

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR A FEASIBILITY STUDY

Project MOTIFS

eMpowerment of wOmen's through the Trade capacity reinForcement in the bamboo and rattan Sector in Lao PDR (MOTIFS)

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1 ECONOMIC & WOMEN RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN LAOS

1.1 RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1.1.1 Laos's private sector

The main sources of revenue in Laos are natural resources, including mining, hydropower, and forestry. Large-scale investments in hydropower, mining, and construction drove most of the GDP growth in the past 15 years. These sectors¹ are mostly dominated by large companies.

On the other hand, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) make up the majority of firms in the country. According to the Prime Minister's Office (2017), MSMEs are defined as "independent enterprises that are legally registered and operated according to the prevailing laws of Laos".

More than 99% of registered firms are MSMEs; 86% are small enterprises and most of them are micro-businesses with less than five employees². These MSMEs provide the greatest number of jobs in the private sector but they contribute to less than 20% of the country's GDP (compared to about 40 percent in Thailand). They often lack the resources and/or expertise to successfully grow their business or access new markets. The size of Laos's informal economy stands for 27.2 percent of GDP³. Informal businesses have difficulties accessing business support services and development programs.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) is responsible for promoting the development of the private sector and supporting SMEs. In recent years, the country has stressed its focus on SMEs, in order to create impulse for the country's growth. The Law on the Promotion and Development of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (2011) suggests creating the environment and conditions that facilitate business owners in establishing and operating their SMEs. This law applies to all sectors of the economy. More recently, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Plan (2016-2020) stressed on the need for access to finance for SMEs, enhancing access to business development services, enhancing SMEs accession and expanding domestic and international markets, build entrepreneurs' capacities, and create an enabling environment for establishment and operating business of SMEs and tax incentives. Specifically for the present project, it should be noted that MoIC has strong focus on supporting large factories and processing centers, and does not prioritize rural communities: attention should therefore be paid to align the feasibility study and the project with "farmers' strategy", in order to keep rural communities developing new professional trades and careers.

1.1.2 The rural private sector and bamboo-rattan value chains

The agriculture and natural resources sector is currently the largest sector in the national economy, accounting for about 30.5% of national GDP and providing the main source of income for about 80% of the population.⁴

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are widespread throughout the country and Laos has an abundance of bamboo and rattan varieties. These resources represent an important source of income and is part of the culture of the Lao people. Traditionally, women have an important role in NTFPs such as cultivating vegetables, collecting fibers, shoots and firewood. They have in-depth knowledge of forest resources and their uses. Women are also responsible for marketing textiles and handicrafts that are frequently made from forest resources⁵. Their use of bamboo and rattan ranges from food to building materials, to the manufacture of furniture and handicrafts. Bamboo and rattan through proper environmental & social management and sustainable use can be highly sustainable materials that grow quickly (bamboo more quickly than rattan).

The several laws that promoted entrepreneurship did not focus on the rural sector, although handicraft was one of the four prioritized sectors promoted by the Decree on SMEs Promotion and Development Fund.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) is responsible for developing policies and strategies for the sustainable development of agriculture and forestry in the country. In 2021, this Ministry took action to

¹ Statista : [share of economic sectors in GDP](#)

² World Bank, Enterprise Survey, 2018 Laos Country Profile, 2018

³ [Quarterly Informal Economy Survey \(QIES\)](#), World Economics London

⁴ Statista Laos : [Distribution of employment by economic sectors](#) and [share of economic sectors in GDP](#)

⁵ NAFRI, Gender Empowerment and Agricultural Production in Laos, 2020

promote the development of the rattan-bamboo sector with the *National Action Plan (NAP) for sustainable rattan and bamboo (2021-2025)*. The NAP targets five features:

- The sustainable rattan and bamboo natural resource management
- Rattan and bamboo researches and technical extension
- Capacity enhancement for farmer organizations, processors, traders and local farmers
- Rattan and bamboo marketing development
- Improvement of enabling environment to support the sustainable development of rattan and bamboo sectors

1.1.3 Women employment and entrepreneurship

Women-owned enterprises have been rising in recent years and different sources provide different data⁶. In 2016, a World Bank's National Enterprise Survey found that 43.1% of businesses in Laos were partly or fully female-owned, and 45.3% operate with a female manager. Women accounted for more than half of the owners of newly registered SMEs. However, 52% of businesses run by women are micro-businesses, compared to 8% for men⁷. A research paper⁸ from the Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia based on a previous study of the International Labour Organization (ILO)⁹ gave several information on women entrepreneurs' profiles and challenges.

Most women entrepreneurs started their business young (40% of entrepreneurs start their business in their 20s), are married (79%) and with a relatively low level of education (32% for primary school level and only 13% completing upper secondary school).

Female entrepreneurship in Laos is usually driven by the need for a complementary income (31% against 15% for men) or by the absence of other sources of income (64% against 35% for men).

Numerous challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, beyond the common identified barriers to MSMEs, have been identified in gender issues reports in Lao PDR :

- **Socio-cultural factors:** Women tended to encounter challenges regarding traditional norms more than men in family life especially for those in ethnic groups and in rural areas. For instance, males are often the leaders of the family, working outside to earn income to support the family. Such traditional norms can limit women's time and mobility, which makes it difficult for them to access markets or working far from their homes.
- **Education and skills and experience:** Disadvantages in education based on gender, ethnicity and geographical location have been highlighted in several studies. They can face : i) difficulties dealing with complicated and time consuming business registration procedures, ii) lack of confidence to deal with legal documents and official authorities, iii) lack of technical skills related to business opportunity identification, financial management, marketing, and entrepreneurship.
- **Access to finance:** Access to finance, especially from the commercial banking system was considered as the most significant challenge for women. Women still lack the confidence and knowledge to navigate financial systems, and distance from banks for those living in rural areas was another challenge. Additionally, women customers were also considered as high-risk borrowers in some circumstances, therefore they were required to demonstrate to formal banks a greater level of collateral than male-owned firms in the same situation. Women who are within ethnic minority groups may also face more issues associated with customary land rights.
- **Access to markets and infrastructure:** Many women tend to establish businesses in retailing and textile manufacturing, and their businesses are often homebased because of the traditional norms limiting women's mobility with poor public infrastructure also adding to the costs of small enterprises. Until now, laws for MSMEs development have not addressed women-owned MSMEs and the type of assistance women entrepreneurs might need. Still, the MoIC has committed to address in the future the specific challenges affecting women-owned and women-managed enterprises, by supporting the implementation of possible complementary policies and interventions to alleviate these constraints and mitigate potential adverse impacts of increased economic activities on gender equality¹⁰.

The activities of the project will have to take into account an accurate situation of women in the different value chains and provinces selected to identify which levers can reinforce their economic empowerment.

⁶ Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia, Overview of Women's Entrepreneurship in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Laos, 2019.

⁷ USAID/LAOS, Country-level Gender Analysis, 2022

⁸ See ⁶

⁹ ILO, Gender Issues in Micro and Small Enterprises in Laos, 2006.

¹⁰ See on their website : <http://www.bned.moic.gov.la/en/women-entrepreneurs-3442.html>

1.1.4 Opportunities and challenges for rural entrepreneurship

The contribution of the bamboo and rattan industries to the country's GDP stands for more than US\$22 million per year (around 1 percent of the GDP), and their potential to create jobs could potentially benefit over 150,000 households in 1,700 villages in Laos (NAP on bamboo and rattan 2021-25). As rattan and bamboo do not represent the only revenue for households, a holistic approach has to be implemented (NTFP resources management plan).

The main identified issues for the bamboo and rattan: geographically widespread and fragmented production; mainly informal and often secondary in competition with new opportunities; a weakly structured and organized sector with a lack of sustainable management of natural resources; an unstable and constraining legal framework. It is therefore important to turn constraints into constructive and impactful actions that stimulate investment, growth and a sense of ownership and pride in Lao products and businesses.

Several opportunities and challenges in the bamboo and rattan sectors are identified and are summarized in the below table (sources: various literature review, including the NAP) and AFD mission in May 2023 conclusions).

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laos has rattan and bamboo forests in many areas, and a high potential of raw materials that can attract business investment. There are existing tools and methods for land use planning and allocation of rattan and bamboo forest areas for sustainable management, use and development. - Opportunities for sustainable, green and environmental-friendly development, biodiversity and climate change approach in supporting rattan and bamboo sectors. - Communities could earn additional income from rattan and bamboo harvesting through the tradition of handicraft weaving (especially by women), which can be developed into a sustainable value chain that can contribute to a national income stream. A specific approach should be developed for women in ethnic communities and vulnerable groups: youth, PWD, etc. Reports from WWF and GRET (2019) indicate that in Bolikhamsay province, rattan handicrafts can generate an income of 310\$ per family whilst bamboo sector in Houaphanh province can generate income for up to 2 307 families with an average of 309\$ per family. - The market demand for rattan and bamboo products tends to increase, the products are more diverse and can meet the needs of the market. Laos is the first country in the world to receive FSC certification, which is a good opportunity for Lao rattan products to access international markets. - Many lessons learned exist in the development of rattan and bamboo sectors, especially under the support of GRET and WWF. There are also lessons that can be learned directly from neighbour's countries such as Thailand (TICA Program) and Vietnam. Some lessons learned on research and demonstration on production techniques, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The value chain development mainly depends on the resource availability (different species are suitable for different usages), access to technical competences and access to market. Key limitations seem to be resource availability and lack of access to market and value-added production in Laos. - In some areas, locals do not see the importance in the management of the rattan and bamboo resources in accordance with the rules of allocation, management and use. Planting to replace used rattan and bamboo takes time since the harvest cycle is longer compared to other types of crops such as cassava. This can be an incentive for villagers to shift to crops planting. - Rattan and bamboo harvesting is difficult and their price is low. Trading of rattan and bamboo is not yet well organized; The return rate on rattan and bamboo handicrafts is still low. There is a lack of tools and equipment to improve processing quality, along with limited capacity and skill. - Locals still do not explore the potential of cultivating rattan and bamboo for commercial purposes. The extension of production techniques is limited while a stable market for rattan shoots does not exist. - Supporting policies to promote rattan and bamboo business are still limited. This includes tax and fees, timing and procedures for issuing quotas, moving approvals, import procedures for equipment and tools for production and export. - Limited investment of rattan and bamboo entrepreneurs whose businesses are still family-oriented with limited capacity, not yet turned into a well-organized enterprises. - FSC-certified rattan products must be inspected by an international organization, which represents a high cost. Lack of specific

