos, China and Vietnam.
https://yaodao.hku.hk/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/research/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/genesis/

[12] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project*. Research programme concerning Daoism, collective organization, ritual life and cultural identity among Mun or Lanten Yao communities in Laos, China and Vietnam.
https://yaodao.hku.hk/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/research/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/genesis/

[13] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project*. Research programme concerning Daoism, collective organization, ritual life and cultural identity among Mun or Lanten Yao communities in Laos, China and Vietnam.
https://yaodao.hku.hk/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/research/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/genesis/

Family Structure and Marriage Practices

The available sources demonstrate that family and household relationships are closely connected to Mun or Lanten Yao ritual and social life.[14] Religious ceremonies link living family members with ancestors and help maintain household and community identity.

The sources reviewed, however, do not provide sufficient direct evidence to confirm the prevailing family structure, residence pattern after marriage, marriage-exchange practices or clan-based marriage restrictions of Dao/Yao households specifically in Naxaythong District. These matters should be documented through local interviews rather than generalized from other Yao subgroups or locations.

Ceremonies and Cultural Events

Ceremonial traditions are among the best-documented aspects of Mun or Lanten Yao culture in Laos. Daoist ritual and cosmology are described as central to collective organization and cultural life.[15] Ritual specialists use inherited manuscripts to communicate with Daoist deities and conduct ceremonies that sustain social and cosmological relationships.[16]

The manuscript tradition includes ritual and non-ritual texts written in Chinese script. These texts preserve knowledge required by ritual masters and priests and have been transmitted over several generations. .[17] Research also documents Daoist ordination traditions among Lanten Yao communities in Laos.

These findings indicate the cultural importance of ritual specialists, religious manuscripts, ancestor-related practices and ceremonial knowledge among the studied communities. Nevertheless, the particular ceremonies currently practised by Dao/Yao households in Naxaythong—such as New Year observances, weddings, funerals, healing ceremonies or initiation rites—require confirmation through direct community consultation.

Language and Cultural Transmission

The Yao Dao Project identifies the studied communities as Mun or Lanten Yao and documents a cultural tradition in which ritual knowledge is preserved through religious specialists and written manuscripts.[18] The manuscripts are written in Chinese script and contain knowledge

[14] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project*. Research programme concerning Daoism, collective organization, ritual life and cultural identity among Mun or Lanten Yao communities in Laos, China and Vietnam.
https://yaodao.hku.hk/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/research/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/genesis/

[15] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project*. Research programme concerning Daoism, collective organization, ritual life and cultural identity among Mun or Lanten Yao communities in Laos, China and Vietnam.
https://yaodao.hku.hk/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/research/
https://yaodao.hku.hk/genesis/

[16] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project: The Lanten Manuscripts*. Documentation of ritual manuscripts, Chinese-script religious texts and the transmission of ceremonial knowledge among Lanten Yao communities in northern Laos.
https://yaodao.hku.hk/manuscripts/

[17] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project: The Lanten Manuscripts*. Documentation of ritual manuscripts, Chinese-script religious texts and the transmission of ceremonial knowledge among Lanten Yao communities in northern Laos.
https://yaodao.hku.hk/manuscripts/

[18] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project: The Lanten Manuscripts*. Documentation of ritual manuscripts, Chinese-script religious texts and the transmission of ceremonial knowledge among Lanten Yao communities in northern Laos.
https://yaodao.hku.hk/manuscripts/

used in ceremonies and in maintaining the community's religious and cosmological traditions.[19]

This evidence shows that cultural transmission may occur through both oral instruction and specialist ritual literacy. Elders, parents, and ritual practitioners are therefore likely to play important roles in transmitting cultural knowledge. However, the reviewed sources do not provide Naxaythong-specific information on the Dao/Yao language variety spoken, the level of fluency among younger people, language use in the home, or the effects of Lao-language schooling and interaction with surrounding communities. These issues should be assessed locally.

3.3.2 Nam Suang Subproject

Hmong Ethnic Group in Naxaythong District, Vientiane Province, Lao PDR.

Livelihood-Related Cultural Practices

Published studies specifically describing Hmong households in Naxaythong District are limited. However, research on Hmong communities in Vientiane Capital, including neighbouring Xaythany District, indicates that Hmong livelihoods have diversified considerably over recent decades. While agriculture remains an important source of income, households increasingly combine rice cultivation, vegetable production, livestock raising, wage employment, small businesses and market-oriented agriculture. Improved road access, urban expansion around Vientiane and greater integration into regional markets have contributed to these livelihood changes while family labour continues to play a central role in agricultural production and household enterprises[20].

Based on the consultation conducted with the Hmong during March 2025, Hmong community has lived in the area for **10–30 years**, with **105 Hmong households** residing in Phoxay Village, although only **6–7 households cultivate land within the irrigation command area**. Most households own **2–10 ha of rubber plantations**, while others cultivate cassava or rent land outside the village for rice production. Rice is grown mainly for household consumption, while cucumber has recently become an attractive dry-season cash crop because it provides better income than rice. Farmers rely mainly on family labour. Participants reported that improved irrigation would enable a second rice crop. The community speaks Lao in public but Hmong at home and indicated no significant communication barriers. Members of the Water User Group reported satisfactory access through piped irrigation but expressed the need for improved canals and more reliable water supply. Household responsibilities remain gendered, with women undertaking most domestic work while agricultural decisions and community participation are more equally shared.

Land Tenure

[19] University of Hong Kong. *Yao Dao Project: The Lanten Manuscripts*. Documentation of ritual manuscripts, Chinese-script religious texts and the transmission of ceremonial knowledge among Lanten Yao communities in northern Laos. https://yaodao.hku.hk/manuscripts/

[20] Lattana, Inpeng (2022). *Changing Livelihood of Hmong People in Nasala Village, Xaythany District, Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR*. Master's Thesis Summary, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University. https://ussh.vnu.edu.vn/vi/dao-tao/luan-van/ttlv-bien-doi-sinh-ke-cua-nguoi-hmong-o-lang-nasala-huyen-xaythany-thu-do-vieng-chan-21734.html

Like other ethnic groups in Lao PDR, Hmong households in Naxaythong are subject to the national land administration framework established under the Land Law. Agricultural land is generally held through legally recognized land-use rights issued to individuals or households. In practice, land inheritance commonly occurs within families, although local customary norms may continue to influence decisions regarding inheritance and land use. The gradual transition from shifting cultivation in upland areas to permanent agriculture and settlement in Vientiane Province has strengthened reliance on fixed agricultural landholdings and formal land administration.[21]

Social Organization and Clan Identity

Clan identity remains one of the most important foundations of Hmong society. Hmong social organization is based on patrilineal clans, with approximately eighteen major clans recognized in Laos. Clan membership is inherited through the father's lineage and provides an individual's primary social identity. Clan members share mutual obligations, participate in important ceremonies, provide assistance during times of need and help resolve disputes. Even where Hmong households are geographically dispersed, clan identity continues to provide an important framework for social cohesion and collective support. [22]

Kinship Networks

Kinship relationships extend beyond the immediate household and frequently connect Hmong families across villages, districts and provinces. These networks facilitate labour exchange, mutual assistance during weddings and funerals, financial support during periods of hardship and the maintenance of clan relationships. Loyalty to one's clan remains an important cultural value irrespective of place of residence, enabling Hmong communities to maintain strong social ties even after migration or resettlement. [23]

Family Structure and Marriage Practices

Traditional Hmong families are patrilineal and generally patrilocal. Following marriage, a woman usually joins her husband's household and becomes a member of his clan, while retaining recognition of her natal clan. Marriage serves not only to establish a family but also to strengthen relationships between clans. Marriage within the same clan is traditionally prohibited because members of the same clan are considered close relatives. Although marriage practices have evolved over time, particularly among Hmong living near urban centres, customary engagement ceremonies, negotiations between families and clan participation remain important aspects of marriage. [24]

Spiritual Beliefs and Ritual Life

[21] Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. *Land Law No. 70/NA* (2019). English version available through Open Development Laos.
https://data.laos.opendevelopmentmekong.net/laws_record/presidential-decree-on-the-promulgation-of-land-law-revised-2019

[22] Springer Nature. "Hmong herbal medicine and herbalists in Lao PDR: pharmacopeia and knowledge transmission." *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* (2019).
https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13002-019-0307-2

[23] Culas, Christian & Michaud, Jean (eds.). *Hmong/Miao in Asia*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books. (Referenced in ethnographic literature on Hmong kinship, clans and cultural organization.)

[24] Culas, Christian & Michaud, Jean (eds.). *Hmong/Miao in Asia*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books. (Referenced in ethnographic literature on Hmong kinship, clans and cultural organization.)

Traditional Hmong spiritual beliefs are based primarily on animism and ancestor worship. Hmong cosmology recognizes that people, animals and natural features possess spiritual significance, and rituals are conducted to maintain harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds. Ritual specialists, commonly referred to as shamans, perform ceremonies associated with healing, protection, illness, agriculture, household welfare and communication with ancestral spirits. Although some Hmong families have adopted Christianity or Buddhism, traditional spiritual beliefs continue to play an important role in many communities throughout Laos.[25] [26]

Ceremonies and Cultural Events

Ceremonies remain central to Hmong cultural identity. Important cultural events include New Year celebrations, weddings, funerals, ancestor ceremonies and rituals associated with agriculture and household well-being. These events reinforce relationships among families and clans while providing opportunities to transmit traditional knowledge to younger generations. Ritual observances are commonly led by elders or ritual specialists and frequently involve extended family participation.[27]

Language and Cultural Transmission

Hmong communities in Laos primarily speak languages belonging to the Hmong-Mien language family, including White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) and Green or Blue Hmong (Hmoob Ntsuab). Older generations generally maintain fluency in Hmong languages, while Lao is widely used in education, government administration and commerce. Consequently, younger Hmong people increasingly become bilingual. Cultural knowledge—including oral history, clan traditions, customary law, agricultural practices, traditional medicine and ritual knowledge—is transmitted primarily through families, elders and clan networks, thereby contributing to the continuity of Hmong cultural identity across generations. [28] [29]

3.3.3 Nam Hin Subproject

Livelihood-Related Cultural Practices

Published information specifically describing Khmu households in Muang Xay District is limited. However, ethnographic studies indicate that Khmu communities throughout Laos traditionally depend on agriculture as their principal livelihood. Rice cultivation remains the dominant economic activity, complemented by the cultivation of maize, vegetables, bananas, sesame, sugarcane and other crops. Livelihoods are further supplemented by livestock

