



Evaluation

WAVES: Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality in Lao People's Democratic Republic 2019–2022



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November 2022

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Foreword

RECOFTC believes in a future in which people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. One of its four strategic goals centres on social inclusion and gender equality, in which women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and other vulnerable groups are active and empowered contributors to forest management.

To achieve this goal, RECOFTC recognizes that gender equality and equity are matters of fundamental human rights and social justice and a precondition for sustainable forest governance. It uses an equity-oriented intersectional approach to help expand the representation and leadership of women and other excluded groups. This approach helps increase their access to income and other economic assets, promote gender-inclusive policy and extension mechanisms and tackle root barriers, including harmful gender norms, practices and knowledge gaps.

Tackling these long-standing inequalities is a complex process that requires dedicated attention and resourcing. RECOFTC established Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, or WAVES, based on the idea that having stronger leadership and expertise will improve policymaking and investments in ways that promote gender equality and social inclusion. RECOFTC has positioned and engaged with WAVES as a regional network that leads, inspires and sustains long-lasting changes. WAVES operates in partnership with “gender leaders” who are change intermediaries creating context-relevant inclusive solutions that work for women, Indigenous Peoples and youth across the forest landscapes.

The WAVES results from the first nearly three years of the program, which are captured in this report, demonstrate innovative approaches, such as how engaging gender leaders and supporting them in determining national and organization-based gender issues and priorities can lead to locally acceptable and sustainable solutions. The results showcase the absolute value in power-sharing and inclusive engagement for co-creating long-term solutions on topics of gender and social inequalities.

The type and spectrum of changes brought about by the gender leaders that were evaluated for this report differed among them but were contextually relevant and significant.

We invite you to learn about WAVES and its gender leaders who have spearheaded different initiatives to make the forestry landscapes more equal and inclusive. We hope that WAVES will inspire you to become a gender leader, with each one of you taking actions to realize a more inclusive and equal world, especially in the forest landscapes.

David Ganz

Executive Director, RECOFTC

Kalpana Giri

WAVES Program Manager, RECOFTC

Acknowledgements

The research report was designed and implemented under the technical oversight of Kalpana Giri, now the former Senior Program Officer for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality, RECOFTC, who also managed the WAVES program. Independent consultant Dibya Devi Gurung, who is the Coordinator of Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management in Nepal, collected and analysed the data and wrote the initial draft of the report.

Manilay Thipalansy, the WAVES country focal point in Lao PDR reviewed and provided technical inputs. Vanessa Hongsathiviz and Julian Atkinson from RECOFTC provided technical inputs to finalize the report.

RECOFTC recognizes the partnership from and engagement with the gender leaders and their respective organizations in the WAVES network: Sisomphet Souvanthalisith, Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; Yomala Phaengsuwan and Phonephanh Luangaphay, Department of Forestry; Nilapha Vorachit and Anouthay Panyanouvong, Department of Forest Inspection; and Khampheng Pongkham, Lao Biodiversity Association and Lao CSOs FLEGT Network.

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Executive summary

Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, or WAVES, is a RECOFTC initiative that promotes gender equality in the governance of forest landscapes in the Asia-Pacific region.

WAVES built a network of 36 gender leaders from the seven countries where RECOFTC works. In Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), six gender leaders, from the Department of Forest Inspection, the Department of Forestry, Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Lao Biodiversity Association within the Lao CSOs FLEGT Network, were supported in advocating for social and gender-equitable programs in their communities and institutions.

In early 2021, more than two years into the program, WAVES conducted an evaluation at country and regional scale to document the results and learnings. Gender leaders, partners and stakeholders provided inputs.

The evaluation found that the program triggered a range of results and changes among the WAVES gender leaders and partners at the individual and institutional levels. The gender leaders reported personal and professional growth in their ability to articulate gender and inclusion concepts, formulate effective plans and strategies and influence high-level policymakers and community leaders through negotiation and advocacy.

In Lao PDR, the gender leaders adopted the WAVES approach and conducted training on gender equality, skills development and gender in village forest management planning for national and village-level partners.

They strengthened the monitoring and evaluation system and collected sex-disaggregated data, addressed gaps in the gender integration plan for the Department of Forest Inspection and developed and disseminated gender-responsive communication materials, including a handbook on safety and health in wood processing for women workers.

The gender leaders provided inputs to revise the Forestry Strategy to the year 2020 and helped develop the Forestry Strategy to the year 2030. They conducted coordination meetings to promote synergies and discuss and address issues they and the staff of their partner organizations experienced. Barriers and opportunities for future gender and social-inclusion programming were identified through regional participatory learning.