<p>harvesting of rattan-bamboo that can be applied. The promotion of the cultivation techniques under the forest and domestication of good quality with high market demand rattan-bamboo can be adapted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some lessons learned from research and demonstration of rattan-bamboo production and harvesting techniques can be applied. Promotion of forest cultivation techniques and domestication of good quality rattan orbamboo with high commercial demand can be adapted. 	<p>financial support to the development of rattan-bamboo sectors. Stakeholder coordination is not yet harmonized; The provision of information and public budget to support the promotion of rattan-bamboo is still limited due to lack of specialized skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the bamboo and rattan used by the value chains are extracted from commercial forests. Planting to replace used rattan takes time since the harvest cycle is longer compared to other types of crops such as cassava. This can be an incentive for villagers to shift to crops planting.
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Different values chains of bamboo and rattan exists, with different issues:

Value chains	Shoots		Handicraft and furnitures		Industrialized product
Sub-value chain	Fresh	Dried	Handicraft	Furniture	Slat and Stick
Type of products and estimate proportion of volume	Raw fresh shoots (70%) Ready to cook fresh shoot (30%)	Sundried (15%) Voven-dried (85%)	Mass products for lao households : Sticky rice box and steamer, (30%) Coffee table or Pakhao(25%), Gift basket (10%), Chicken coop (5%) Bins (5%) and others (15%) Top-end products (10%): Weaved basket or bags, tissues dispenser, straws, alms bowls, etc.	Sets of table and chairs (50%) individual table or chairs (35%) Shelves and other products (15%)	- Exported Dried Slats (90%) - Sticks (10% with 7% of Chopsticks, 2% of skewer-sticks, 0,5% of incense stick, 0,5% of toothpicks] → Exported (5%) → Sold in Laos (5%)
Differentiation criteria of VC	- Food product - Seasonal resource and medium pressure on it		- Medium to important skills and investments required - Longer VC (until 7 actors) - Smallest pressure on the resource		- High investment required in buildings, specialized machines, registration, exportation and quotas process. - High pressure on the resource
Secondary differentiation criteria of sub-Value Chain	- No need of particular skills and investment** - Short VC - Informal	Need of skills and investment - Registration, exportation and quotas process (Oven dried)	- Less need of skills and investment - Frequent producer organization - Informal	- Significant need of skills, investment and specialization - Frequent business registration with quota request and taxes.	

Extract from the study "BAMBOO AND RATTAN SECTOR STUDY IN LAO PDR", A. BEASSE - L. VEISBLAT – S. KHAMPAVONG – M.MALALOY, Gret LAOS

Key attributes, based on the observed lifestyle of interviewed producers of the above-mentioned study:

- The bamboo and rattan activity is a secondary activity for these households. Rice culture was presented as the main household activity, as it is the main source of sustenance and most time-consuming activity. This means that the bamboo and rattan activity is organized in accordance to the rice cultural calendar, as well as the bamboo and rattan value chains' seasonality
- The bamboo and rattan activity is the main source of cash income for these households. In case the production of bamboo or rattan products is rather small, it can be completed with other sources of income such as weaving, livestock, rice selling...
- Few are involved in any additional activity (apart from rice and bamboo/rattan). For those who are, it is in an agricultural activity, mainly cash crops such as cassava, coffee, rubber plantations...
- They own very few hectares of land. Indeed, of the bamboo and rattan producers interviewed, it was estimated that they owned in average 0,8ha of land (dedicated to rice culture, including low-land and upland rice which are known to have lower rice yield and quality). In comparison, the standard individual living in rural population owns, in average, 1,6ha of land (USAID, 2013), twice as much as a bamboo and rattan producer.

1.1.5 E&S issues

The main environmental and social issues of the bamboo and rattan sectors identified so far are (to be confirmed by the E&S impact assessment, as part of the feasibility study):

- Overexploitation of natural resources due to lack of knowledge, local coordination and monitoring, leading to deforestation;
- Potential negative impacts on soil, biodiversity, carbon emissions due to the harvesting activities and deforestation;

Lack of information on the resilience bamboo and rattan species to climate risk (water stress, temperature increase, flooding);

- Pollution and nuisances related to the processing step, if necessary (for example, for bamboo shoot drying);
- Risk of local social tension in case of unequal access to economic benefits;
- Risk of increasing social inequalities for the most vulnerable people (women, elderly, ethnic minorities...) in case that they are not correctly considered.

For the bamboo sector, species of bamboo represent different physical characteristics that make them more or less suitable for the different usages (bamboo shoot, handicraft, furniture...). Therefore, the value chain development mainly depends on the resource availability at the local level, access to technical competences and access to market. The support of local CSO seems to be necessary to allow villages to initiate or step up the value chain development by providing better knowledge of the resource availability, access to necessary trainings and building up a more structured local organization. One of the key limitations seems to be resource availability. The existing quota system does not seem to be efficient to prevent resource depletion. One of the key challenges is to have a reliable inventory of the existing resources and a rigorous monitoring of the resource exploitation. In the context of the support provided by BNDA, the beneficiary villages have mapped the different types of lands within the village boundaries (Protection Forests, Conservation Forests, Production Forests) and the allowed usages. According to the Forestry Law, only Production Forests can be exploited for livelihood development. However, the monitoring of the existing and exploited resources does not seem to be effective in the field, although the observation of having less and less bamboo resources is already a reality in some villages.

1.2 GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

1.2.1 Overview of the situation

Despite several achievements, gender inequality in Laos is still a challenge and affects the main areas of development for the country. Women face particular disadvantage, as poverty and wellbeing are highly gendered and associated with ethnicity and geography. Rural and ethnic minority women lag behind in terms of economic status, health and education.

Some key figures¹¹:

- The ranking in UNDP Gender Inequality Index (2020) places Laos 113 out of 162 countries.
- The total fertility rate for Laos is 3.2 children per woman, and the median age for first birth is 21 years (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2015). Laos has one of the highest rates of early marriage in the region, with one-third of Lao women married before age 18, and with 19.4% of reproductive age women giving birth before 18 (UN, 2015).
- Women's overall Labor Force Participation rate is estimated at 76.8 percent as compared to 79.7 percent for men¹². Despite the relatively small gap between women's and men's Labor Force Participation rate, 61% of women and girls who are employed are unpaid family workers compared to 26 percent of men and boys. Only one in four working women were reported to be own-account workers, while one in two men had a similar status, indicating that women had less autonomy and control in the way they earned a living¹³.

¹¹ Based on Gender equality strategy 2022-2026.

¹² ILO, Modelled Estimates, extracted from the World Bank website.

¹³ ILO, Decent Work Country Programme for Laos 2017-2021, 2017

- Most of the Lao workforce is in the informal economy, which accounts for 82.9% of total employment rate. This share is slightly higher among women (85.9%) than among men (79.9%)¹⁴. High informality presents a significant administrative and financial challenge for the extension of social insurance coverage because workers in the informal economy have irregular and unrecorded incomes, and tax and social security compliance is difficult to enforce, even for formal sector workers. Studies have shown that even among women employed in Laos's formal economy, only 23% benefit from social protection schemes¹⁵.
- Women are overrepresented in low-skill occupations, comprising 71.8% of the workforce in the service sector and 63.36% in the retail sector¹⁶. At the same time, management and professional occupations also do have more women (57% of positions) than men (43%)¹⁷, even though women's pay is less.
- Women work longer hours than men, spending 7 hours per day on productive and reproductive tasks, compared to the 5.7 hours spent by men. However, women's average monthly income is only 77% of that of men. The wage gap is mostly prominent in the occupations classed as "craft and related trades workers" and "skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers," where women's incomes are respectively 56 % and 58% of those of men.
- Women have represented 51% of the economically active population in agriculture since at least 1980, with a higher percentage of female-headed farm households cultivating irrigated rice (76.8% vs. 72.3% for male-headed households) and, in general, a less diverse crop mix than male-headed farm households. Climate change resulting in hotter seasons, heavy floods, droughts, abnormal cold, and other irregular weather patterns across the country can increase the vulnerability of female-headed households, including because of the limited crop diversity, and lead to food shortages and loss of income, as well as potentially exacerbate domestic violence¹⁸.
- Under the 2014 National Violence Against Women Prevalence Survey, when looking at the three types of violence among ever-partnered women in Laos, 30.3% experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional violence, 72% of them experienced sexual violence, 15.3% experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and 26.2% were exposed to emotional violence in their lifetime. The survey outlined that of all women interviewed, 35.6% agreed with the statement that a good wife should obey her husband even if she disagreed with him. This rationale was particularly prevalent in rural areas and the country's northern region.

The primary challenges to gender equality involve enabling equal access for women and girls to opportunities and resources, particularly for rural and marginalized women. Illiteracy, poor reproductive outcomes and basic health, food insecurity and economic disenfranchisement rank high among development priorities for women.