[25] Lao People's Democratic Republic. *Project Implementation Manual*, Agriculture for Nutrition Project (2023). Ethnic Group Profile describing Hmong social organization, spiritual beliefs, ancestor worship and traditional livelihoods. https://www.afn2.org.la/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Project-Implementation-Manual.pdf

[26] Minority Rights Group International. *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Laos: Lao Sung* (2018). https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/mrgi/2018/en/64546

[27] Lattana, Inpeng (2022). *Changing Livelihood of Hmong People in Nasala Village, Xaythany District, Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR*. Master's Thesis Summary, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University. https://ussh.vnu.edu.vn/vi/dao-tao/luan-van/ttlv-bien-doi-sinh-ke-cua-nguoi-hmong-o-lang-nasala-huyen-xaythany-thu-do-vieng-chan-21734.html

[28] Lattana, Inpeng (2022). *Changing Livelihood of Hmong People in Nasala Village, Xaythany District, Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR*. Master's Thesis Summary, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University. https://ussh.vnu.edu.vn/vi/dao-tao/luan-van/ttlv-bien-doi-sinh-ke-cua-nguoi-hmong-o-lang-nasala-huyen-xaythany-thu-do-vieng-chan-21734.html

[29] Culas, Christian & Michaud, Jean (eds.). *Hmong/Miao in Asia*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books. (Referenced in ethnographic literature on Hmong kinship, clans and cultural organization.)

raising, fishing, hunting, gathering non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and the collection of medicinal plants. Agricultural work is commonly undertaken through reciprocal labour exchange among households, reflecting the importance of community cooperation. In areas surrounding Vientiane, increasing market integration has also encouraged greater participation in wage employment and commercial agriculture while maintaining family-based farming systems.[30] [31]

Consultations with Khmu in Nam Hin were undertaken to establish a basic livelihood profiles. Community consists of approximately 150 Khmu households, together with around 30 Hmong households in the village. Around 70% of village households engage in reservoir fishing, which contributes roughly 80% of annual household income, while maize contributes about 20%. Most households also cultivate upland sticky rice for household consumption only; production is sufficient for about five months, requiring families to purchase additional rice. Corn is cultivated on about 2 ha per household, yielding approximately 3.5 t/ha, while upland rice averages 1 ha with yields around 1.75 t/ha. Labour exchange remains an important traditional practice within the Khmu community, especially during sowing and harvesting, replacing the need for hired labour in rice production. Fishing occurs throughout the year, mainly at night using gill nets. Participants reported declining fish stocks due to increasing numbers of fishers, illegal electrofishing and predatory fish species. The community expressed a strong desire for fish stock recovery and support for expanding small-scale livestock such as chickens, ducks, pigs and cattle. Households speak the Khmu language in daily life and reported having no written script.

Land Tenure

Khmu households in Muang Xay are governed by the national land administration framework established under the Lao Land Law. Individuals and households may obtain legally recognized land-use rights for residential and agricultural land. Traditionally, access to agricultural land has also been influenced by customary village practices and inheritance within families. As many Khmu communities have transitioned from shifting cultivation to permanent settlement, fixed agricultural landholdings have become increasingly important, while customary knowledge continues to influence the use of forest resources and communal areas where these remain available. [32] [33]

Social Organization and Clan Identity

Khmu society is organized around family lineages and clan-based social relationships. Village elders traditionally play important roles in community decision-making, dispute resolution and the maintenance of customary practices. Community leadership has historically included village elders, ritual specialists, herbal healers and, more recently, government-recognized village leaders. Although formal village administration now operates under the Lao

[30] World Bank. *Environmental and Social Management Framework – Lao PDR Landscape and Livelihood Project* (2017). Ethnic profile of the Khmou, including livelihoods, village organization, customary leadership and traditional practices

[31] Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. *Land Law No. 70/NA* (2019). English version available through Open Development Laos.

[32] Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. *Land Law No. 70/NA* (2019). English version available through Open Development Laos.

[33] World Bank. *Ethnic Group Development Framework – Enhancing Systematic Land Registration Project* (2021). Overview of ethnic groups and land administration applicable to ethnic communities in Lao PDR

administrative system, customary leadership continues to influence community affairs, particularly those relating to ceremonies, conflict resolution and the management of social relationships. [34] [35]

Kinship Networks

Kinship networks remain an important feature of Khmu society. Extended families commonly cooperate in agricultural production, house construction, ceremonies and mutual assistance during periods of hardship. Reciprocal labour exchange between related households has traditionally strengthened village solidarity and reduced labour shortages during planting and harvesting seasons. Relationships among relatives also support the transmission of customary knowledge, traditional medicine and cultural practices across generations. [36] [37]

Family Structure and Marriage Practices

Khmu households are generally organized around nuclear families, although close relationships with extended family members remain important. Marriage is regarded as both a union between individuals and an alliance between families. Traditional marriage practices commonly involve negotiations between the two families, exchanges of gifts and community ceremonies. Following marriage, couples often establish an independent household while maintaining close social and economic ties with their parents and relatives. Although marriage practices have evolved with increasing interaction with Lao society, customary family relationships continue to shape household organization and social obligations. [38] [39]

Spiritual Beliefs and Ritual Life

Traditional Khmu spiritual beliefs are primarily based on animism. Communities believe that spirits inhabit forests, mountains, rivers, agricultural land and the household, and ceremonies are conducted to maintain harmonious relationships between people and the spiritual world. Ancestor spirits and territorial spirits are regarded as important protectors of families and villages. Ritual specialists conduct ceremonies related to healing, agricultural production, household welfare and protection from misfortune. Knowledge of medicinal plants and traditional healing practices also remains an important component of Khmu cultural heritage. [40] [41]

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[34] World Bank. *Environmental and Social Management Framework – Lao PDR Landscape and Livelihood Project* (2017). Ethnic profile of the Khmou, including livelihoods, village organization, customary leadership and traditional practices

[35] Frank Proschan (1997). "We are all Kmhmu, just the same": Ethnonyms, Ethnic Identities, and Ethnic Groups. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 24(1), pp. 91–113.

[36] World Bank. *Environmental and Social Management Framework – Lao PDR Landscape and Livelihood Project* (2017). Ethnic profile of the Khmou, including livelihoods, village organization, customary leadership and traditional practices

[37] Frank Proschan. "Khmu." In *Encyclopedia of World Cultures, Volume 5: East and Southeast Asia*. Summary reproduced in *Facts and Details*. This source documents Khmou kinship, ceremonies, spiritual beliefs, oral traditions, music, traditional medicine and cultural practices.

[38] Frank Proschan. "Khmu." In *Encyclopedia of World Cultures, Volume 5: East and Southeast Asia*. Summary reproduced in *Facts and Details*. This source documents Khmou kinship, ceremonies, spiritual beliefs, oral traditions, music, traditional medicine and cultural practices.

[39] Khmu language and cultural overview, including language classification, dialects and cultural transmission among Khmou communities in Laos.

[40] World Bank. *Environmental and Social Management Framework – Lao PDR Landscape and Livelihood Project* (2017). Ethnic profile of the Khmou, including livelihoods, village organization, customary leadership and traditional practices

[41] Frank Proschan. "Khmu." In *Encyclopedia of World Cultures, Volume 5: East and Southeast Asia*. Summary reproduced in *Facts and Details*. This source documents Khmou kinship, ceremonies, spiritual beliefs, oral traditions, music, traditional medicine and cultural practices.

Ceremonies and Cultural Events

Ceremonial life continues to play an important role in maintaining Khmu cultural identity. Major cultural events include agricultural ceremonies associated with planting and harvesting, weddings, funerals, ancestor-related rituals and village spirit ceremonies. Music, bamboo instruments, oral traditions, storytelling and ceremonial songs are important elements of Khmu cultural expression. Traditional bronze drums continue to symbolize social status and may be used during important ceremonies in some communities. These events reinforce relationships among families, strengthen community solidarity and facilitate the transmission of traditional knowledge to younger generations. [42]

Language and Cultural Transmission

The Khmu language belongs to the Khmuic branch of the Austroasiatic language family and is one of the largest indigenous languages spoken in northern and central Laos. Numerous dialects are spoken throughout the country, although they remain largely mutually intelligible. Older generations generally maintain fluency in Khmu, while Lao is increasingly used in education, administration and commerce. Consequently, younger people commonly become bilingual. Cultural knowledge—including oral history, folklore, traditional ecological knowledge, medicinal plant use, music, customary law and spiritual practices—is transmitted primarily through parents, elders, storytelling, participation in ceremonies and everyday village life. [43] [44] [45]

3.4 Initial assessment of vulnerability of ethnic groups

Consultation had been conducted across three sites as a quick assessment of vulnerability of farmers vis a vis access to water from the reservoirs. Feedback from consulted ethnic groups and Lao Loum consistently indicate that the vulnerability is determined more by dependence on reservoir water than by ethnicity. Ethnic communities whose livelihoods rely directly on reservoir fisheries, fishponds or irrigated agriculture (particularly the Khmu at Nam Hin and Yao at Nam Houm) appear to be most vulnerable to reduced water access (e.g. temporary water restrictions during dam rehabilitation). On the contrary, communities whose livelihoods depend primarily on rain-fed rubber plantations (such as the Hmong in Phoxai, Nam Suang) reported little impact as their reliance on reservoir water is very small.

[42] Frank Proschan. "Khmu." In *Encyclopedia of World Cultures, Volume 5: East and Southeast Asia*. Summary reproduced in *Facts and Details*. This source documents Khmou kinship, ceremonies, spiritual beliefs, oral traditions, music, traditional medicine and cultural practices.
[43] Frank Proschan (1997). "We are all Kmhmu, just the same": Ethnonyms, Ethnic Identities, and Ethnic Groups. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 24(1), pp. 91–113.
[44] Frank Proschan. "Khmu." In *Encyclopedia of World Cultures, Volume 5: East and Southeast Asia*. Summary reproduced in *Facts and Details*. This source documents Khmou kinship, ceremonies, spiritual beliefs, oral traditions, music, traditional medicine and cultural practices.
[45] Khmu language and cultural overview, including language classification, dialects and cultural transmission among Khmou communities in Laos.