Lessons documented through the evaluation process included:

- An accurate understanding of the capacity of stakeholders that allow for reasonable timelines for complex activities and the ability of stakeholders to commit to longer-term work plans are all important determinants of project success.
- Gender action plans can be most effective when they are demand-driven, results-oriented and context-specific.

- Understanding and being responsive to intersectionality is important to achieving inclusion and equity.
- Financial support for WAVES-like interventions must be scaled up to achieve more widespread and sustainable impacts. Enabling follow-up action and partnerships are crucial to sustaining the momentum created through the activities made possible by WAVES.

The evaluation

About WAVES

Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, known as WAVES, is a RECOFTC initiative that promotes gender equality in the governance, management and use of forest landscapes and their resources in the Asia–Pacific region. RECOFTC implemented the three-year WAVES program from March 2019 to September 2022. It was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

RECOFTC established WAVES based on the idea that having stronger leadership and expertise will improve policymaking and investments in ways that promote gender equality and social inclusion more broadly. It also recognizes that creating transformative change requires identifying and supporting individuals working in natural resources management who can advocate for and negotiate such change at the institutional level.

The WAVES initiative so far has created a network of 36 gender leaders in the seven countries where RECOFTC works: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam. Although the WAVES program has ended, RECOFTC continues supporting the gender leaders as they advocate for equality and lead gender-equitable programs in their communities and institutions.

The gender leaders across the region encompass technical experts, senior government officials, politicians, academics, directors and officers of civil society organizations, local community leaders, business managers and a journalist.

To date, WAVES has equipped them with the knowledge and capacity to understand, design and implement gender-equality measures in forest landscapes. It has built up women’s leadership skills to promote gender equality across public agencies, the private sector and local communities and has worked with men as allies to support gender equality. And it has supported the gender leaders to integrate gender equality into policies, investments and actions.

WAVES has helped the gender leaders maximize their potential by cultivating leadership skills and by providing technical and financial support as they implement their individual action plan. Through regular mentoring and ad hoc psychosocial support, WAVES has helped the gender leaders create new narratives and visions in leading gender equality efforts and has helped amplify their work by linking them with wider networks and collaborators.

With support from the WAVES program, the gender leaders challenge conventional ways of thinking and promote gender equality in policies and processes related to climate change, REDD+, forestry, forest law enforcement, governance and trade. They have revived and are driving the gender agenda and reminding their societies that the goal is inclusion and social justice for all.

The WAVES program is part of RECOFTC's dedicated effort to achieve its strategic goal 4 on social inclusion, gender equality and public action. In its work RECOFTC tackles systemic inequities and marginalization prevalent in the natural resource landscapes by using a participatory approach of critical framing and co-engagement and co-creation of knowledge.

Four pillars of the WAVES program

WAVES was designed using participatory action research principles to activate self-discovery, analysis and actions (or co-creation) through a regional network of gender leaders. Participatory learning and action were activated by using engagement approaches that took into account the gender leaders' demand-driven needs and priorities. Multiple strategies were employed to address the intersecting barriers and drivers of gender inequality. The four pillars outlined here are part of the co-creation structure that was put in place to cultivate discovery and actions.

Demand-driven

- The gender leaders were selected for their commitment to gender issues and their ability to work on context-specific issues and achieve results. They were involved in the program's conception and remain involved in its implementation.
- Before launching the program, the WAVES manager and focal points from the seven countries where RECOFTC works conducted informal outreach and national discussions with the gender leaders. Together, they identified gender issues relevant to the national context and priorities and assessed potential positive outcomes as well as challenges, conflicts and barriers, and they planned risk-mitigation strategies.

The gender leaders were selected based on the following criteria:

- **Demonstrated commitment:** They had experience taking initiatives on gender and social inclusion work in forestry but were limited by the institutional set-up or facing resistance.
- **Understanding of gender issues and activities:** They had some level of understanding of gender issues, activities and changes that result from such interventions and barriers.
- **Scope of manoeuvrability:** They had a mandate to create institutional influence over people working in gender, policy or planning who provide opportunities to influence institutional changes and were willing to lead work in these areas.
- **Diversity of partners to deliver different types of changes:** They collaborated with a wide group of organizations and people who can bring about diverse levels of change, from the policy level to practice, with a good representation of state and non-state actors and the private sector.
- **Period of engagement:** They were willing to commit to working with the WAVES program for three years (2019–2022).
- **English proficiency:** They had a working level of English sufficient to participate fully in the program.