Rural women have many roles and responsibilities in supporting household work and agricultural production. They also play a significant role in improving the livelihoods and wellbeing of their communities. However, the gender gap between women and men makes it difficult for women in rural areas to fulfill their potentials. Due to cultural norms, where men migrate to search for work, women often find themselves with the heavy burden of the remaining responsibilities. They must look after their children, prepare meals, manage household chores, plant, harvest crops, and tend livestock. Despite these multiple challenges, they are further affected by resource inequities, reduced access to services, lack of education, and unequal rights.

According to FAO's findings on rural areas, agricultural investment projects often undervalue women's involvement, and many women struggle to take advantage of a transitioning economy (from subsistence to market-based models). **The feasibility study will have to determine more specifically the gender issues on the bamboo-rattan value chains and identify the main levers to improve women economic empowerment at all levels of the project's components.**

¹⁴ MPI, Lao Statistics Bureau, Labour Force Survey, 2017

¹⁵ UN Laos, Joint Shadow Submission to CEDAW, 2017

¹⁶ ILO, Decent Work Country Programme for Laos 2017-2021, 2017

¹⁷ UNICEF, The Situation of Children and Women in Laos, 2019

¹⁸ FAO, The Gender and Equity Implications of Land Related Investments on Land Access and Labour and Income: A Case Study of Selected Agricultural Investments in Laos, 2013

1.2.2 National vision, policies and strategies

The country ratified the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (CEDAW) in 1981, but the first State report was only submitted to the CEDAW Committee for review in 2005. Currently, knowledge of CEDAW is confined mainly to senior government officials or senior members of the mass women's organization, the Lao Women's Union (LWU). There is a need for greater public advocacy and training of district officials, to encourage greater awareness of CEDAW and of women's rights in general. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW), established in 2003, serves as the country's national women's machinery. NCAW is tasked with formulating and implementing national policy for the advancement of women, as well as monitoring the implementation of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action.

The **National Constitution of Lao People's Democratic Republic** enshrines equal rights of men and women in Article 35: "Lao citizens are all equal before the law irrespective of their gender, social status, education, beliefs and ethnic group," and Article 37: "citizens of both genders enjoy equal rights in the political, economic, cultural and social fields and in family affairs," while Article 29 specifically commits to "supporting the progress of women and to protecting the legitimate rights and benefits of women and children" (Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2003).

The **Gender Equality Law** (2019) provides principles, regulations and measures for effective and efficient management and monitoring of gender equality to ensure real equality between men and women in the equal condition and opportunity. It also provides the legitimate needs and benefits of women and men, alleviates all forms of gender discrimination. The Article 8 provides that both women and men regardless of age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, education level, employment, faith, religion and region of leaving have equal rights to politics, economy, culture, education and sport, health, labor and social welfare, sciences, technology

Several relevant high-level documents integrate gender issues. One of them is the **National Development Vision to 2030**, which aims for "green economic growth that ensures sustainable, resilient development", complemented by the 10-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2016-2025), and the Eighth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPP) (2016-2020), which translates targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into national-level planning. This includes SDG 5, which relates to gender equality and empowerment of women.

The **National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy** (NGPES) specifically targets rural women and highlights plans to improve their livelihoods, with the aim of eradicating poverty in Lao People's Democratic Republic by 2020. The strategy aims to improve agricultural practices for women and strengthen land tenure security by incorporating women's customary land rights into land reallocation, titling and dispute settlement plans

However, the 2015 **Agriculture Development Strategy to 2025** which supports sustainable agriculture and focuses on food security as a national priority does not have a substantial gender focus.

Moreover, **different National Action Plans (NAP) have tackled gender equalities issues**: the NAP for Gender Equality, the NAP on Maternal and Child Health and the NAP for Protection and Elimination of Violence against Women and Children. The country found that improving gender equality can have a profound effect on economic growth¹⁹ and took it into account in its National Green Growth Strategy. The latter promotes the vocational training, labor skill development, creation of jobs and income generating activities for women, especially in green economic sectors.

The result of the previous NAP for gender equality (2016-2020) are mitigated. Some challenges still require remedies – especially women's employment, economic empowerment, access to education and health services in rural areas, access to financial resources and land for production and equal access to justice. These challenges are intertwined with the limited allocation of State budget and human resources for the development and promotion of women's advancement, gender equality, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women²⁰. , information and environment, nation protection and security, foreign affairs, family relation and grievances. The law on Gender Equality 2019 (LGE) is gender responsive, with some gender positive provisions, as it incorporates important equality principles and provides for overcoming cultural beliefs that inhibit women's advancement. Crucially, it mandates gender mainstreaming in laws and policies across all areas of work. The law is accompanied by an ambitious policy

¹⁹ The Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) gave recommendations in 2018 to Laos to maximize its economic growth through gender equality. See
²⁰ According to the summary report of the Third National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2016-2020) published in 2021 in The Fourth-Five Year National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025)

for implementation—the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2021–2025 (NAPGE)—which is gender responsive and includes a broad spectrum of gender positive targets, such as introducing quotas for women and girls over a broad spectrum of activities including leadership roles in the areas such as climate change and disaster risk reduction. With more detailed action plans for each set of targets and new complaints procedures, the law and action plan can support effective integration of gender considerations and an increase in the participation of women in decision making on issues relating to resilience to climate change and disasters.

Despite these achievements, there is a notable lack of commitments to equality and non-discrimination in key laws and policies related to disaster risk management, environment, and climate change. The laws and policies of the Lao PDR in these areas are based on formal equality between men and women, but do not address gender inequality and gender differences in risks or needs or provide mechanisms for the collection of sex-disaggregated data, gender analysis, gender mainstreaming, or the specific engagement of women in their institutions and processes. A notable exception is the Decree on Environmental Impact Assessments 2019 (EIA Decree), which mandates the collection of information and conduct of assessments relating to gender. Another positive step forward is the inclusion of the Lao Women's Union (LWU) in the Technical Working Group on Climate Change, which promotes the participation of women in environmental policy making. LWU is also included in Village Disaster Management Committees under the Law on Disaster Management (DM Law), although not in the district, provincial, or central DM Committee. The capacity of LWU to influence women's resilience through these mechanisms is also limited by the lack of any specific gender criteria or targets in the relevant law and policy frameworks. Similar findings from a close analysis of agriculture sector laws and policies reveal no integration of gender equality and non-discrimination principles and no mention of the gender dimensions of agriculture considered in related laws or policies. The one exception is the National Agro-Biodiversity Program and Action Plan 2021–2025, which goes some way towards gender sensitivity by acknowledging the different roles of men and women in managing and using agro-biodiversity resources and calls for their knowledge to be incorporated into management plans.

The Fourth **National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Laos launched in 2021 for the 2021-2025 period** has the ambition to tackle these issues.

There is no specific ministry for gender equality. However, two institutions support these issues:

- **The Lao Women Union (LWU)** is a mass and social organization of women, part of Lao People's Democratic Republic system. Officially established in 1955., the LWU has an extensive national network, including provincial, district, and in most cases, village units. Over the past decade, the LWU has been evolving into a development organization delivering services to women in development projects. In 1995, the LWU has been also tasked to facilitate gender mainstreaming into line ministries. The LWU's capability in service delivery as well as gender mainstreaming in development programs is been severely constrained by lack of staff and basic resources, staff's conceptual and technical capacity, and limited decision-making authorities over line agencies and other government agencies.
- **The National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW)**, an organization tasked with promoting gender equality, which is the result of the country's ratification of CEDAW in 1981. In 2016, it was moved under the LWU. The expected new role of the LWU was to function as an advocacy unit that provides technical inputs to the inter-ministerial decision-making process through NCAW, while at the same time to continue service delivery targeted at women at a grassroots level in collaboration with local governments. NCAW's main tasks are to formulate and implement a national policy on gender equality; eliminate discrimination against women; and coordinate the mainstreaming of gender in all sectors of public life. To carry out these tasks, all ministries have sub-commissions (sub-CAWs) with fully functioning secretariats. This means that in the majority of ministries, government officials assigned to carry out gender-related work have to perform these tasks on top of their regular duties. For example, within the **Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF)**, there is a **Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)**, which houses the Gender Focal Point and the sub-CAW representative for MAF. This division, in addition to being a part of the sub-CAW network, also receives guidance from LWU on its gender programs.

1.3 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND AID FOR TRADE IN LAOS

1.3.1 Trade as a pillar for development

Trade plays an important role in the economy of Laos, accounting for a significant portion of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). According to the World Bank, the share of trade in Laos' GDP was 94.2% in 2020. While trade has helped to spur economic growth in Laos, the country's reliance on exports of raw

materials and natural resources has also made it vulnerable to global market fluctuations. Therefore, the government of Laos is working to diversify its economy and increase the value-added of its exports to reduce its dependence on raw materials and natural resources.

The current National Social and Economic Plan (NSEDP)²¹ of Lao PDR - covering the period 2021-2025 – recognizes the critical role of trade for development. The plan aims to continue the country's efforts to achieve sustained economic growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. It has a long-term development vision, which aims to transform the country from a Least Developed Country to an Upper Middle-Income Country by 2030.

The plan recognizes that trade is a critical driver of economic growth and job creation, and emphasizes the need to enhance the country's competitiveness and integrate it more fully into regional and global markets. The NSEDP includes a number of measures to promote trade, including:

- Strengthening export promotion: to increase exports of goods and services by promoting high-potential export sectors and by improving the competitiveness of Lao products in international markets.
- Supporting private sector development for trade-building capacities by improving access to finance, strengthening entrepreneurship, and promoting innovation and technological development.

NSEDP also highlights the importance of natural resource, particularly the forests, and fostering their sustainability. Therefore, there is a need to balance between this prioritization and promoting exportation of bamboo and rattan products.