Assessment Topic	Nam Hin – Khmu (Thasaleung)	Nam Houm – Yao (Na Nard)	Nam Suang – Yao (Na Nard)	Nam Suang – Yao/Imieng (Phoxai)	Nam Houm – Hmong (Phonxay)	Nam Suang – Hmong (Phoxai)
Dependence on reservoir water	**Very High.** Reservoir fishing is the principal source of food and income. Reported uncertainty about how they would cope if affected by subproject. Livelihoods least diversified	**Very High.** Fish ponds and poultry farming depend directly on reliable reservoir water. Participants stated that their livelihoods cannot function without sufficient water. Livelihoods least diversified	**High.** Fish ponds, paddy cultivation and poultry rely heavily on stable reservoir water levels. Livelihoods moderately diversified	**Moderate–High.** Households depend on reservoir water for paddy, fish ponds, household use and livestock although some supplementary livelihoods exist.	**Moderate.** Paddy cultivation depends on irrigation. However, households also earn income from vegetables and rubber. Livelihoods moderately diversified	**Low.** Households rely mainly on rain-fed rubber plantations rather than reservoir irrigation.
Livelihood diversification	**Very Low.** Few viable alternatives to reservoir fishing were identified.	**Very Low.** Participants consistently reported having no realistic alternative livelihoods or skills.	**Low.** Temporary labour may be available but cannot replace fish pond and paddy income.	**Moderate.** Small trade, sewing and livestock were identified but expected to generate substantially lower income.	**Moderate.** Households identified wage labour, cassava cultivation and livestock as temporary coping options.	**High.** Existing rubber production is expected to continue unaffected, reducing the need for alternative livelihoods.
Food security dependence	**Very High.** Fish provides both household consumption and cash income. Loss of fishing would directly reduce food security.	**High.** Fish and poultry are major household food sources and income generators.	**High.** Reduced water would decrease fish production and rice yields, increasing dependence on purchased food.	**Moderate–High.** Reduced water would lower fish availability and crop production, particularly affecting children and elderly household members.	**Moderate.** Reduced rice and vegetable production would affect household food security, although households have some income diversification.	**Low.** Food is primarily purchased using rubber income rather than produced using reservoir water.
Coping capacity	**Low.** Few practical coping mechanisms beyond limited agriculture and livestock were identified.	**Very Low.** Participants reported no clear coping strategy other than reducing household consumption and borrowing from relatives.	**Low.** Households would reduce production, seek occasional labour and rely more on poultry, but considered these insufficient.	**Moderate.** Households would reduce expenditures, seek local employment and adjust farming practices according to water availability.	**Moderate.** Wage labour, cassava and livestock provide some resilience, although income would decline.	**High.** Existing livelihoods are expected to continue with little disruption from the project.

3.5 Development Support for Ethnic Groups in Subproject Area

The Project will fund and deliver culturally appropriate support in response to verified impacts and barriers to benefits. The PIU will consult affected people on the options below, prioritize measures based on impact severity, livelihood dependence and household vulnerability, and assess their feasibility with relevant service providers. The PMU will confirm the selected measures, budget, responsibilities and timetable in the EGEP and, where ESS5 applies, the Resettlement Plan. The options listed here reflect priorities mentioned during consultations and will be confirmed during site-specific assessment.

3.5.1 Nam Houm (Vientiane provice)

A. Protected water supply during construction

Yao participants identified reliable water as essential to their livelihoods. The Project will assess water needs and include feasible continuity measures in the design and construction arrangements for the following uses:

- Fish ponds;
- Poultry farms;
- Paddy fields; and
- Household production needs.

Possible investments include:

- Temporary bypass pipes or pumps during works
- Repair of secondary and tertiary canals
- Water gates and flow-control structures
- Lined canals to reduce leakage
- Farm-level water storage ponds, and
- Metering or simple water-distribution controls

B. Aquaculture and poultry productivity support

Subject to site-specific assessment and consultation, support to sustain aquaculture and poultry production may include the following options:

- Low-cost fish and poultry feed production;
- Improved pond management;
- Water-quality monitoring;
- Fish disease prevention;
- Poultry vaccination and veterinary services;
- Improved farm biosecurity;
- Energy-efficient aeration or pumping where appropriate; and
- Cooperative purchasing of feed and inputs.

This directly responds to the support requested by the Yao men consulted at Na Nard.

C. Livelihood-loss contingency fund

The EGEP and, where applicable, the Resettlement Plan will set out how the Project will verify and address livelihood losses linked to water disruption. The PIU will agree on reporting, eligibility, responsibilities and timing with affected people. Measures may address:

- Production losses caused by planned water restrictions
- Fish mortality linked to project-induced water changes
- Poultry losses where water disruption affects farm operations, and
- Emergency feed or water supply

3.5.2 Nam Suang (Vientiane province)

Yao communities identified the following options for site-specific assessment and discussion:

- Repair and lining of irrigation canals
- Functioning water-control gates
- Removal of accumulated sediment
- Transparent water-rotation schedules
- Pond-level water storage;
- Water-efficient aquaculture practices
- Support for chickens and egg production
- Temporary labour opportunities during construction, and
- Targeted support for women managing household food and finances.

Women emphasized that water reductions would affect fish ponds, paddy production, nutrition, schooling costs and debt repayment.

For the Hmong communities, as the Hmong communities are less dependent on dam water than the Yao households but still require support for irrigated rice and vegetables, investments may include:

- Reliable paddy and vegetable irrigation
- Drought-tolerant and short-duration crop varieties
- Cassava and vegetable production training
- Pig and chicken production packages
- Sewing and handicraft training for women
- Small electrical-appliance repair training
- Access to farm inputs and local markets, and
- Short-term employment in project construction

These investments should be designed as livelihood resilience measures. Participants specifically identified livestock, cassava, sewing, handicrafts and appliance repair as useful options.

For the Hmong and Yao/Iu Mien at Nam Suang (Phoxai village), since consultation responses differed between male and female groups, the project should avoid a single standardized package.

For households dependent on water, support should include:

- Reliable water delivery for paddy and fish ponds
- Small livestock
- Household water storage
- Sewing and small-trade support for women
- Advance notice of water restrictions, and
- Fair water-distribution arrangements.

For rain-fed rubber-dependent households that expect little direct impact, project benefits could include:

- Rubber productivity and disease-management training
- Market information
- Traditional knife-making equipment and skills
- Youth vocational training, and
- Village-level infrastructure selected through consultation.

Male Hmong participants stated that compensation was unnecessary where no livelihood impact was expected, which supports using community-selected development benefits rather than uniform cash support**.**

3.5.3 Nam Hin (Oudomxay province)

A. Fisheries restoration and management

The project should consider financing the following activities to support livelihood stabilization and development for the vulnerable Khmu households:

- Community-managed fish conservation zones
- Native fish restocking based on technical assessment
- Control of illegal electrofishing and destructive fishing methods
- Seasonal fishing rules agreed with fishing households
- Fish population and catch monitoring with community participation
- Rehabilitation of fish habitats around reservoir margins, and
- Training for village fisheries management committees.

Khmu participants identified reservoir fisheries as a priority for assessment because they support both food consumption and income.

B. Temporary livelihood and food-security support during rehabilitation

Where project-related drawdown or construction restricts fishing, the Project will assess eligible losses and provide mitigation and required livelihood support through the applicable plans. Options include:

- Transitional income assistance
- Food or protein support during the restricted-access period
- Compensation for verified fishing-income loss

- Temporary access to alternative fishing areas where safe
- Support for fish processing, cold storage and market access, and
- Advance notice of drawdown and restricted fishing zones.

Support should begin **before** fishing access is interrupted, not afterward.

C. Diversification suited to local land constraints

Because the community reported limited land, livelihood support should avoid assuming that greenhouse farming is feasible for everyone. More realistic investments include:

- Small livestock packages—chickens, ducks, pigs and cattle
- Animal-health and vaccination services
- Improved maize production with reduced pesticide dependence
- Small-scale fish processing and marketing
- Boat and fishing-gear safety improvements
- Vocational skills for youth, and
- Local employment in rehabilitation works.

The consultation records show that corn and wage labour would not fully replace fishing income. Therefore, diversification should supplement rather than substitute fisheries.

3.6 Recommended project principle

The project should not provide the same investment package to every ethnic group. Support should be based on:

- The degree of dependence on reservoir water
- The duration and severity of project-induced restriction
- Availability of alternative land and livelihoods
- Household food-security risk
- Cultural importance of the affected livelihood
- Preferences expressed through meaningful consultation, and
- Technical and market feasibility.

Each site-specific EGEP will record the concerns raised, measures selected, who will receive support, timing, funding, and how results will be monitored. Where an activity uses an integrated instrument, retain these same commitments in that instrument. Document the reasons for deferring or declining options and communicate them to affected groups.

4. E&S RISKS, IMPACTS & MITIGATION MEASURES

At this stage, the following E&S risks and impacts are identified. Once the Feasibility Study for the project is completed, this EGEF will be updated to further identify, assess, evaluate, and manage environmental and social risks and impacts (based on the FS). A mitigation hierarchy will be applied under which risks and impacts are anticipated and avoided. Where avoidance is not possible, minimized or reduced to acceptable levels; and, once risks and impacts have

been minimized or reduced, mitigated. Where significant residual impacts remain, compensation or offset measures will be applied where technically and financially feasible.