Participatory engagement approach

- **Meaningful engagement:** WAVES created spaces for deliberation and dialogue. It enabled ownership, power-sharing, knowledge co-creation and multifaceted engagement strategies. The gender leaders were involved in every step, from program scoping and implementation to unpacking tensions and nuanced resistance that they encountered. Problems and solutions, including unintended changes and resistance, were analysed as a group. The program's methods were defined by the participatory approach and power-sharing between the WAVES team and the gender leaders.
- **Tailored capacities:** WAVES provided the gender leaders with targeted and timely support at the regional and national levels. They were provided with trainings and workshops on various gender concepts and skill sets, based on each leader's specific skills, needs and interests to implement their action plans.
- **Learning space:** WAVES created learning channels to connect the gender leaders in a safe and trusting environment at the national and regional levels to share their accomplishments, challenges and pitfalls. The WAVES focal points in each country moderated the learning channel at the national level.
- **Results-oriented:** WAVES provided support to each gender leader to implement their action plan and to link with other RECOFTC programs to expand their outreach and garner more support.

Intersectional interventions

- Different types of interventions were needed for the gender leaders to implement their respective action plan.
- The WAVES program employed diverse strategies and actions to address gender gaps and structural barriers, mitigate emerging risks and reduce opportunity costs.
- Technical and financial support were provided at the regional and national levels to roll out interventions.
- Interventions promoted inclusive changes at the individual and institutional levels.

Institutionalization and enabling systems

- The WAVES program design emphasized deliberative feedback loops to formal and informal spaces and governance procedures so that efforts to achieve gender equality extended to the institutional system to address systemic inequalities.
- A system of direct communication channels, such as the WAVES focal points working directly with the RECOFTC regional WAVES project team, leveraged influence and encouraged adaptive planning and strategizing.
- The gender leaders in each country supported one another and created communication loops between their informal network and the formal systems.
- Individual leadership approaches were used to influence institutional shifts within each gender leader's organization through policy changes, mandates, budgets and other means.

- The gender leaders were connected to a larger audience and network outside of their institutions and forestry circle for collective advocacy and amplification.

Of the 36 gender leaders from the seven countries where RECOFTC works, 31 are women and five are men.

About the evaluation: Purpose and framework

The regional evaluation was conducted in 2021, more than two years after the program had begun, by independent consultant Dibya Devi Gurung, in close collaboration with the then-WAVES program manager Kalpana Giri, the WAVES country focal points and the gender leaders.

The overarching objective of the evaluation was to review and identify the results and learnings of the WAVES program to date. The consultant interviewed the gender leaders, partners and stakeholders from all seven countries where RECOFTC works.

The approach of the evaluation was based on the principles and practices of participatory learning.¹ The gender leaders were guided through a process of self-reflection and assessment through several facilitated workshops and individual discussions.

Framework for evaluating individual and institutional change

The framework for individual and institutional change,² which was also used to design the WAVES program, was adapted for the assessment. The framework focused on changes that took place at two distinct but interrelated levels.

Individual change: The performance and behavioural change of the gender leaders were assessed based on their understanding of gender and leadership concepts and how they were able to apply these concepts to their personal and professional lives. The evaluation also considered informal changes, such as increased confidence and capacities of leaders on gender integration into the efforts they have led towards influencing internal policies and programs.

Institutional change: The evaluation examined how WAVES effected changes in organizations' programs, policies, structures and work culture. It considered both informal changes, such as each institution's networks, peers, norms and values, and the formal changes, such as introduction of policies and programs to support gender equality.

Evaluation process

The evaluation process was guided by a framework designed by the RECOFTC WAVES team with the consultant and the gender leaders. The framework was used as a guide to examine the WAVES results at the country and regional levels.

Design and framework for evaluation

The design and framework were developed by RECOFTC in consultation with the consultant and gender leaders.

- A first workshop was organized to create a common understanding of the evaluation framework among the consultant, the gender leaders and the WAVES RECOFTC team.
- The evaluation framework was then used to facilitate the country and regional evaluations.
- The evaluation was designed at two levels. First, workshops and meetings drew out evidence and learnings that occurred within each country. Then the learnings from the national evaluations were condensed into a regional perspective and shared at a regional evaluation workshop in March 2021.

Project documentation

The evaluation drew on all project documentation:

- WAVES concept report
- WAVES framework
- Country reports
- Meeting minutes
- Case studies
- Documents related to participatory action research, gender and leadership

Meetings and workshops conducted for the evaluation

- Country evaluation workshops: Country-level evaluations were made within a span of two months, from February through March. Each evaluation was conducted with a mixed approach of face-to-face meetings, virtual workshops and interviews and group discussions. One in-person workshop was conducted each in Lao PDR, Nepal and Viet Nam. One virtual workshop was conducted in Indonesia. Interviews and discussions were conducted in Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. The gender leaders shared their progress, learnings and achievements, including examples and evidence. The country-level workshops and meetings were used to assess the achievements, results, gaps and possibilities that the gender leaders had observed through their engagement with WAVES. Information derived through each country's evaluation process was then synthesized and consolidated to collate results and learnings at the regional level.
- Regional workshop: A three-day regional workshop in March gave the gender leaders the opportunity to present and discuss their results, learnings, challenges, opportunities and recommendations with all stakeholders, including partner and donor agencies.
- Meetings: Two meetings were organized between the consultant and the RECOFTC WAVES team to discuss and provide feedback on the draft reports. In addition, several rounds of in-depth discussions with the RECOFTC WAVES manager, the WAVES country teams and communication and learning experts were organized to gain a better understanding of the context and validate the findings.