1.3.2 Aid for trade

The National Implementation Unit (NIU) is a division responsible for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of development projects financed by external aid. This division is the anchor division within the the Department of Planning and Cooperation of the MoIC for a sector-wide approach on trade in the Lao PDR and is responsible for coordinating trade-related assistance to the country. The NIU has been implementing the program Trade for Development (T4D)²² - a program that aims to promote sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction in Laos through trade. It is a joint initiative of the Lao government and several development partners, including the European Union (EU), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

The T4D program focuses on enhancing the capacity of Lao businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to participate in regional and international trade. It provides technical assistance, training, and access to market information and networks, as well as support for policy reforms that improve the business environment²³. Various organizations, including government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations are implementing and co-financing the program.

2 PROJECT CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION

2.1 PROJECT CONTEXT

The AFD Group co-financed in 2018 a project to support the participation of civil society in the management of sustainable bamboo and rattan value chains in Laos through the project CLA1107. (See [appendix 1](#) for a detailed presentation of the project).

This project reached more than 3,500 families in 80 villages in two pilot provinces, namely Houaphanh and Borlikhamxay. The main achievement was the structuration of the bamboo and rattan sectors at the community and national levels with:

- (i) The development of the first strategic sectoral document at the national level;
- (ii) The implementation of a forest management plan for approximately 40,000 ha in Houaphanh, and;
- (iii) The creation of a farmer's organization (the Bamboo and NTFPs Development Association, "BNDA") with 30 SMEs for the processing and marketing of products and the promotion of quality labels in Houaphanh.

The ex-post evaluation of the project identified several challenges:

²¹ Lao PDR, NSEDP, 2021

²² [Trade for Development - T4D \(t4dlaos.org\)](https://t4dlaos.org)

²³ See the list of programs implemented [here](#)

- (i) The need to understand better how and which families are able to move from a sustainable farmers status to an entrepreneur one, with more specialized role and capacity (design, marketing, etc.).²⁴
- (ii) A strong dependence on international markets with high trade barriers (slow quota approvals, high royalty fee and taxation for harvesting raw material, complexity of export procedures, etc.);
- (iii) A lack of a national mechanism to encourage entrepreneurs (including lack of access to soft loans for the improvement of technology in rattan and bamboo processing)
- (iv) A need for financial support to implement the NAP 2021-2025;
- (v) The need to generate more revenue through these sectors in order to maintain stakeholders in the sustainable development approach initiated by the project, and ;
- (vi) The need to provide greater opportunities for women and young people (the main driving forces of these sectors), and to support the increase in both technical skills of the latter in management positions in these sectors (business management, marketing, access to finance)

Considering the results of this first pilot-project, the AFD Group, in cooperation with the MoIC and the sectorial Ministries and in line with government priorities, wants to participate in the scaling-up of this project by supporting the development of rattan and bamboo value chains in Laos with a gender-based approach.

2.2 PROJECTED CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

As designed so far, the present project aims to scale up and sustain the achievements of the above-mentioned bamboo-rattan project while focusing on women entrepreneurship and gender equality through a systemic approach and by facilitating the dialogue between public authorities, private stakeholders and communities living on the edge of national parks. This project, aligned with the priority of the French Trade Capacity Building Program²⁵, will also explore trade issues and opportunities on the value chains of these two sectors, while considering regional economic cooperation, as well as international economic cooperation with French and EU stakeholders. The main objective of this project will be to accompany women economic empowerment through support of MSMEs with a gender-responsive approach in the bamboo and rattan value chains. In order to contribute to the construction of a more gender-friendly ecosystem and a more tailored-made supply regarding the differentiated needs of men and women, the project will focus on the capacity building of the stakeholders within the public-private entrepreneurial ecosystem on gender-related aspects. The project will rely on strong synergies with existing schemes identified in the study.

This new project will be discussed with the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoIC) as it is the potential contracting authority, and in close consultation with other relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and relevant public-private stakeholders. Technical assistance will potentially be provided by WWF and the GRET due to their expertise and experience in bamboo and rattan value chains in Laos.

The project aims at scaling up and sustaining the achievements of the above-mentioned bamboo-rattan project while focusing on “Enhancing women’s economic empowerment and the promotion of gender equality in the bamboo and rattan sector in Lao PDR through the gender-lens entrepreneurial ecosystem and the reinforcement of the commercial capacity”. It is therefore expected that the new project will be implemented in the provinces where the previous project was (more details in the “Project intervention areas analysis” section) and to consider pursuing support to the BNDA.

The specific objectives (SO) of the project are:

- **SO1:** Improving sector governance and enabling business environment in the rattan & bamboo value chains for supporting women inclusiveness and leadership
- **SO2:** Strengthening national bamboo and rattan value chains in Laos and favouring quality labels to enhance local added value for women economic empowerment
- **SO3:** Support sustainable economic models for gender-lens businesses in the rattan and bamboo value chain

The project components will be developed on the following principles and guidance:

Component 1: "Improved sector governance and enabling business environment in rattan-bamboo sectors for supporting women inclusiveness and leadership: This component will focus on the

²⁴ On that specific point, it would be interesting to benefit from the lessons learned from the TABI project, funded by SDC and implemented by NIRAS.

²⁵ The Trade Capacity Building Program (PRCC in French) – as the main French bilateral tool for Aid for Trade- must contribute to the well-being of populations and help developing countries by stimulating their productive sector in an inclusive and sustainable manner. It is part of a shared-prosperity logic between France and its partners. See appendix 2 for details on PRCC objectives and main axes.

establishment of a dialogue between public-private-community through existing multi-stakeholder platforms such as sectoral sub-working groups, private stakeholders' networks, and farmers' associations' networks. The objective of this dialogue will be to facilitate the implementation of the current national action plan (NAP 2021-2025), the establishment of a participatory and inclusive business environment, and the promotion of a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem to support women-led and women-owned of small and growing businesses (SGBs) and start-ups and building an enabling environment doing business (i.e. reviewing legislation, policies and regulations related to quota and taxes, export procedures, etc.).

Component 2: Higher rattan-bamboo value chain and recognition of quality labels to enhance local added value for women economic empowerment: This component will focus on the creation of higher added value for the products from bamboo and rattan and ensure an equitable share for all sector stakeholders. This will be achieved through:

- sustainable resource allocation, management and uses (inventory and mapping of resources, definition and implementation of sustainable forest management plan...) (ii) promotion of a participatory and community-based approach for the sustainable forest management plan;
- creating a skilled workforce through the strengthening the skills and expertise of actors and facilitating collective learning processes between local authorities, producers and local entrepreneurs (with a special focus on the involvement of women and youth, especially regarding ethnic community issues) to better manage forest resources and to ensure the higher value chain;
- generating added value for products through the promotion of quality labels (such as ODOP, FSC, PEFC, PGS, Fair Trade, and others) and the development of the inclusive and innovative product design as a tool to access to specialized/emerging markets;
- improving domestic, regional and international market linkages.

Component 3: Sustainable economic models and strategy for gender-lens businesses in the rattan-bamboo sector: This component aims to create technical assistance and comprehensive financing strategies to ensure the sustainability of the sector. This component will focus on:

- developing holistic financing strategies that will include both business models and financial sustainable strategies;
- providing adapted services and technical assistance to gender-lens businesses.
- building sustainable business models via the pilot models with the small and growing businesses and start-ups and providing them a regular assistance support.
- ensure the sustainability in their community development and help maintaining and developing self-sufficient bamboo and rattan production (after the end of project, they are able to continue by themselves).

In order to capitalize on the achievements of the previous project, the present project will focus on the CLA1107 pilot regions (Houaphanh and Bolikhamxay). The potential for collaboration with one or two additional provinces per product chain should be investigated²⁶.

2.3. PROJECTED PROJECT INSTITUTIONAL SET UP

The following options for the institutional set-up of the project with the intervention of Expertise France – to be discussed and confirmed with the MoIC – are:

- A delegation of funds to EF (on the model of the “Pour Elles” project in the DRC); EF would act as an MOD i.e. project implementation agency, and would be in charge of recruiting a PMU, managing the budget, drafting the AAPs, reporting to the AFD, etc.;
- Intervention of EF as a service provider for the establishment of Technical Assistance with the MoIC with potentially a resident expert on site (on the model of the “PAEB” project in Benin);
- A “mixed” option, with a delegation of funds to EF. However, the PMU would not be recruited by EF. This PMU would be composed of MoIC agents and would be housed within the Ministry. This PMU would therefore be responsible for the implementation of the project, but with supervision from EF, which would also intervene with TA and capacity building of this PMU with short term and/or technical expertise on certain topics.

These proposal and other options will be discussed during the consultation workshop of the Phase A.

²⁶ The NAP suggested Phongsaly, Xiengkhouang, and Bokeo for bamboo and Saravan and Sekong for rattan.

3 OBJECT OF THE CONTRACT AND EXPECTED RESULTS

3.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

The consultant shall undertake the remaining tasks of the feasibility study to complete the diagnosis as well as analytical elements required for the development of the project's institutional and operational set-up proposal. A gender-lens approach has to be implemented at each step of the feasibility study, to ensure that the project will be qualified as DAC 2 under the OCDE gender equality policy marker²⁷. See the general guidance in Section 3.2.