Category	Key E&S Risk / Impact	Nature of Impact
Air Quality	Dust generation from excavation, earthworks, haul roads and material transport	Temporary, localized construction impact
	Exhaust emissions from construction machinery and vehicles	Temporary
Noise and Vibration	Construction noise affecting nearby villages and sensitive receptors	Temporary
	Vibration from heavy equipment	Temporary
Surface Water	Increased turbidity and sedimentation during spillway rehabilitation, dredging and canal works	Temporary but potentially significant downstream
	Pollution from fuel, oil, lubricants and concrete wash water	Localized if not controlled
	Reduced downstream water availability during construction	Temporary
Groundwater and Soil	Soil erosion on exposed slopes	Temporary
	Sedimentation into waterways	Temporary
	Soil contamination from accidental fuel or chemical spills	Localized
Waste Management	Construction debris and excavated spoil	Temporary
	Domestic waste from workers' camps	Ongoing during construction
	Hazardous waste (oil, filters, fuel containers)	Requires proper management
Biodiversity	Temporary disturbance to aquatic habitats during reservoir and spillway rehabilitation	Temporary
	Reduced fish habitat and fish populations during drawdown and dredging	Moderate
	Disturbance to vegetation around work sites	Localized
Occupational Health & Safety	Injuries from excavation, heavy machinery, working at heights and confined spaces	Significant construction risk
	Heat stress, dust exposure and accidents	Construction phase
Community Health & Safety	Increased traffic accidents from construction vehicles	Temporary
	Public safety risks near construction areas	Temporary
	Community exposure to dust and noise	Temporary
	Communicable disease transmission associated with workforce	Low–Moderate
Labor	Poor labor conditions if contractors fail to comply with Labor Management Procedures	Contractor management issue
	Child labor or forced labor (preventive risk)	To be prohibited
	Worker grievances	Requires worker GM
Land and Livelihoods	Temporary disruption to irrigation water delivery	Temporary
	Possible small-scale land acquisition for canal improvements	Site-specific

Category	Key E&S Risk / Impact	Nature of Impact
	Temporary restrictions on access to agricultural land	Construction phase
Reservoir Fisheries	Temporary loss of fishing access due to reservoir drawdown or safety exclusion zones	Significant for fishing households
	Decline in fish catch and household income	Moderate–High for affected households
Food Security	Reduced household food security	Particularly for ethnic households
Ethnic Groups	Disproportionate impacts on ethnic communities dependent on reservoir resources	Social risk requiring culturally appropriate engagement
	Need for culturally appropriate consultation	ESS7 requirement
Cultural Heritage	Discovery or disturbance of graves and ancestral sites during excavation	High sensitivity
	Need for Chance Finds Procedure and customary ceremonies	Important cultural risk
Gender and SEA/SH	Sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment associated with contractors	Preventive risk requiring Code of Conduct
	Unequal participation of women in consultation and project benefits	Requires targeted measures
Dam Safety	Temporary increase in safety risks during rehabilitation works	Engineering management issue
	Failure to maintain safe reservoir operations during construction	Requires Emergency Preparedness Plan
Climate Risks	Extreme rainfall affecting construction activities	Increased erosion and safety risks
	Flood events damaging temporary works	Construction risk
Stakeholder Risks	Community dissatisfaction if consultation and disclosure are inadequate	Social licence risk
	Grievances from affected households	Requires effective project GM

Differentiated measures will be adopted so that adverse impacts do not fall disproportionately on disadvantaged or vulnerable groups and so that ethnic groups are not disadvantaged in sharing Project benefits and development opportunities. Potential risks and impacts on ethnic groups will be assessed on the basis of available information and will be further assessed when the feasibility studies, detailed designs, and environmental and social assessments for the relevant Project activities are undertaken.

Where ethnic groups are identified in a Project area, the Social Assessment will examine their relationship with the affected land and natural resources, their livelihood systems, and the potential positive and adverse effects of Project activities. Consultations will be undertaken to identify assets, cultural places, tangible or intangible cultural heritage, trees, plants, natural resources, or other culturally significant features that may be affected. Mitigation measures will, where possible, be designed in consultation with affected ethnic groups. The assessment

and consultation process will also identify measures to maximize culturally appropriate Project benefits and to avoid or minimize adverse impacts.

It is noted that risks and impacts may be more pronounced for ethnic groups because of language barriers, cultural norms, potential discrimination, limited access to information, or dependence on land and natural resources. Particular attention will therefore be given to whether Project activities may affect land and natural resources subject to traditional ownership or customary use, cultural or spiritual areas, livelihoods, and access to Project benefits. These aspects need to be considered and addressed in the site–specific EGEP.

Available consultation records indicate that some Hmong households participate in existing Water User Groups (WUGs). Other participants reported weak WUG functioning or called for clearer water-rotation schedules. Current information does not establish systematic differences in tenure or water access by ethnic group. The site assessment will compare titled, customary, rented and informal use, including seasonal and collective resource access, and check who participates in WUGs, receives allocation information and can contest delivery decisions. Verify access for women, non-Lao speakers and users outside WUG membership.

5. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

1.1 Screening for Presence of Ethnic Groups in Subproject Area

Screening will be conducted once the location and scope of a subproject are known. The purpose of the screening is to determine whether ethnic groups are present in, or have collective attachment to, the subproject area. The screening will include a review of available secondary data, including census data, ethnic group databases, local administrative records, and other relevant information concerning the villages and communities in the subproject area. Primary data will also be collected through field visits and consultations with local authorities, village chiefs, key informants, representatives of ethnic groups, and local community members.

The PIU, with PMU and social specialist support, will record these findings in the ESMF screening form and verify them during feasibility and detailed design. Use existing records, targeted site visits and consultations. Focus on issues that could change the design, eligibility, compensation, livelihood support, water allocation or engagement. Expand the assessment where the initial findings indicate material risks or data gaps.

Groups identified during screening will be assessed against the following four characteristics referred to under ESS7:

(a) Self-identification as members of a distinct indigenous social and cultural group and recognition of this identity by others;
(b) Collective attachment to geographically distinct habitats, ancestral territories, or areas of seasonal use or occupation, as well as to the natural resources in these areas;
(c) Customary cultural, economic, social, or political institutions that are distinct or separate from those of the mainstream society or culture; and

(d) A distinct language or dialect, often different from the official language or languages of the country or region in which they reside.

The screening process and its conclusion will be documented. Where it is determined that no ethnic groups are present in, or have collective attachment to, the subproject area, the process and basis for this determination will be documented in the relevant Environmental and Social Management Plan, and no further action under this EGEF will be required.

Where screening concludes that ethnic groups are present in, or have collective attachment to, the subproject area, a Social Assessment proportional to the nature and scale of the potential impacts will be conducted and an Ethnic Group Engagement Plan will be prepared where required. The requirements of ESS7 apply regardless of whether the expected impacts on ethnic groups are positive or adverse and regardless of the significance of those impacts.

1.2 Conducting a targeted Social Assessment

Where screening confirms that ethnic groups are present in, or have collective attachment to, a subproject area, a Social Assessment and related meaningful consultations will be conducted. The Social Assessment may be integrated into the relevant environmental and social assessment or prepared separately. The breadth, depth, and type of analysis undertaken as part of the Social Assessment will be proportional to the nature and scale of the subproject's potential positive and adverse effects on the affected ethnic groups.

The Social Assessment will include, as needed:

a. Baseline information on the demographic, economic, social, cultural, and political characteristics of the affected ethnic groups;
b. Information on habitats, ancestral territories, areas of seasonal use or occupation, land, and natural resources that the affected ethnic groups have traditionally owned, customarily used, or occupied;
c. An assessment of the expected direct and indirect economic, social, cultural, and environmental risks and impacts;
d. An assessment of the vulnerability of the affected ethnic groups and the constraints they may face in accessing Project benefits;
e. Identification and evaluation of measures to avoid adverse effects or, where avoidance is not feasible, to minimize, mitigate, or compensate for such effects;
f. Identification of measures to ensure that affected ethnic groups receive culturally appropriate Project benefits;
g. A summary of the relevant provisions of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan; and
h. A summary of meaningful consultations and, where applicable, the Free, Prior and Informed Consent process.

Meaningful consultation will involve the representative bodies and organizations of affected Ethnic Groups and, where appropriate, other community members. It will provide sufficient time for the decision-making processes of ethnic groups and allow their effective participation in the design of Project activities and mitigation measures that may affect them positively or adversely.

Meaningful consultation will begin early, continue throughout Project preparation and implementation, and be based on prior disclosure of relevant, transparent, objective, meaningful, and accessible information. Information will be provided in a culturally appropriate format, in relevant languages, and in a manner understandable to affected ethnic groups.

The consultation process will consider and respond to feedback, support active and inclusive engagement, be free of external manipulation, interference, coercion, discrimination, and intimidation, and be documented and disclosed.

The PIU will verify impacts that will require obtaining FPIC (see Annex 2) from affected ethnic groups, including impacts on customary land, water and fisheries, potential relocation from customary lands or resources, and possible impacts on cultural heritage. The PIU will refer potential or uncertain triggers to the PMU. The PMU will consult the World Bank on the determination of obtaining FPIC.

1.3 Prepare an Ethnic Group Engagement Plan

Based on the findings of the Social Assessment and meaningful consultations, an Ethnic Group Engagement Plan will be prepared where required. The scope and level of detail of the EGEP will be proportional to the nature and scale of the potential impacts on affected ethnic groups.

The EGEP will include, as needed:

a) A summary of the Social Assessment;
b) A summary of the legal and institutional framework applicable to ethnic groups;
c) A summary of the relevant portions of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, including stakeholder analysis, consultation, and disclosure arrangements;
d) A summary of the framework for meaningful consultation and, where applicable, Free, Prior and Informed Consent during Project implementation;
e) A detailed description of culturally appropriate measures to mitigate adverse physical or cultural impacts and to provide culturally appropriate and sustainable development benefits;
f) Institutional arrangements, including clear responsibilities and accountabilities;
g) A culturally appropriate and accessible grievance mechanism that takes into account the availability of judicial recourse and customary dispute-settlement mechanisms;
h) Cost estimates and a financing plan; and
i) Mechanisms and benchmarks for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

The identification of impacts, mitigation measures, and Project benefits will be undertaken in close consultation with affected ethnic groups and will take into account gender and inter-generational considerations.

1.4 Review and Approval of an Ethnic Group Engagement Plan

The draft Ethnic Group Engagement Plan will be submitted to the World Bank for review as part of the relevant subproject implementation documentation. Prior to implementation of

the activities covered by the EGEP, the plan will be disclosed publicly and made accessible to affected ethnic groups. A copy will be made available in Lao language and in another relevant language where appropriate. A summary of the EGEP will be communicated to affected ethnic groups in an easily understandable format. Depending on language and literacy needs, the format may include audio, photographs, drawings, printed booklets, or flyers. The Social Assessment and/or EGEP will be updated during Project implementation where necessary to identify unexpected adverse impacts or to revise the required mitigation measures.

Where FPIC is required, the PMU will submit the FPIC record and the relevant EGEP to the World Bank for review before authorizing the affected activity. The relevant activity may proceed only once the Bank has ascertained that FPIC was obtained and the applicable EGEP requirements have been met. If the design or impacts change materially, or an unforeseen trigger is identified, the PIU will pause the activity and the PMU will re-screen it in consultation with affected groups and the Bank.

6. GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISM

6.1 Objectives of the Project GRMs

The objective of this project-level GRM, as part of stakeholder engagement, is to receive and resolve timely and effectively the grievances that are submitted by affected stakeholders during project implementation. At central and provincial level, the GRM will be established. In addition, formal procedures and alternative channels for receiving grievance is developed under WISER to GRM accessible make the projects and user friendly for project affected people.