3.2 GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR THE PROJECT FORMULATION

The consultant will have to ensure that the following points of attention are covered in the report Phase A:

- The empowerment of women and the structural reduction of inequalities between women and men constitute the ultimate goal of the project and permeate all its components;
- This main objective aims at a facilitating structural change, i.e. the gender actions have a geographical and/or temporal impact beyond the perimeter of the project, and aims at sustainability in terms of results and treatment of the causes of inequalities;
- The analysis of the baseline situation integrates sex-specific data, an analysis of barriers and constraints to the participation of men and women in the project and an analysis of the project's gender risks and opportunities, and feeds into the design of the project and is not confined to an annex component;
- Gender actions are detailed and include: a budget, human and financial resources, responsibilities for implementation, training and/or capacity building elements if necessary, a monitoring and evaluation system including targets and monitoring and results indicators;
- The gender approach is central to the methodology to be proposed by the Consultant and must take into account available data, lessons from existing literature, feedback from donors/TFPs on similar projects (in the country or in the region) as well as an in-depth field analysis in the project area.
- The main information, analyses and operational recommendations should thus be integrated at all levels of the feasibility study report: analysis of the context/sector, beneficiaries and actors, detailed feasibility, detailed presentation of the project. It should also be noted that the analyses/issues/perspectives linked to gender will be a central decision-making element for the final framing of the project.
- The consultant will rely on the methodological elements described in AFD's Gender Toolkits, in particular the Gender Toolkit: Private Sector Support, Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion.
- The detailed E&S impact assessment will be performed during the Phase B. However, in case that baseline data are collected during the phase A, E&S information should also be integrated if it is relevant in terms of resource optimization and if the same stakeholders are involved.

3.3. PROJECT VALIDATION COMMITTEE

According to the Minutes of technical Meeting MOTIFS – 05/02/2024, the Project Validation Committee is decided as following parties:

- AFD as co-chair – Validation entity
- NIU representative Chair - Validation entity
- MAF representative – Consultation member
- LWU Representative from MOIC - Consultation member
- Representative of sub-NCAW of MoIC - Consultation member
- PICCOs of target provinces - Consultation members
- LNCCI representative - Consultation member

This committee is responsible for the validation of:

- Final selection of the Project intervention areas;

²⁷ A project marked 2 means that gender equality is the main objective of the project and is fundamental in its design and expected results. The project would not have been undertaken without this objective. See <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/dac-gender-equality-marker.htm>

- Consultancy service's schedule and deliverables (see Section 4)

3.4. DETAILED ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE CONSULTANCY

3.4.1. Final selection of the Project intervention areas

As per conclusion from the report on the selection of the additional provinces (*see report on "Criteria for additional provincial and district selection", final version on 05 July 2024*), the consultant should quickly organise a consultation meeting with the Project Validation Committee to validate the selection of Vientiane Capital and Xieng Khouang province as an additional provinces for the project and propose the field visits to these provinces to identify stakeholders, assess the socio-economic at the household and community levels (households' profiles, economic activities...), social dynamics (including gender profiles), and carry out an in-depth value chain analysis.

3.4.2. Phase A: comprehensive diagnosis

3.4.2.1. Detailed activities for phase A

In this phase, consultants shall continue to conduct the following tasks:

Task A1 - Country and sector analysis: The consultant shall conduct the analysis on country context and sectors (agriculture, NTFPs, bamboo and rattan) as well as the analysis of the political, legal and institutional framework. It should identify global gender inequalities and women economic empowerment's challenges at country and sectoral levels, and the capacities of key stakeholders and their level of awareness on the issue. More specifically, it should focus on the two main gender institutions (the LWU and the NCAW) to understand their relationship with the government (degree of independency and the level of integration into ministry's policies).

The consultant shall also provide an overview of projects in Lao PDR related to the agricultural and gender topics. The attention should be paid to the projects took place in the project target provinces (Houaphanh, Borlikhamxay, Vientiane Capital and Xieng Khouang) to take advantage of the activities carried out and to maximise synergies.

Task A2 - Entrepreneurship ecosystem analysis:

Supply:

- Review of the existing (or proposed) policy/legal framework to promote women's entrepreneurship and their economic opportunities. This should include all relevant strategies, policies, roadmaps, guidelines and regulatory;
- Mapping of the public, private and non-governmental stakeholders in the ecosystem and the existing entrepreneurship support programs implemented by public and private organizations, civil society organizations, development partners, financial institutions, etc.
- Analyse the capacities of stakeholders with a mandate on supporting entrepreneurship and identify capacity-building needs and financing tools with a special focus on female representation in the workforce, gender-sensitive approach/initiatives, etc.

Demand:

- Analysis of women entrepreneurship challenges in the related sectors/value chains and identification of the key long-term levers for contributing to their economic empowerment (immediate needs and structural obstacles): key data (if available) on female representation in the related sector/value chains; needs of women entrepreneurs (individuals or organisations) in terms of financial services (loans, savings, products, insurance, equity, guarantees, etc.) and their non-financial needs (soft-skills, "life-skills"; capacity building needs in relation to psychosocial and/or socio-cultural constraints; access to basic services/health/care/infrastructures/training;...).
- Robust analysis of beneficiaries profiles to be accompanied by the project, with an intersectional perspective (age, civil and reproductive status, geographical location, married/unmarried, previously disadvantaged persons, workers/management, ethnicity, informal, etc), data and profiles of unserved and underserved women from technical and financial services (etc.), obstacles encountered in access to socioeconomic opportunities to set up/maintain/scale up entrepreneurial initiatives (social norms, legal barriers, burden of "care responsibilities and domestic duties, time

availability, access to health, access to education and training; lack of information and network, mobility, ICT access, etc.), obstacles related to the social environment (community, family, integration of men, risk of gender based violence, etc...).

Task A3 - Market analysis: The consultant shall carry out comprehensive market studies on the bamboo and rattan at national and international level, in particular the European market to be able to develop “**a sector of excellence for export**” and ensure the financial sustainability of the value chain stakeholders. The study should be able to (i) identify the market and business opportunities in these two sectors, (ii) identify and understand the expectations of potential buyers at national, regional and international market, and (iii) understand the expectations of buyers in terms of the product conceptual designs from the traditional models existing in Lao PDR and the inventory of the existing products in the South-Est Asia region and in Europe. This inventory could be used to develop a wide range of product catalogues under the project. It is expected that the project targets niche and high value-added markets (not mass markets) and will support the promotion of sustainable labels (such as a gender label, forest sustainable label, etc.) to be able to create more added-value to the product. A global market survey and studies are expected to identify potential partners and regional/international economic cooperation (notably commercial opportunities in global value chains), aligned with PRCC opportunities. The lessons learned and successes of the promotion of quality labels in Lao PDR (such as the promotion of the Geographical indications, Fairtrade, etc.) should be explored, as well as the other potential labels/certifications. This market analysis must be conducted with a view to enhance added value for women economic empowerment²⁸.

A value chain analysis framework, including at least Functional, Technical, Organizational, Financial, Economic aspects should be conducted.

Task 4 - A preliminary E&S analysis: AFD has categorized this project as B (moderate E&S risks), according to its Environmental and Social Risk Management Policy²⁹. A detailed ESIA (environmental and social impact assessment) including the ESMP will be elaborated during the phase B in line with the national framework and international good practices, once the project’s activities and scope are defined. However, the phase A analysis should already take into account the key E&S constraints and opportunities, in particular on the following aspects:

- **E&S scoping:** identification of the key E&S issues for this project, confirmation (or not) of the E&S categorization proposed by AFD (B, moderate risks), taking into account potential direct, indirect, cumulative impacts; preparation of the methodological approach for the data collection for the detailed E&S impact assessment (phase B).
- **Description of legislative and institutional context** that applies to the project, both on environmental and social aspects (in addition to gender): national regulations in environmental and social terms (including context on the management of national parks/forest lands where the bamboo and rattan grow), ratified international texts, the relevant standards from the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework³⁰.
- **Project intervention areas analysis:** consideration of E&S constraints and opportunities, definition of the exclusion criteria for the project activities to reflect AFD group’s exclusion list³¹ and to minimize negative E&S impacts (for instance, conservation forests and protected forests should be avoided (only commercial forests allowed), all protected areas according to IUCN (categories I to VI), AZE (alliance for zero extinction) sites, carbon emissive activities (considering the baseline and project alternatives) etc.). The consultant should pay attention to select value chains and project intervention areas that combat/have the capacity to combat imported deforestation and that align/have the capacity to align with the European law to fight global deforestation (EUDR).

Task 5: Climate challenges analysis: In order to be consistent with the objectives of the Paris Agreement, the consultant must ensure that the project is in line with the country’s long-term climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy and a fortiori that it is consistent with Laos’ Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). The consultant must clearly identify, within the project components, those that will contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation activities. Using the existing literature, the consultant will make a brief assessment of: i) the effects of climate change in the targeted project areas (evolution of climatic parameters and climate risks) and; ii) the vulnerability of the bamboo and rattan sectors to these climate risks. To analyse the mitigation potential of the project, the consultant will analyse qualitatively the project’s possible sources of GHG emissions and the potential in terms of forest preservation and reducing deforestation as well as explore opportunities to integrate mitigation measures in the value-chains.

²⁸ For the CLA1107 project, GRET and BNDA experienced successfully the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) approach. The feasibility study may benefit from learning of these experience.

²⁹ [Environmental and Social Risk Management Policy for AFD-funded Operations | AFD - Agence Française de Développement](#)

³⁰ <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/936531525368193913/Environmental-Social-Framework-French2.pdf#page=67&zoom=80>

³¹ [AFD Group Exclusion list | AFD - Agence Française de Développement](#)

Task A6: A gender-sensitive diagnosis: The consultant will conduct a gender-sensitive diagnosis, including the public-private entrepreneurial environment - supply and demand analysis - (see Handbook below). The analysis should identify the cross-cutting issues (resources management/conservation, adaptation solutions, economic opportunities, voice and agency) to address within the project's activities in order to accompany the active role of women in driving solutions in sustainability, resource scarcity and climate resilience through the related sectors and value chains.

Handbook for conducting an in-depth gender analysis within the expected diagnosis in phase A

1) Identification of key gender issues at national and sectoral levels: with a focus on women economic empowerment issues in rural development and climate resilience

By articulating literature review and field investigation, the consultant will highlight the relevant gender issues within the framework of the project and the sectoral and geographical scope in which it falls.