6.2 Summary of national legislation related to grievance and complaint Description of the Project GRMs

The Government of Laos PDR has various laws and sub-decrees that have been in place to guide the implementation of complaint resolution process. These documents specify the right of the complainants as well as the responsibilities of concerned governmental agencies as to complaint resolution. Relevant legal documents include:

- Law on Complaint (amended version), No. 05/NA dated: 9/11/2016
- Environmental Protection Law 2012 (No. 29/NA);
- Labor Law (2018);
- Women and Children Law 2014 (Law No. 56/NA of 2014);
- The Lao Front for National Development (2012);
- Decree on Ethnicity (No. 207/GOL,2020);
- Law on Grievance Redress (No. 012/NA of 2014);
- Law on Resettlement and Occupation (No. 45/NA date: 15/06/2018).

6.3 Principles of the Project GRMs

The principles are adopted to design GMR for the project:

- **Channels.** Different channels are established to enable affected person to submit their grievances, including submission to village committee, as well as district and provincial levels. Grievance can also be submitted to:
    i. **PMU's email**, including telephone nuber (as helpline call centers) (response within 5 business days);
    ii. **PMU offices** at district level;
    iii. **Project staff** (including Project District Staff, Village Facilitators) during meetings or during site visit;
    iv. **Village Mediation Committee** (independent from any other committees established for project purpose). Within 5 business days following the receipt of the grievance, the VMC will inform the complainant if her/his grievance could be addressed at the village level or will be escalated to the next level. Complaints are typically resolved within 10 business days at VMC level.
- **Forms.** Grievances can be submitted in writing and verbally, and either directly by the affected households, or by a person delegated by the complainant (e.g. the elderly, people with disabilities). Anonymous complaints are accepted and kept confidential.
- **Complainant can delegate a representative who act on their behalf.** Person lodging a grievance can ask assistance from their family or from individual that they trust to transcribe their complaint, and act as their representative to submit their complaint.
- **Disclosure.** GRM procedures are disclosed in public domain (e.g. websites of PMU, at public notice board located at village hall). GRM procedure will be explained to people attending consultation meetings. In addition, the contact detail of responsible persons including phone and WhatsApp numbers will be disseminated and displayed on poster in the project areas and affected villages.
- **Documentation.** A grievance logbook will be maintained at village hall (subproject level) and at PMU level (through PMU GRM focal point). A grievance logbook will be established and regularly updated/maintained at village hall and PMU level.
- **Transparency.** The grievance procedures include steps, expected time frame grievance resolution for each step, notification to affected person, how decision is made, decision makers, mediation options.
- **Time-limit for grievance resolution is specified for each step.** Complaint will be acknowledged within 5 days from the date of complaint receipt.
- **Acknowledgement of complaint receipt.** The unit in charge of complaint resolution will notify complainant upon complaint receipt and will initiate the complaint resolution process.
- **Appeal.** If the agency in charge does not resolve a grievance in a manner that is satisfactory to the affected person, a multistakeholder committee will be established (ad-hoc) to resolve the dismissed grievance – as an alternative for affected person going to court. If the grievance could not be resolved satisfactorily by the multistakeholder committee, the affected person may resort to the Provincial Assembly for consideration and decision prior to submitting to the court of law (Law on Grievance Redress No. 106/NA, 2022).

- **Monitoring.** All grievances received are recorded by PMU and relevant Village Mediation Committees, and are processed/resolved in a given timeframe, and are monitored by PMU GRM focal point.
- **Complainants bear no costs associated with the entire complaint resolution process**. Costs incurred as a result of grievance resolution will be borne by the project. However, if the complaints bring their case to the court of law as they wish, they will bear the costs associated with their lawsuit.

6.4 Project's Redress Procedures

Based on the above GRM principles, the project will establish three complaint handling procedures for three types of potential grievances: grievances related to 1) general complaints from the public and communities in and around the subproject sites, 2) labor and working conditions (all groups of project workers), and 3) sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEA/SH). It is noted that the GRM for complaints related to labor and working condition will follow the procedure described in the project's Labor Management Procedures whereas the GRM related to SEA/SH established under this project will be in accordance with the pertinent national laws and the World Bank's guidance on SEA/SH and is described in project's LMP (see LMP for details) and grievance related to land acquisition will be resolved in accordance with the GRM described in the project't EGEPs. These three procedures are summarized below:

6.4.1 Redress Procedure for General Complaints

In case individuals, households, or communities are affected by any other aspects, for instance, environmental impacts (e.g. dust, noise, or lack of safety measures that increase risks of traffic accident to road users or to local ethnic group), their complaints could be submitted through various channels that will be established for their convenient use, including people from ethnic groups. These include:

For general project benefits:

- PMU GRM focal point's telephone (as helpline call center);
- Local EG leaders (in case affected individual/households belong to ethnic groups)
- Village Authorities/Village Mediation Committee

For environmental and other relevant social issues at construction sites:

- Dedicated helpline call center with contact detail of GRM responsible persons assigned by the Contractors, PMU and Construction Supervision Consultant (CSC) teams with their contact detail including helpline call numbers (phone/WhatsApp) are disclosed for affected people to report cases that they think Contractor can resolve timely (contact detail of Contractor will be posted at construction sites, distributed to project's stakeholder through Subproject Information Booklet during consultation, and posted at public billboard of village offices, etc.).

6.4.2 Redress Procedure for Complaints related to labor and working conditions

Project workers can lodge their grievance/complaint as follows:

Step 1 Employer Level. Affected person (AP) can submit their grievance to their Employer

who serves as the first focal point for receiving and resolving grievance. Grievance can be lodged verbally or in writing, in person or by phone, text message, mail or email (anonymous complaint is accepted). The Employer involved will resolve the case no later than 15 days. Once resolved and the AP is satisfactory, the Employer will report the case, including resolution process and results, to the Project Management Unit (PMU) for information and record. If the AP is not satisfied with the resolution of their Employer, the Employer will refer the AP to the GRM focal point of PMU, and PMU if needed, and inform the AP of this referral. It is noted that if a complaint is concerned of the safety and health of one or several individuals, such complaint shall be resolved as soon as possible – depending on the nature and urgency of the grievance.

Step 2 **PMU level.** PMU will resolve the complaint referred by the Employer and acknowledge the receipt of the AP's complaints within two weeks from the date of complaint receipt. If the GRM of PMU cannot resolve the complaint, the GRM focal point of PMU will consult with the Project Manager for resolution. The GRM focal point of PMU will inform the AP of the PMU's resolution result in writing within 15 days from the date of complaint receipt. If the AP is not satisfied with the resolution outcome proposed by PMU, PMU will refer the case to the PMU for resolving and inform the AP of this referral in writing.

Step 3 **Court of Law.** If the AP is not satisfied with the resolution proposed above, a multistakeholder committee will be established (ad-hoc) to resolve the dismissed grievance – as an alternative for affected person going to court. If the grievance could not be resolved satisfactorily by the multistakeholder committee, the affected person may resort to the court of law. The cost associated to the lawsuit shall be borne by the AP. The decision of the Court will be final.

6.4.3 Redress Procedure for Complaints related to SEA/SH

Under this Project, GRM for SH/SEA mainly serves in: (i) refer the cases to the national network/center for women protection and counselling services with hotline number at 1362 and health care services under Mahosoth hospital (hotline number: 1527); and (ii) recording resolution of the complaint. The following principles, which will be applied under the Project, recognize victim as principal decision makers in their own care, and treat them with agency, dignity and respect for their needs and wishes.

- Multiple channels are in place for easy access and lodge complaints.
- SH/SEA/GBV victims will be referred to local SEA/SH/GBV service provider for immediate support if they make a complaint directly to the PMU .
- Confidentiality of victims are protected. GRM operator of PMU will keep SH/SEA/GBV allegation report confidential.
- No identifiable information on the victim shall be collected and stored in subproject Grievance Logbook.
- Costs of operating the SH/SEA/GBV GRM will be financed by the project.

Channels for lodging SH/SEA/GBV complaints:

- **Channel 1** – AP can submit a complaint, verbally or in writing, to Village Mediation

Committee/Village Authorities

- **Channel 2** – Alternatively, AP can lodge their complaint, verbally or in writing, to GRM Social Focal Point of PMU.
- **Channel 3**– AP can submit a complaint to, or seek counselling support from local Lao Women's Union, as they wish.

Under this project, PMU does not tolerate reprisals and retaliation against project stakeholders who share their views about Bank-financed projects.

7. INFORMATION DISCLOSURE & STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

7.1 Stakeholder Engagement

During project preparation, from March through December 2025, six-teen meetings have been conducted with the partipants of 115 people from various ethic groups (Yao, Mong, Khmu). Of the 115 people from three main ethnic groups, 79 are male, 36 are female. Across all consultation meetings, the following common priorities emerged:

- **Reliable and equitable water supply** was the highest priority for all ethnic communities.
- Participants consistently requested **rehabilitation of irrigation canals, repair of damaged water-control structures, sediment removal and improved water management**.
- Communities expressed concern that temporary disruptions during construction could affect **agricultural production, fisheries and household incomes**, and requested that water interruptions be minimized and communicated in advance.
- **Livelihood protection and diversification** were recurring themes. Hmong and Yao communities focused primarily on irrigated agriculture, aquaculture and livestock, while Khmu communities emphasized reservoir fisheries together with livestock as complementary income sources.
- Indigenous communities requested **continued consultation, culturally appropriate communication, and participation in Water User Groups and project implementation** throughout the rehabilitation process.

Despite the commonalities, the consultation in each subproject sites indicate that the needs for water and support for crop/livelihood production varies slightly from subproject to subprojects – as summarized in table below.

Nam Houm Reservoir/ Yao (Dao) and **Hmong**
▪ The principal concern was maintaining **reliable irrigation water** during and after rehabilitation. Ethnic households rely on irrigation to support rice cultivation, aquaculture (fish ponds), poultry and household livelihoods. ▪ Participants highlighted deteriorated canals, sedimentation and inadequate secondary and tertiary canals as the main causes of water shortages. ▪ Yao participants emphasized that interruptions to irrigation could reduce fish pond production, poultry production and household income, while Hmong participants stressed the importance of irrigation for rice cultivation and food security.

▪ Communities requested rehabilitation of irrigation canals, improved water management, advance notification of construction schedules, maintenance of water supply during works, and livelihood support if agricultural production is temporarily affected. ▪ Consultation records also note that some Dao and Hmong households were unavailable during one March consultation because they were working outside the village, indicating the need for continued engagement during implementation.
Nam Suang Reservoir/ Hmong and a small number of **Yao/Iu Mien**
▪ Hmong households explained that most families depend on **rubber plantations, cassava and rice cultivation**, while only a small proportion farm within the irrigation command area. ▪ Participants believed that improved irrigation would enable cultivation of a **second rice crop**, increase agricultural productivity and improve household food security. ▪ Women emphasized the importance of maintaining household water supplies during rehabilitation and requested timely information on construction schedules and possible water interruptions. ▪ Communities requested rehabilitation of irrigation canals, reliable water delivery, livelihood diversification (e.g. livestock, handicrafts and vocational skills), and continued participation in Water User Groups. ▪ Participants also noted that communication should be provided in appropriate local languages where necessary.
Nam Hin Reservoir/ Khmu (primary ethnic group) and **Hmong**
▪ The dominant concern was **protection of reservoir fisheries**, which constitute the principal livelihood and food source for many Khmu households. Participants estimated that fishing contributes around **80% of household income** and supports approximately **70% of village households**. ▪ Communities reported that fish stocks have declined because of illegal electrofishing, increasing fishing pressure and ecological changes, and requested measures to restore fisheries and strengthen enforcement. ▪ Farmers also reported increasing competition for irrigation water due to sedimentation, upstream water use and deteriorating irrigation infrastructure. ▪ Participants requested rehabilitation of canals and water-control structures, improved water distribution, canal extensions, sediment removal and provision of drought-tolerant crop varieties. ▪ Khmu participants also requested livelihood diversification through livestock (chickens, ducks, pigs and cattle), continued support for reservoir fisheries, and recognition of traditional labour-sharing practices. During later consultations, participants also highlighted the importance of continued engagement with Khmu communities regarding resettlement history, reservoir management and future livelihood support.

7.2 Information disclosure

The World Bank requires that sufficient information about project's potential risks and impacts be made available to the affected project people - in a form and language that is understandable to project affected people and project's stakeholders, and in an accessible place and in a timely manner, enable affected peoples to provide meaningful feedback for project design and mitigation measures.

7.3 Arrangement for Information Disclosure and Stakeholder Engagement

During project preparation: During project preparation, this EGEF will be disclosed in English (full text) and in Lao language (Executive Summary). At national level, the EGEF will be disclosed on the website of MAE – for public consultation. The Lao executive summary will be disclosed at three subproject sites for consultation with people in affected villages and at relevant district offices. Feedback and recommendations from consulted stakeholders, if any, will be incorporated into the final revised versions and will be disclosed on the websites of MAE and the World Bank.

During project implementation: In subproject area where EG(s) are present, an EGEP will be prepared and will be disclosed to affected stakeholders for consultation. The EGEP will be disclosed locally (commune level) in Lao language. If EG people are affected, the EGEP will be explained verbally to them in the EG's own language (in addition to disclosed Executive Summary in Lao language).

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

8.1 Internal monitoring

Where ethnic groups are present, internal monitoring will be conducted during implementation of the relevant Project activities. Monitoring results will be documented and included in regular Project reports.

Compliance monitoring will verify whether the required mitigation measures have been considered and implemented in accordance with the EGEF, the site-specific EGEP, and other relevant environmental and social instruments. It will also examine how grievances have been submitted, addressed, and resolved, including outstanding grievances and issues raised by stakeholders during monitoring.

Impact monitoring will assess the impacts experienced by affected ethnic groups, including impacts identified in the EGEF and EGEP, unforeseen impacts, and gender-related impacts.

Affected ethnic groups will, where possible, be involved in monitoring the effects of Project activities on their communities. Such participation will take into account the results of consultation, customary decision-making structures, gender balance, and inter-generational representation.

Monitoring of the EGEP will also cover implementation progress, socioeconomic conditions during and after implementation, the effectiveness of mitigation measures, and whether Project benefits reach affected ethnic groups.

8.2 External monitoring

The PMU will determine the need for independent monitoring during site-specific assessment, considering the severity and concentration of impacts, livelihood dependence and capacity to verify outcomes. The monitoring arrangements and budget will be specified in the EGEP.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Summary of Consultation Outcomes

No.	Date	Project site	Location / Village	Ethnic groups	Male	Female	Total	Key feedback from consulted ethnic groups
1	4 March 2025	**Nam Houm Reservoir**	Downstream command area	**Hmong** (3 participants in mixed FGD with Lao Loum farmers)	3	0	3	▪ Irrigation reliability has deteriorated due to sedimentation and damaged earth canals. ▪ Water shortages occur during the dry season, resulting in conflicts between upstream and downstream farmers. • Upstream expansion of chicken farms is increasing water consumption. ▪ Water User Groups (WUGs) are weak and meet only once a year. ▪ Requested canal lining, repair of water gates, improved sediment removal and practical water management training for farmers.
2	5 March 2025	**Nam Houm Reservoir**	Midstream command area	**Dao and Hmong**	3	0	0	▪ Participants explained that Dao and Hmong households also depend on the irrigation system although they were unavailable for consultation. ▪ Major concerns affecting all communities include sedimentation, deteriorated earth canals, declining dry-season water availability and the need to expand secondary and tertiary canals.
3	6 March 2025	**Nam Suang Reservoir**	Phoxay Village (Upstream)	**Hmong**	2	2	4	▪ Approximately 105 Hmong households live together in Phoxay Village, although only a small number cultivate land within the irrigation command area. ▪ Livelihoods depend on rice, rubber, cassava and cucumbers. ▪ Better irrigation would enable a second rice crop and increase incomes. ▪ Households requested improved canals and more reliable water delivery. ▪ Hmong households generally communicate in both Lao and Hmong and participate in the Water User Group. ▪ They emphasized that improved irrigation infrastructure would directly improve agricultural productivity and household livelihoods.
4	12 March 2025	**Nam Hin Reservoir**	Upstream fishing villages	**Khmu** (approximately 150 households) with about 30 Hmong households	6	1	7	▪ Fishing is the principal livelihood for around 70% of households and contributes approximately 80% of household income. ▪ Fish catches have declined significantly over the past decade because of increased fishing pressure, illegal electrofishing and ecological changes. ▪ Communities expressed concern about protecting fish stocks and maintaining reservoir productivity. ▪ 5Fishing remains critical for both food security and household income.

No.	Date	Project site	Location / Village	Ethnic groups	Male	Female	Total	Key feedback from consulted ethnic groups
								▪ The Khmu community primarily speaks the Khmu language, while Hmong households also live in the village.
5	12 March 2025	**Nam Hin Reservoir**	Downstream command area (Nana Village)	**Khmu and Hmong**	6	1	7	▪ Rice farmers reported increasing competition for irrigation water during the dry season. ▪ Water shortages are attributed to sedimentation, upstream greenhouse development and expanding water demand. ▪ Communities requested canal extensions, improved water distribution, drought-tolerant rice varieties and better sediment management. ▪ Participants also recommended stronger Water User Group coordination and improved irrigation planning.
6	26 March 2025	Nam Suang Reservoir	Phoxay Village (Upstream)	**Hmong (Mong)**	2	2	4	▪ Approximately 105 Hmong households live in Phoxay Village, although only a small proportion cultivate land within the command area. ▪ Livelihoods depend on rice, rubber plantations, cassava and cucumbers. ▪ Farmers indicated that reliable irrigation would allow cultivation of a second rice crop. ▪ Requested improved irrigation canals and more reliable water distribution. ▪ Community members participate in the Water User Group and communicate in both Lao and Hmong.
7	12 March 2025	Nam Hin Reservoir	Thasaleung Village	**Khmu (majority) and Hmong**	3	2	5	▪ Fishing is the primary livelihood and principal source of household income and food security. ▪ Fish catches have declined because of increasing fishing pressure and illegal fishing methods. ▪ Communities requested protection of fish resources, sustainable fisheries management and continued access to reservoir fisheries. ▪ Reservoir fisheries remain essential for household livelihoods.
8	13 May 2025	Nam Hin Reservoir	Houay Oun Village	**Khmu**	4	3	7	▪ Farmers reported repeated flash floods (2008, 2013, 2018 and 2022) damaging greenhouses, canals and agricultural land. ▪ Water shortages occur because of broken water gates, leaking canals and unauthorized pipe connections. ▪ Frequent water allocation conflicts occur between upstream Houay Oun and downstream Nasenkham farmers. ▪ Requested repair of canals and water gates, sediment removal, raising canal walls and expansion of the irrigation network.

No.	Date	Project site	Location / Village	Ethnic groups	Male	Female	Total	Key feedback from consulted ethnic groups
9	13 May 2025	Nam Hin Reservoir	Thasaleung Village	**Khmu and Hmong**	4	2	6	▪ Community described the 2000 resettlement associated with Nam Hin Dam construction, affecting 89 Khmu households. ▪ Participants considered compensation inadequate despite improved livelihoods after resettlement. ▪ Current livelihoods have shifted from upland farming to reservoir fishing, greenhouse production and corn cultivation. ▪ Graveyards were submerged after reservoir filling following traditional ceremonies; no graves were relocated. ▪ Requested additional paddy land because remaining agricultural land is insufficient. ▪ Communities continue annual fish-release ceremonies with PDAE/DAE and requested continued support for fisheries and irrigation management.
10	9 Dec 2025	Nam Houm Dam	Na Nard Village, Naxaythong District	**Yao**	10	3	13	▪ Participants emphasized that their livelihoods depend heavily on fish ponds, chicken farms and paddy fields, all of which require reliable reservoir water. Their highest concern was disruption to water supply during dam rehabilitation, which could reduce aquaculture production, poultry production and household income. They indicated that they have very limited alternative livelihood options and requested the project to maintain water supply during construction, provide technical support for aquaculture and poultry production, improve canal access roads, and offer financial or low-interest credit if livelihoods are disrupted. Fish and chicken are also important for Yao New Year ceremonies, and reduced income could affect cultural practices. Complaints are traditionally channelled first through the ethnic leader, followed by the village chief.
11	9 Dec 2025	Nam Houm Dam	Phonxay Village, Naxaythong District	**Hmong**	6	6	12	▪ Hmong participants explained that their livelihoods are based primarily on rice cultivation, vegetables, rubber, cassava and small livestock, while reservoir fishing is of limited importance. They expressed concern that reduced irrigation water during rehabilitation could delay planting, reduce crop yields and threaten household food security. Women noted that many female participants have limited Lao language proficiency and requested communication in the Hmong language. Participants requested advance notice of construction schedules, improved water management, support for livestock raising, cassava cultivation, sewing, handicrafts and vocational training to diversify incomes during construction. They also highlighted the importance of rice and vegetables for Hmong New Year and wedding ceremonies.