- **General Issues:**
 - Differential social and economic roles and responsibilities of women and men and structural causes of inequality;
 - Distribution of domestic work between women and men: household typology and differentiated and/or shared roles and responsibilities between women and men in informal activities, family and household.
 - Access to basic resources, services and infrastructures (health, education, training, etc.), economic resources (employment, financial services, property, inheritance, etc.), miscellaneous services, etc.
 - Gender stereotypes, weight of gender-based violence, etc.
 - Social precariousness by gender: migration, marginalization, access to information, etc.
- **Specific sectoral issues:**

The consultant will analyse issues related to gender inequalities in the agricultural and rural sector. In particular, the analysis will highlight the following issues, supplemented as necessary by any other relevant elements that may be identified during delivery:

- The gender division of agricultural work: within farms, within bamboo and rattan sectors and the sharing of roles and responsibilities between women and men;
- Gender-differentiated access to resources such as land, water, agricultural credit, inputs, production tools, markets and networks; as well as training opportunities (e.g., cultural channels, early marriages and/or pregnancies, accessibility: transport, availability of appropriate infrastructure, etc.);
- The weight of informal and especially domestic work for the various members of rural and agricultural households;
- The existence of specific professional organizations in the sector, mixed or non-mixed, and their influence in the governance of the sector;
- **Cross-cutting dimensions:**
 - **Gender and climate change issues:** on the basis of general and sectoral gender analysis, the diagnosis will characterize (where applicable), the gendered impacts of climate change and the gender-differentiated vulnerability – and possibly other stakeholders – to climate change and its effects. Potential existing climate change adaptation strategies will be identified and qualified.

2) Analysis of the political, legal and institutional framework (country context, sectors) in relation with the scope of the project and the entrepreneurial ecosystem

- The country's international commitments on gender and gender equality (for example: CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, etc.), and possibly including commitments where gender is not the main objective, in connection with the project;
- National policy framework and machinery gender equality;
- Policy and institutional framework on gender in relation to the project sector and relevant ministries;
- Organization and operational skills of the dedicated public services (Ministry, state agencies, etc.) and transversal integration of gender issues in the state services (for example: networks of gender focal points in other ministries, gender sectoral strategies), including decentralized and/or decentralized services in targeted provinces, and relevant state agencies for the project;
- Mapping of national stakeholders (institutional stakeholders, public agencies, public or private structures supporting entrepreneurship and/or agricultural training, financial stakeholders, etc.) & gender programs/initiatives in the geographical and/or sectoral scope of the project: public bodies

(possibly private), civil society organizations, donors, technical and financial partners (TFPs), UN agencies, etc.

On the basis of the mapping of programs/initiatives carried out to date and/or existing in the sectors covered by the project, the diagnosis will have to question and identify the operational lessons to be drawn for the formulation of the project and/or identify potential synergies to ensure the complementarity of the operational components of the future project.

3) Capacity needs assessment of project management/owner's

- Commitments to gender equality: policy or gender strategy documents, HR policy on professional equality for staff, etc.;
- Gender-specific HR staff, share of women represented at the managerial level, etc.
- In-house expertise and existing teams on gender and gender equality: dedicated staff if necessary, training already received on the subject;
- Gender mainstreaming in studies, planning, internal processes and procedures for program development, monitoring and evaluation system, etc.
- Programs/initiatives and partnerships that integrate or address current or past gender and equality issues.
- Collaboration with national entities responsible for coordinating national gender policy and implementing policies to support women entrepreneurship.
- The project owner's appeal and interest in the project's gender ambition should also be highlighted.

On this basis, the gender-related capacity building and technical support needs of the project owner will be identified and integrated within the project design.

4) Analysis of women entrepreneurship challenges in the related sectors: profiling of beneficiaries characteristics, analysis of their specific immediate constraints and structural obstacles as well as their short and long-term needs

Around the economic fabric of Lao MSMEs and the challenges of women entrepreneurship:

- General elements of the socio-economic and political context, business environment (legal and regulatory framework, doing business indicators, etc.) impacting Lao enterprises, especially women's entrepreneurship (analysis with policy and institutional framework on gender and gender equality in relation to the project)
- Activities, profiles (individuals and groups) and geographies of Lao enterprises in the related sectors: female representation and current duties/roles in bamboo and rattan supply chains; categories of MSMEs, employees, size, type of enterprise, turnover, sectors, etc. Profiles of entrepreneurs and characterization of inequalities between girls and boys / women and men: breakdown of the workforce according to gender, profiles - social origin, geographical location, age, etc.; obstacles in accessing business creation - for example: cultural bias, early marriages and/or pregnancies; obstacles in developing a business, etc. The main difficulties faced by entrepreneurial initiatives led by women.
- Issues of informality: determine the degree of informality of the bamboo and rattan sectors and advise solutions to increase the share of formal employment and formalized businesses.
- What are the needs of entrepreneurs in terms of financial and non-financial services? Analysis of the immediate and strategic needs of women entrepreneurs in terms of financial services (microcredit, loans, guarantees, investment, etc.) and non-financial services (information, training, mentoring, coaching, networking, family, psychological, support for business development etc.)
- What are the profiles of women entrepreneurs in bamboo and rattan sectors who are most excluded from financial and non-financial services?

The analysis of beneficiary profiles will be based on an intersectional perspective, i.e. taking into account the interactions between the different categories of belonging (real or assumed) and their influence in the production and reproduction of social inequalities: gender, age, community membership, social class, disability, sexual orientation, etc.

The study will pay particular attention to the analysis of “structural” barriers to women's economic empowerment (including the development of women-led entrepreneurial initiatives):

- At the micro level:

- Insufficient productive means (land, inputs, technologies...)
- Time constraints divided split between productive and reproductive work

- Inequitable sharing of income
- Insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health (early pregnancies and marriages, school drop-outs), to prevention and support services for gender-based violence
- Insufficient access to education, employment and professional training
- Insufficient access to information, markets and networks
- Insufficient knowledge and technical skills
- Insufficient access to financial and non-financial services, social transfers
- Psychosocial constraints & "life soft skills" (self-esteem, public speaking, ability to negotiate with one's environment...)

- At the meso level:

- Insufficient capacity for action and organization of women at the individual and collective levels
- Insufficient capacities and means allocated to public policies aiming at women's economic empowerment and gender equality
- Insufficient gender capacities within the public and private stakeholders involved in the entrepreneurial ecosystem
- Focus on the rural and agricultural sector:
 - Insufficient participation of women in the governance mechanisms
 - Insufficient gender capacity in rural institutions to target women and ensure their access to resources and services

- At the macro level :

- Insufficient legal and political environment and investments to support the implementation of operational gender approaches
- Insufficient sex-specific data, gender analysis and monitoring and follow-up mechanisms
- Norms, values, prejudices and education that limit women's access to economic opportunities and power within the household (decision-making, distribution of income and work)
- Inadequate infrastructure (water, energy, storage, processing technology) and social services (childcare, education, health), especially in rural areas.

3.4.2.2. Expected results for phase A

The consultant will produce a report at the end of the phase A and present the main results to the Project Validation Committee and relevant stakeholders during the 1st technical consultation workshop. The report is expected no later than two (2) months after the starting of the Phase A. The consultant will consolidate the comments and suggestions from the stakeholders 1st technical consultation workshop in the final version of the report as well as the proposal activities for Phase B. See "4. Consultancy service's schedule and deliverables" for more information on deliverables.

The report Phase A shall cover at least the following topics:

Section I: Comprehensive Diagnosis (Phase I results)

- Country and sector analysis (including the findings from the field missions in target provinces);
- Entrepreneurship ecosystem analysis (supply & demand);
- Market analysis including international benchmark on rattan and bamboo, with a focus on rattan and bamboo value chains in Laos;
- E&S preliminary analysis (key E&S issues, confirmation (or not) of the project categorization, methodological approach for the data collection for the detailed ESIA, E&S legislative and institutional context, E&S exclusion criteria);
- An analysis of climate change challenges (including the crosscutting approach on gendered-impact)
- A gender-sensitive diagnosis to ensure that the project will be qualified as DAC 2 under the OECD gender equality policy marker.

Section II: Primary Project Design and Implementation Framework

- Proposed project objectives, components and tentative packages of activities (with Gender-focused approach and integration);
- Project Implementation Framework: primary results from the consultation with key stakeholders based on the proposed project set up (see 2.3);

- Indicative Financing Plan by component: The financial plan shall include: (i) AFD grant of X M€, (ii) co-financing from other sources³² of fund if any, and (iii) an estimation of possible in-kind contribution from Lao government,);
- Indicative logical framework with gender-sensitive indicators
- Risk Management

3.4.3. Phase B: Finalisation of the project structuration proposal

3.4.3.1. Detailed activities for phase B

In phase B, based on the results of the phase A, the consultant will:

- **Develop the project detail activities** for each component taking into account the project guidelines (see 3.2), but it is invited to formulate its own opinion on the most relevant structure.
- **Finalise the institutional and operational framework for the project's implementation** and ensuring that the objective on the gender of DAC 2 are reflected in the project structure. The consultant shall propose the role and responsibility of each unit of the project set institutional framework (Project Steering Committee, Project Management Unit, Project Implementing Partner, Project technical partners, ...).
- **Propose different measures** linked to the project risk assessment findings (environmental, social and climate), in particular, the detailed **ESMP**³³ should be elaborated and include the following elements: (i) Identification of the project's influence zone and description of the baseline: physical environment, biological characteristics of the main species of bamboo/rattan (seasonality, flowering season, life cycle...), mapping/inventory of the main species, biodiversity status in the bamboo/rattan forests (presence of key biodiversity areas, protected species?) and impact of human activities, socio-economic context of the local communities including the specificities of ethnic minorities, presence of vulnerable people, local governance, land tenure system, etc., (ii) Analysis of project's impacts and definition of the key E&S measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate the negative impacts (including for stakeholder engagement, monitoring). The Consultant shall ensure that the ARC sequence (Avoid, Reduce, Compensate) is respected and justified and (iii) Elaboration of the Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) that operationally translates the conclusions of ESIA by specifying the practical modalities of implementation and monitoring of mitigation measures or compensation of impacts, including the related schedule, responsibilities, budgets. Capacity-building actions necessary for the proper implementation of mitigation, compensation and monitoring measures should also be identified, as well as all relevant stakeholder engagement activities (stakeholder mapping, consultation methodology and communication methods, key consultation results, complaint collection and management mechanism).
- **Propose climate adaptation and mitigation measures:** Based on the climate analysis in phase A, if relevant, the Consultant will propose adaptation activities to cover the existing and future climate risks in order to (i) ensure the projects activities will be resilient to current and futures climate conditions and (ii) identify if the project activities can help increasing the area and populations resilience to climate risks. If significant GHG emissions or reductions are anticipated, conduct a carbon assessment of the project in order to obtain an order of magnitude ex ante of the emissions that will be produced, avoided and/or reduced by the project activities (directly or indirectly). To do this, the consultant can use the Ex-Act tool. In Ex-Act, the baseline scenario will be a scenario without a project.
- **Provide the project monitoring frameworks (logical framework and M&E system):** The consultant shall integrate a comprehensive logical framework for the project following the standard, including: General objective, Specific objectives, Expected outcomes, Activities (per expected outcomes), Indicators with the baseline data/information and targets (disaggregated when relevant), Sources of verification, Resources to mobilize, and Assumptions and Risks. Relevant gender, E&S and climate objectives and indicators should be clearly stated.
- **Establish the detail financing plan:** Based on the estimated needs in human resources and activities, the consultant shall (i) propose a detailed budget of the project (including the estimated budget for the ESMP implementation), by components and by activities, based on the details on the operational arrangement and geographical coverage, (ii) define the disbursement plan over the project duration (foreseen to be of 4-years).

³² An estimation of possible financing from other partners and development partners (SDC, ADB, WWF, GRET, etc.).

³³ In addition to the "do no harm" approach through the E&S study, the project also aims at reaching positive outcome in the preservation of biodiversity and natural resources. The main challenges should be clearly analyzed to identify relevant activities to be included in the project to maximize the co-benefits for biodiversity.

3.4.3.2. Expected results for phase B

A final report including the elements above.

The consultant will present its findings at the second technical consultation workshop to the Project Validation Committee and other relevant stakeholder.

See “4. Consultancy service’s schedule and deliverables” for more information on deliverables.

4. CONSULTANCY SERVICE’S SCHEDULE AND DELIVERABLES

The consultant team will submit and justify its implementation schedule. However, the AFD recommends that the team follow the timetable suggested below. Efforts and appropriate means to **reduce these delays** are expected.

The service for the feasibility study should run for an indicative period of three (3) months – the period of validation of the reports by the contracting authority included.

For other possible activities during the launch phase of the project, they should not exceed three (3) months after the signature of the project.

The consultant is free to schedule its services as they wish in their proposal. A final approval from AFD will decide the deadline.

The below proposed schedule is based on the assumption of 22 working-days per month.

The following table summarizes the list of deliverables as well as the delivery dates calculated from the receipt of the order to start the services by the project owner. The order to begin the services will be given at the end of the negotiation of the consultant’s contract, within a maximum period of seven (7) days following signature.

N°	Name	Tentative calendar	Feb	Mar	Avr	May
1	Proposal of work plan	1 week after reception of the service order	X			
2	Report Phase A (1 st Draft)	1 month after reception of the service order		X		
3	1st technical consultation workshop	7 days after the submission of the Report Phase A (1 st Draft)		X		
4	Minutes of 1st technical consultation workshop	7 days after 1st technical consultation workshop		X		
5	Report Phase B (1 st Draft), including the revision of the report Phase A based on comments from 1st technical consultation workshop	1 month after the Report Phase A (final version)			X	
6	2nd technical consultation workshop	7 days after the submission of the Report Phase B (1 st Draft)				X
7	Final report (final version)	5 days after 2 nd technical consultation workshop				X

The report phase A, B and final reports should not exceed 50 pages each (excluding appendix). The report shall delivered in two hard copies (one for MOIC and one for AFD) and in electronic version. The report

language is English. An executive summary (at least 5 pages) in Lao and English are compulsory and to be submitted 10 working days before the two technical consultation workshops.

5. EXPECTED SKILLS FROM THE CONSULTANT

The team of consultants proposed by the consultant must have recognized expertise and experience in the field of **technical and economic feasibility studies on women's entrepreneurship** development projects in agriculture in Southeast Asia. The consultants shall compose of international and national experts.

The consultant, in its offer, will justify the optimal organization it intends to set up. The AFD Group will pay attention to the chosen organisation.

The consultant shall provide, based on its own methodology, organization and timetable, the time needed to engage each of its staff member for these services. The schedule will justify the services performed on site and those performed at its headquarters or subcontracted.

The consultants will have the appropriate qualifications and experience for the services described in these terms of reference. More specifically, the consultant team (key personnel and support staff) must meet the following requirements:

- Strong academic background in gender studies and/or gender and development approach;
- Good understanding of the agricultural field in Laos, and the value chains for bamboo and rattan.
- Expertise in entrepreneurial ecosystems and technical and financial support mechanisms for entrepreneurship, and in particular in the structuring of projects/programs integrating a gender approach and/or aiming at the empowerment of women
- Demonstrated experience in conducting qualitative and quantitative field surveys and baseline studies of development projects integrating gender issues;
- Expertise in E&S and biodiversity issues, including experience in implementing E&S risk management measures.
- Expertise in climate change assessment
- Experience in managing development projects and good knowledge of donor approaches to gender and gender equality;
- Knowledge of the institutional (national gender "machinery") and entrepreneurial ecosystem targeted by the future project;
- Knowledge of Laos and South Est Asia;
- Languages: English, French, and other languages spoken in Laos (Southern Lao, Vientiane Lao, Western Lao, Central Lao, Northeastern Lao, and Northern Lao);
- Demonstrated skills in conducting meetings, workshops, interviews;
- Excellent synthesis and writing skills;
- Interpersonal skills to work in a multicultural context, including a plurality of stakeholders;
- Autonomy and organizational skills - responsiveness - interpersonal skills - adaptability - good interpersonal skills;
- Team spirit; strength of proposal, critical and constructive spirit, discretion;
- Strong availability over the period considered. consultants will have to achieve a significant workload that in the given and incompressible schedule.

The expert inputs specified in the Table below are indicative. The consultant could propose the alternative set-up in its offer as long as all tasks and responsibilities listed are covered and the methodology is in line with the objectives of the ToRs.

- KE1: Agribusiness and value chains specialist
- KE2: Gender and women economic empowerment specialist
- KE3 : Gender specialist
- KE4: Climate change and gender specialist
- K5: Marketing and financing specialist
- KE6: Environmental and social specialist
- KE7: Monitoring and evaluation specialist
- KE8: Community-based specialist

Note: Based on 22 working-days per month

Except for the Team Leader, these minimum requirements should be understood as the areas of expertise needed for this service, meaning that a single Key Expert can be in charge of more than one area of expertise, provided that:

- the said consultant fulfils the minimum requirements for each of these areas, and
- the number of corresponding man days for his/her position are adjusted upward.

The Team Coordinator is expected to carry out the work in the Lao PDR at least 50% of his inputs during the implementation of the feasibility study. He/she shall be the relay-person between the consultant team and the key partners.

The TC will be in charge of the overall supervision of the various assessment study activities. He or she will assume full responsibility, including leadership of the expert team. He or she will undertake the review and the updating of design in coordination with the other key experts. The TC would have to demonstrate proficiency with elaborating Project documents, the logical framework and project cycle management.

The key experts commit to a field allocation of at least 30% of their overall inputs under the contract and according to the needs of the project.

The consultant is responsible for the personal taxes incomes according to the Lao Law and other costs related expenses for its personnel to perform the Services in Lao PDR (customs/immigration expenses, licenses, permits, visas and others).

Key expert qualifications

KE1: Agribusiness and value chains specialist

Education: MSc or BSc degree in in agronomy, agro-economy or agricultural related science.

Qualifications and skills:

- Minimum five years of professional experience in agriculture development project, including strong experience of support to farmer innovation and agricultural extension,
- Demonstrated strong experience in innovative cropping systems, engineering/design and implementation,
- Knowledge/Experiences in coffee and tea sector is an asset,
- Be familiar with participative land use planning and participative approaches;
- Having an experience in participatory programme identification, planning and preparation would be a plus;
- Working experience on gender approach within value chains programs will be an asset;
- Proficiency/fluency in written and spoken English.

KE2: Gender and women economic empowerment specialist

Education: At least a Bachelor's degree in in social sciences (sociology, anthropology, gender and development...) or equivalent

Key qualifications and skills:

- A minimum of 10 years of relevant work experience in gender development
- Demonstrated strong experience in and gender and women economic empowerment approaches in development programs
- Working experience on gender approach in agriculture and environment sector is highly preferred;
- Knowledge of Lao language, knowledge of Lao culture or experience of working with the LWU, NCAW and MOIC would be a plus.