No.	Date	Project site	Location / Village	Ethnic groups	Male	Female	Total	Key feedback from consulted ethnic groups
12	10 Dec 2025	Nam Suang Dam	Phoxai Village, Xaythany District, Vientiane Capital	**Yao (Iu Mien) (Female FGD)**	0	3	3	▪ Women indicated that downstream households depend on reservoir water for paddy cultivation, rubber, pigs, chickens and household water supply. Their greatest concern was reduced water availability during dam rehabilitation rather than construction disturbances. They requested advance information on water restrictions, maintenance of irrigation supply, and livelihood support if water shortages reduce rice production or fish availability. Alternative income opportunities such as small trade and sewing were considered limited and unlikely to compensate for agricultural losses.
13	10 Dec 2025	Nam Suang Dam	Phoxai Village, Xaythany District, Vientiane Capital	**Hmong (Male FGD)**	4	0	4	▪ Male participants explained that their principal livelihood is rubber plantation, which relies mainly on rainfall rather than irrigation water. Consequently, they expected little direct impact from dam rehabilitation on household income. Nevertheless, they noted that if unexpected impacts occur, reduced income could affect food, education, health care and loan repayment. They requested practical livelihood support such as livestock raising, technical training, sewing and small electrical appliance repair to strengthen household resilience.
14	12 Dec 2025	Nam Hin Dam	Thasaleung Village, Muang Xay District, Oudomxay Province	**Khmu**	26	11	37	▪ Khmu participants identified reservoir fishing as their principal livelihood and primary source of household food and income. They expressed strong concern that temporary reservoir drawdown or restricted access during dam rehabilitation would interrupt fishing, reduce household income and threaten food security, particularly during the peak fishing season. Alternative livelihoods such as corn cultivation, livestock or wage labour were considered insufficient to replace fishing income because of limited land and economic opportunities. Participants requested culturally appropriate livelihood restoration, support for alternative income generation, effective early warning systems, dam safety training, protection of fisheries, and continued consultation throughout project implementation. They also noted that loss of fishing income could increase household debt, food insecurity and pressure to expand cultivation into environmentally sensitive areas.
15	12 Dec 2025	Nam Hin Dam	Longyang Village (Nam Kor Hydropower Station)	**Khmu**	4	0	4	▪ Representatives of Nam Kor Hydropower emphasized that rehabilitation activities should be carefully coordinated to avoid unnecessary impacts on downstream hydropower operations. They recommended advance notification of reservoir drawdown, coordinated construction scheduling, maintenance of minimum downstream flows, monitoring of turbidity and water quality, and continued consultation during detailed design and construction. They also confirmed that no

No.	Date	Project site	Location / Village	Ethnic groups	Male	Female	Total	Key feedback from consulted ethnic groups
								formal community grievance mechanism currently exists and supported establishing one under the project.
16	9 Dec 2025	Nam Houm Dam	Na Nard Village, Naxaythong District	**Yao**	10	3	13	▪ Participants emphasized that their livelihoods depend heavily on fish ponds, chicken farms and paddy fields, all of which require reliable reservoir water. Their highest concern was disruption to water supply during dam rehabilitation, which could reduce aquaculture production, poultry production and household income. They indicated that they have very limited alternative livelihood options and requested the project to maintain water supply during construction, provide technical support for aquaculture and poultry production, improve canal access roads, and offer financial or low-interest credit if livelihoods are disrupted. Fish and chicken are also important for Yao New Year ceremonies, and reduced income could affect cultural practices. Complaints are traditionally channelled first through the ethnic leader, followed by the village chief.
				TOTAL	**79**	**36**	**115**	

Annex 2 – Procedure for obtaining FPIC

Under ESS7, the Project will obtain FPIC where a proposed activity would:

- Adversely affect land or natural resources subject to traditional ownership or customary use or occupation of affected ethnic groups;
- Relocate affected ethnic groups from those lands or natural resources; or
- Significantly affect cultural heritage material to their identity or their cultural, ceremonial or spiritual life.

1. Verify the trigger and identify the affected groups. The PIU will use the site-specific social assessment and consultations to establish the nature and extent of the impact and identify affected groups and their representative and customary decision-making institutions. Review design alternatives to avoid or minimize impacts. If a trigger remains, the PMU will coordinate with the World Bank.

2. Agree on the process and negotiate in good faith. The PMU and PIU will agree with affected groups on a culturally appropriate process and timetable that respects their decision-making practices and enables women and other potentially underrepresented members to participate. Provide timely, accessible information in relevant languages on the proposed activity, alternatives, risks, benefits, mitigation and implementation arrangements. Allow adequate time for internal deliberation free from coercion or intimidation.

3. Document the process and outcome. Record the mutually accepted process and the outcome of good-faith negotiations, including agreements and dissenting views. Consent is collective support for the affected activity achieved through the agreed process. Unanimity is not required. Record the scope of consent and include commitments, responsibilities, resources and monitoring in the relevant EGEP. The PMU will submit the documentation to the World Bank for review.

4. Apply the decision before proceeding. If the World Bank cannot ascertain FPIC, the affected aspects will not proceed. Where the Bank decides that other aspects may proceed, the PMU will ensure they cause no adverse impacts on the ethnic groups concerned. The PIU will monitor implementation of agreements with affected groups and refer material design or impact changes to the PMU for reassessment.

Annex 3 – Elements of an EGEP

EGEP needs to have the following sections:

Executive Summary

This section describes briefly the *critical facts*, *significant findings* from the social assessment, and *recommended actions to manage adverse impact (if any)* and *proposed development intervention activities* on the basis on the social assessment results.

I. Description of the Project

This section provides a general description of the *project goal*, *project component*s, *potential adverse impact (if any) at the project and subproject levels.* Make clear the identified adverse impact at two levels – project and subproject.

II. Legal and institutional framework applicable to ethnic peoples

III. Description of the sub-project population

- Baseline information on the demographic, social, cultural, and political characteristics of the potentially affected ethnic population, or ethnic communities.
- Production, livelihood systems, tenure systems that ethnic peoples may rely on, including natural resources on which they depend (including common property resources, if any).
- Types of income generation activities, including income sources, disaggregated by their household member, work season;
- Annual natural hazards that may affect their livelihood and income earning capacity;
- Community relationship (social capital, kinship, social network…)

IV. Social Impact Assessment

This section describes:

- ***Methods of consultation*** already used to ensure meaningful consultation with affected ethnic population in the sub-project area.
- ***Summary of results of free, prior and informed consultation*** with affected ethnic population. Results includes two areas:
  - *Potential impact of subprojects* (positive and adverse) on their livelihoods of ethnic peoples in the project area (both directly and indirectly);
  - *Action plan of measures* to avoid, minimize, mitigate, or compensate for these adverse effects.
  - *Preferences of ethnic peoples for support* (from the project) in development activities intended for them (explored through needs assessment exercise conducted during the social assessment)
  - *An action plan of measures* to ensure ethnic peoples in the subproject area receive social and economic benefits culturally appropriate to them, including, where

necessary, measures to enhance the capacity of the local project implementing agencies.

V. Information Disclosure, Consultation and Participation:

This section will:

a) describe information disclosure, consultation and participation process with the affected ethnic peoples that was carried out during project preparation in free, prior, and informed consultation with them;
b) summarizes their comments on the results of the social impact assessment and identifies concerns raised during consultation and how these have been addressed in project design;
c) document the outcome of meaningful consultations and how concerns were addressed. Where ESS7 requires FPIC, summarize the mutually accepted process, the outcome of good-faith negotiations, including agreements and dissenting views, and the measures, responsibilities and monitoring agreed with the affected groups. Cross-reference the FPIC record under Annex 2.
d) describe consultation and participation mechanisms to be used during implementation to ensure ethnic group peoples participation during implementation; and
e) Confirm disclosure of the draft and final EGEP to the affected ethnic people's communities.

VI. Capacity Building: This section provides measures to strengthen the social, legal, and technical capabilities of (a) local government in addressing ethnic peoples issues in the project area; and (b) ethnic organizations in the project area to enable them to represent affected ethnic peoples more effectively.

VII. Grievance Redress Mechanism: This section describes the procedures to redress grievances by affected ethnic peoples. It also explains how the procedures are accessible on a participatory manner to ethnic peoples and culturally appropriate and gender sensitive.

VIII. Institutional Arrangement: This section describes institutional arrangement responsibilities and mechanisms for carrying out the various measures of the EGEP. It also describes the process of including relevant local organizations and NGOs in carrying out the measures of the EGEP.

IX. Monitoring & Evaluation: This section describes the mechanisms and benchmarks appropriate to the project for monitoring, and evaluating the implementation of the EGEP. It also specifies arrangements for free, prior and informed consultation and participation of affected ethnic peoples in the preparation and validation of monitoring, and evaluation reports.

X. Budget and Financing: This section provides an itemized budget for all activities described in the EGEP.

Annexes

Annex 4 – Facilitator's Guide on Conducting Meaningful Consultation with Ethnic Groups

1. Introduction

This guide provides a brief introduction and first-hand guidance to individuals who are tasked to directly facilitate a meeting with ethnic groups or are involved in a team whose task is to moderate a meeting with an individual or a group of people who are from ethnic groups.

2. Principles

This facilitator's guide applies ESS7 and ESS10 to meaningful consultation with ethnic groups under WISER. Project teams will:

- Recognize and foster full respect for ethnic groups and their human rights, dignity, cultural uniqueness, autonomy, identity, and aspirations.
- Recognize and respect the rights of indigenous women and men to the lands, territories, and resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied, or otherwise used or acquired.
- Recognize, respect, protect and preserve the culture, knowledge, and practices of ethnic groups and provide them with an opportunity to adapt to changing conditions in a manner and in a timeframe that are acceptable to them.
- Protect cultural heritage from damage, inappropriate alteration, disruption, removal or misuse; support its preservation and protection; and ensure the equitable sharing of benefits generated from the integration and utilization of cultural heritage in IFAD projects.
- Protect cultural heritage and consider how affected communities wish to preserve it and share any related benefits.

3. Project Implementation

In line with the above principles, the project aims to:

- Support countries to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of ethnic groups.
- Promote the rights of ethnic groups to self-determination and development according to their culture and identity.
- Promote interventions that are designed, managed, and implemented for, by and with ethnic groups, including indigenous women and youth.
- Design and carry out meaningful consultation with affected groups early enough to inform design, mitigation and benefits. Screen against the three ESS7 triggers in Annex 2. Where a trigger is confirmed, follow the agreed FPIC process before the relevant activity begins.
- Promote meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including women and youth regarding the preservation, protection, utilization and management of cultural heritage
- Ensure ethnic groups obtain fair and equal benefits and opportunities from supported activities and from commercial development of their lands or resources in a culturally appropriate and inclusive manner, with due consideration given to gender equality.

- Avoid adverse impacts and address eligible residual impacts through the applicable Project instruments.

4. Steps in Preparing for a Meaningful Consultation with Ethnic Groups

- **Step 1 – Get to know about ethnic groups**
    - Study about ethnic groups to be consulted with
    - Meet with local village chief, opinion leaders from the target ethnic groups group to learn about local practices, taboos
    - Conduct field observation/ Exchange with experienced colleagues
    - As part of consultation with the ethnic groups, identify disadvantaged individuals/groups in ethnic groups community.
- **Step 2 – Prepare before fielding for consultation**
    - Prepare IEC materials (booklet, manuals, guidance note…)
    - Prepare meeting outline, key topics, and agenda for consultation, question guide, meeting template
    - Share meeting agenda and key information with ethnic groups with whom the meeting will be conducted ("prior, and "informed")[46]
    - Make interpretation arrangement – as needed.
- **Step 3 – Meeting with target ethnic groups/individuals**
    - Build rapport
    - Conduct consultation (based on meeting agenda in Step 2)
    - Manage and maintain a "free" conversation.
    - Take notes
    - Share/validate key consultation results with participants by the end of meeting
    - Inform participants of possible next consultation to follow up on issues raised
- **Step 4 – Review and Process Consultation Feedback**
    - Peruse and process consultation feedback
    - Prepare meeting minutes/ documentation
    - Share meeting minutes with relevant stakeholder (e.g., management)
- **Step 5 – Incorporate consultation feedback into project design/implementation**
    - Conduct meeting with relevant stakeholder to discuss consultation feedback
    - Incorporate feedback into project design/implementation
    - Report back to consulted people on decision/progress made as to concerns, issues, expectation raised by consultation participants.

5. Commonly used consultation techniques

- **Focus Group Discussion:**
    - A focus group discussion (FGD) is a way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest.
    - The group of participants (8-10 persons) is guided by a moderator (facilitator) who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion amongst themselves.
    - Allow participants to agree or disagree with each other to obtain an insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community in terms of beliefs, experiences and practices.
- **Key Informant Interview:**
    - To get information about a pressing issue or problem in the community from a limited number of well-connected and informed community experts, IP leaders,
    - To understand the motivation and beliefs of community residents on a particular issue.
    - To get information from people with diverse backgrounds and opinions and be able to ask in-depth and probing questions.
    - To discuss sensitive topics, get respondents' candid discussion of the topic, or to get the depth of information you need.

- **Tips for Facilitators**

Preparing the room

- Arrive at least half an hour early to set up the room
- Check your laptop, papers, pens

Opening the session

- Introduce yourself, your assistant
- Introduce purpose of the focus group.
- Explain to participants that they have been invited to share their opinions and that you will guide the discussion by asking the group to reflect on specific questions.
- Tell them what time the session will conclude.

Explain the ground rules for the focus group discussion

- These will set the tone and expectations for behavior so that everyone will feel safe and willing to participate.
- Participation in the focus group is voluntary.
- It's all right to abstain from discussing specific topics if you are not comfortable.
- All responses are welcome – are no right or wrong answers.
- Please respect the opinions of others even if you don't agree.
- Try to stay on topic; we may need to interrupt so that we can cover all the material.
- Speak as openly as you feel comfortable.

- Avoid revealing very detailed information about your personal health.
- Help protect others' privacy by not discussing details outside the group.

Closing the session

- End the discussion by summarizing the main points. If there is time, invite participants to reflect on the main ideas
- Ask if they have any additional thoughts to share.
- Thank the group for participating; let them know how the discussion results will be used.
- Collect and save all notes (save the file if you type in on laptop)
- Their ideas/suggestion will be used to a) design the project, b) prepare documents that help ensure avoid/minimize the adverse impact on local people while enhancing project's positive impacts.

6. List of Do and Don't Do

✓ Show respect to consulted people who are the poor, vulnerable, disadvantaged people
✓ Being on time,
✓ Speaking slowly and clearly. Repeat as necessary. Check if people understand. Explain as necessary.
✓ Using local ethnic spoken language if possible, or through the assistance of native interpreter

☒ Do not use slang
☒ Avoid talking about issues that should not be spoken/discussed (based on initial information gathered from Step 1)

Annex 5 – Additional Information about Total and Literate Population by Sex and Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Both Sex			Female			Male		
	Total Population	Literate Population	Literacy Rate	Total Population	Literate Population	Literacy Rate	Total Population	Literate Population	Literacy Rate
All Ethnic Group	**4,371,388**	**3,699,254**	**84.6**	**2,198,501**	**1,744,478**	**79.3**	**2,172,887**	**1,954,776**	**90.0**
1 Lao	2,496,725	2,328,774	93.3	1,258,300	1,141,932	90.8	1,238,425	1,186,842	95.8
2 Tai	144,635	129,628	89.6	71,409	60,484	84.7	73,226	69,144	94.4
3 Phouthay	148,503	122,598	82.6	76,615	58,584	76.5	71,888	64,014	89.0
4 Lue	96,925	84,678	87.4	48,759	40,410	82.9	48,166	44,268	91.9
5 Nhoaun	20,922	19,237	91.9	10,632	9,407	88.5	10,290	9,830	95.5
6 Yang	4,252	3,546	83.4	2,081	1,605	77.1	2,171	1,941	89.4
7 Xaek	2,508	2,165	86.3	1,305	1,066	81.7	1,203	1,099	91.4
8 Thaineau	10,123	9,124	90.1	5,096	4,408	86.5	5,027	4,716	93.8
9 Khmu	458,453	360,253	78.6	227,475	156,739	68.9	230,978	203,514	88.1
10 Pray	18,686	14,201	76.0	9,449	6,633	70.2	9,237	7,568	81.9
11 Xingmoun	6,068	3,874	63.8	2,964	1,600	54.0	3,104	2,274	73.3
12 Phong	19,055	16,101	84.5	9,451	7,395	78.2	9,604	8,706	90.6
13 Thaen	496	382	77.0	256	178	69.5	240	204	85.0
14 Oedou	385	316	82.1	192	148	77.1	193	168	87.0
15 Bid	1,544	870	56.3	746	331	44.4	798	539	67.5
16 Lamed	13,834	8,834	63.9	7,246	3,510	48.4	6,588	5,324	80.8
17 Samtao	2,405	1,858	77.3	1,198	810	67.6	1,207	1,048	86.8
18 Katang	83,295	42,479	51.0	42,512	16,383	38.5	40,783	26,096	64.0
19 Makong	96,102	54,114	56.3	49,048	22,659	46.2	47,054	31,455	66.8
20 Tri	19,995	7,086	35.4	10,175	2,479	24.4	9,820	4,607	46.9
21 Yrou	35,089	27,609	78.7	18,317	13,166	71.9	16,772	14,443	86.1
22 Trieng	22,054	16,841	76.4	11,291	7,553	66.9	10,763	9,288	86.3
23 Ta-oy	27,091	17,822	65.8	13,733	7,335	53.4	13,358	10,487	78.5
24 Yae	6,596	4,797	72.7	3,372	2,075	61.5	3,224	2,722	84.4
25 Brao	16,171	10,476	64.8	8,323	4,617	55.5	7,848	5,859	74.7
26 Katu	15,649	11,116	71.0	8,007	4,828	60.3	7,642	6,288	82.3
27 Harak	15,093	11,124	73.7	7,809	4,963	63.6	7,284	6,161	84.6
28 Oy	14,996	11,985	79.9	7,728	5,473	70.8	7,268	6,512	89.6
29 Kriang	9,772	7,328	75.0	4,936	3,190	64.6	4,836	4,138	85.6
30 Cheng	5,527	3,531	63.9	2,893	1,504	52.0	2,634	2,027	77.0
31 Sadang	568	373	65.7	275	137	49.8	293	236	80.5
32 Xuay	29,292	21,648	73.9	15,309	10,257	67.0	13,983	11,391	81.5
33 Nhaheun	4,811	4,038	83.9	2,411	1,839	76.3	2,400	2,199	91.6
34 Lavy	717	604	84.2	321	247	76.9	396	357	90.2
35 Pacoh	11,930	5,613	47.0	6,111	1,902	31.1	5,819	3,711	63.8
36 Khmer	3,927	2,964	75.5	1,997	1,351	67.7	1,930	1,613	83.6
37 Toum	2,106	1,621	77.0	1,025	704	68.7	1,081	917	84.8

38	Ngouan	566	500	88.3	272	228	83.8	294	272	92.5
39	Moy	566	511	90.3	270	229	84.8	296	282	95.3
40	Kree	639	377	59.0	332	182	54.8	307	195	63.5
41	Hmong	324,519	227,877	70.2	160,309	93,592	58.4	164,210	134,285	81.8
42	Ewmien	20,552	12,855	62.5	10,127	5,589	55.2	10,425	7,266	69.7
43	Akha	66,341	24,000	36.2	33,169	7,831	23.6	33,172	16,169	48.7
44	Pounoy	28,449	22,723	79.9	14,254	10,487	73.6	14,195	12,236	86.2
45	Lahou	10,917	2,646	24.2	5,467	851	15.6	5,450	1,795	32.9
46	Syla	1,898	642	33.8	910	194	21.3	988	448	45.3
47	Hayi	501	219	43.7	238	76	31.9	263	143	54.4
48	Lolo	1,318	596	45.2	648	213	32.9	670	383	57.2
49	Hor	7,948	4,090	51.5	3,767	1,697	45.0	4,181	2,393	57.2
Other and NotStated		40,874	32,610	79.8	19,971	15,407	77.1	20,903	17,203	82.3

Source. *The 4th Population and Housing Census (PHC) 2015.*