Desirables:

- Experience with international institution would be preferred;
- relevant work experience the project feasibility study, the project preparation and/or implementation of community based rural development program in the region, notably in south-east Asia will be highly appreciated;

KE3: Gender specialist

Education: At least a Bachelor's degree in social sciences (sociology, anthropology, gender and development...) or equivalent

Key qualifications and skills:

- A minimum of 10 years of relevant work experience in gender development programs
- Working experience on gender approach in agriculture and environment sector is highly preferred;
- Knowledge of Lao language, knowledge of Lao culture or experience of working with the LWU, NCAW and MOIC would be a plus.

Desirables:

- Experience with international institution would be preferred;
- relevant work experience the project feasibility study, the project preparation and/or implementation of community based rural development program in the region, notably in south-east Asia will be highly appreciated;

KE4: Climate change & gender specialist

Education: MSc or BSc degree environment, climate sciences, agronomy, geography with experience in remote-sensing tools for agriculture and landscape management, social sciences (sociology, anthropology, gender and development...) or equivalent.

Qualifications and skills:

- At least three experiences, preferably during the last five years of climate vulnerability studies in the area of agriculture / irrigation;
- Good knowledge of national strategies, issues and challenges ;
- Working experience on gender approach in climate analyses
- Experience in GHG inventory / carbon footprint for AFOLU sector (using internationally recognized tool such as Ex ACT – FAO) / MRV design, and on AFOLU vulnerability assessment to climate change impact,
- Familiar with Ex-ACT Tool
- Abilities to interact with a variety of stakeholders,
- Languages: excellent command of English (written & spoken)

KE5: Marketing/financing specialist

Education: University degree in rural finance, agricultural economics, marketing and economy

Experiences:

- Relevant professional experience in value-chain and the private sector development;
- Experience in working with the private sector in agri-food value chains is preferred;
- Knowledge/Experiences in coffee and tea sector is an asset;
- Fluency in written and spoken English.

KE6: Environmental & social specialist

Education: MSc or BSc degree in environment or ecological sciences

Qualifications and skills:

- At least three experiences, preferably during the last five years of environmental impact assessments in the area of agriculture / irrigation;
- Good knowledge of lao national regulation
- At least 3 experiences with international standards including World Bank E&S safeguards, especially ESS6 regarding biodiversity
- Familiarized in social monitoring criteria
- Proficiency on WB standards RPF, SEP/GRM and IPPF
- Proficiency/fluency in written and spoken English.

KE7: Monitoring & evaluation specialist

Education: At least a Bachelor's degree in social sciences or equivalent

Key qualifications and skills:

- A minimum of 5 years of relevant work experience in elaborating Project documents, the logical framework and project cycle management;
- Proficiency/fluency in written and spoken English;

Desirables:

- Experience with international institution would be preferred;
- Relevant work experience the project feasibility study, the project preparation and/or implementation of community based rural development program in the region, notably in SEA will be highly appreciated.

KE8: Community-based specialist

Education: At least a Bachelor's degree in in social sciences or equivalent

Key qualifications and skills:

- At least 2 years of experience in a community support role;
- Familiar with participative land use planning, community-based management approach and participative approaches;
- Strong knowledge of community resources and services;
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THE AFD GROUP'S SUPPORT IN BAMBOO AND RATTAN VALUE CHAINS.

The AFD Group co-financed in 2018 a project to support the participation of civil society in the management of sustainable bamboo and rattan value chains in Laos. Implemented from 2018 to 2021 by the GRET for the bamboo sector and by WWF for the rattan sector, this project has helped the structuring of these two sectors at the community and national levels. The achievements of the project are the following:

- (i) The development of a national action plan on bamboo and rattan (NAP 2021-2025);
- (ii) A revision of the provincial strategy on bamboo and Non-Timber Forest Products (NFTPs);
- (iii) The development of a forest management plan implemented in 5,788 ha for bamboo and 31,029 ha for rattan;
- (iv) The creation of a functional and recognized farmers' organization with more than 30 SMEs ensuring the processing and marketing of products;
- (v) The promotion of quality labels (ODOP and FSC). More than 10,000 ha of rattan are FSC certified. The promotion of the bamboo and rattan sectors in Huaphanh and Bolikhamxay provinces – the two pilot provinces of the project – has enabled more than 3,500 families in 80 villages to receive an additional annual income of up to USD 2 000 per family.

The project did not develop specific objectives on gender but it was mentioned as a cross cutting issue. It has produced a specific report on Gender for SDC. This report underlines that the team involved in the implementation of the project should get enough gender awareness tools to start understanding the need for specific action/method to facilitate women participation in the project and to be aware of the different gender gap.

APPENDIX 2 : TRADE BUILDING CAPACITY PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND AXES

The OECD accounting system on Aid for Trade includes five categories:

- (Category 1) Technical assistance for trade policy and regulations (e.g. helping countries to develop trade strategies, negotiate trade agreements, and implement their outcomes);
- (Category 2) Trade-related infrastructure (e.g. building roads, ports, and telecommunications networks to connect domestic markets to the global economy);
- (Category 3) Productive capacity building, including trade development (e.g. supporting the private sector to exploit their comparative advantages and diversify their exports);
- (Category 4) Trade-related adjustment (e.g. helping developing countries with the costs associated with trade liberalisation, such as tariff reductions, preference erosion, or declining terms of trade);
- (Category 5) other trade-related needs, if identified as trade-related development priorities in partner countries' national development strategies.

The scope of the PRCC may include Aid for Trade categories 1, 3, 4 and 5, and targets the main following axes:

1. Develop trade policies and facilitate regional economic integration in developing countries
 - Define and implement regional and national trade policies aimed at inclusive and sustainable economic development and win-win partnerships with France;
 - Strengthen trade negotiation capacities;
 - Support trade facilitation measures (modernization/simplification of customs procedures/border procedures/tariff reforms, digital trade management tools), in conjunction with the activities of the French Directorate-General of Customs and Indirect Taxes;
 - Implement a policy of standardization and quality, in line with the requirements of international and regional markets;
 - Implementing policies and systems for managing market risks for strategic products, including food safety.
2. Develop a competitive offer from developing countries on regional and international markets
 - Define and implement sustainable and inclusive sectoral policies (particularly in the thematic areas mentioned below);
 - Strengthen the business environment contributing to trade competitiveness;
 - Structuring regional professional stakeholders (professional representations, umbrella organizations);
 - Strengthen the support organizations for business development;
 - Develop and organize growth sectors;
 - Strengthen the production and management capacities of business groups.

The programme gives a particular attention to projects that fall within the framework of axis 1.

The PRCC is structured around the three following themes:

- The quality approach in the broadest sense, which covers compliance with international environmental and social standards, regulatory convergence with the European Union, particularly in the sanitary and phytosanitary field, and the protection of intellectual property, particularly the development of geographical indications. Fair trade and geographical indications are priority themes;
- Support for the entrepreneurial ecosystem and sustainable sectors, which includes support for public policies supporting entrepreneurship and trade, the structuring of local and regional sectors, and support for VSEs/SMEs, particularly in the social and inclusive economy;
- Support for regional economic integration and trade facilitation in Africa. This covers, on the one hand, specific operational support for the implementation of the agreement and the strengthening of institutional structures, including regional economic communities, related to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and, on the other hand, operational support for measures and initiatives to strengthen regional trade, particularly intra-African trade. The theme may cover operations aimed at creating shared value and partnerships with France in regional and international production and supply chains;

Sectors with a high propensity to include populations at the bottom of the pyramid (BoP) due to their low barriers to entry, such as agriculture, will receive special attention under the PRCC. The sustainability

(particularly in terms of climate resilience) and inclusiveness of projects (equitable and inclusive development, economic empowerment of women, or in favor of family farming), or the integration of climate issues (low-carbon trajectories), will be determining selection criteria.

The selected projects will seek to contribute to the respect of the environment and the climate, to the improvement of the living conditions of the populations, as well as to a better consideration by the beneficiaries of their environmental and social responsibility. The inclusion of social and environmental criteria will be assessed in accordance with AFD's appraisal procedures within the framework of the Sustainable Development Analysis and Advice mechanism. Projects that have an ecosystemic effect, mobilize co-financing, or allow for synergies or complementarities with other projects will be highlighted, in particular when they target middle-income countries.

Projects implemented by the PRCC may contribute to France's strategic positioning in beneficiary countries, in line with the objectives of economic diplomacy. To this end, the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and the General Treasury Direction departments in Paris and in the beneficiary countries (in particular embassies and economic departments) will be consulted during the design of the projects and afterwards. Possible collaborations with French operators or companies may be sought in partnership with embassies and economic services, both upstream, during project design, and downstream, in the search for outlets for the projects financed, for example. In addition, AFD will ensure that PRCC projects are coordinated with the actions of other European donors.

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APPENDIX 3: REFERENCES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Internal documents provided by the AFD Group

- Ex-post evaluation of the project CLA1107 (2021)
- Mapping of AFD project in Laos (2021)

Studies

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- INBAR, Socio-economic Issues and Constraints in the Bamboo and Rattan Sectors, 1999.

Women's entrepreneurship in Laos:

- Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia, Overview of Women's Entrepreneurship in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Lao PDR, 2019. [Link](#).
- ILO, Gender Issues in Micro and Small Enterprises in Lao PDR, 2006. [Link](#).
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Gender studies in Laos:

- USAID/LAOS, Country-level Gender Analysis, 2022. [Link](#).
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- UN Lao PDR, Joint Shadow Submission to CEDAW, 2017
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- MAF, 1st NAP on sustainable rattan and bamboo, 2021. [Link](#).
- MAF & GRET, The Second 5-year bamboo development strategy (2016-2021), Houaphan Province.
- NCAWMC, forth NAP on Gender Equality (2021-2025). [Link](#).
- Lao PDR, Ninth 5-year nation socio-economic development plan (NSED9), 2021. [Link](#)
- Lao PDR, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016 – 2025, (2016)