Limitations of the evaluation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation had to be conducted virtually.

This made it difficult to discern behaviour changes and expansion of informal spaces, especially through the remote interviews. The pandemic made it unrealistic to visit the gender leaders' workspaces and conduct face-to-face interviews with them and their colleagues, subordinates, supervisors and partners, which could have provided further insights on the gender leaders' leadership practices and their influences on their colleagues' behaviour and institutional norms for gender integration. This also limited the face-to-face interaction with the WAVES leaders, except for Nepal, where the consultant is based.

WAVES in Lao PDR

Gender leaders

During the evaluation period, RECOFTC supported the six gender leaders in Lao PDR—who worked with the Department of Forest Inspection, the Production Forest Division, the Village Forest Division of the Department of Forestry and a civil society organization.

The gender leaders were carefully selected based on their commitment to gender activities, their scope to create change in policies and practices at the national and local levels and their potential to affect a gender-transformative shift in their respective organizations. The program’s main objective was to promote gender-inclusive participatory approaches in forestry policies and community activities.

	Name	Organization	Position
1.	Sisomphet Souvanthalisith	Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (government)	Head of Division
2.	Nilapha Vorachit	Department of Forest Inspection (government)	Technical officer
3.	Anouthay Panyanouvong	Department of Forest Inspection (government)	Technical officer
4.	Yomala Phaengsuwan	Production Forest Division, Department of Forestry (government)	Technical officer
5.	Phonephanh Luangaphay	Village Forest Division, Department of Forestry (government)	Technical officer
6.	Khampheng Pongkham	Lao Biodiversity Association and Lao Civil Society Organization Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Network (civil society)	Technical officer

Implementation of the WAVES approach

As this section elaborates, RECOFTC provided step-by-step, demand-based inputs and some financial support to each WAVES leader to implement their specific plan to meet the program’s objectives. Through targeted financial and technical investments, the focus in Lao PDR was on increasing the extension, training and advisory services of state and non-state entities engaged in the forestry sector.

Within Lao PDR, the WAVES approach evolved with the following primary inputs.

Country-level scoping meetings and orientation workshops

The RECOFTC WAVES focal point in each country was oriented on the overall WAVES approach and provided them with guiding criteria to help identify prospective partners and gender leaders. RECOFTC conducted one country-level scoping meeting and one-to-one in-depth discussions with prospective participants to identify their vision for gender equality in forestry work, to map out major barriers they faced to integrate gender-equality into their work and to understand their interest to engage with a program like WAVES. After a few months of careful preparation by the RECOFTC country team and the scoping meeting, the six leaders were selected.

The gender leaders, together with few other partners, were provided with a three-day consultation workshop and training skills development on gender and forestry. It was conducted in collaboration with the RECOFTC Lao Country Program, the Department of Forestry and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The main objective was to understand the different gender concepts and analysis tool, apply them to a gender situation analysis and develop strategies and plans.

Regional launch, training workshops, coaching, mentoring and technical support

A regional leadership workshop was organized in Bangkok to launch the WAVES program. The workshop examined training on gender concepts, including negotiation, communication and networking. Participants were encouraged to critically analyse their situation and explore solutions and opportunities for developing their individual action plan based on their needs, priorities and context.

After six months of implementing their action plan, the WAVES gender leaders attended another regional training in Bangkok on relational leadership and gender analysis. This Leadership Pathways and Change workshop focused on developing frameworks on domains of change and gender assessments, managing resistance and self-care, training of trainers with facilitation skills, designing training courses and developing delivery skills.

Demonstrated actions

After returning to their respective organizations, the gender leaders started implementing their action plans, facilitated by the RECOFTC WAVES focal point from the country office. RECOFTC provided some financial support to help them execute their action plans. A network of the gender leaders was created to enable regular meetings and exchanges among them. The RECOFTC WAVES focal point provided regular support to the gender leaders through technical backstopping and guidance, regular monitoring and addressing their queries and challenges at the personal and institutional levels. These regular exchanges helped the gender leaders and RECOFTC staff analyse and identify their needs and challenges to develop demand-based, tailor-made capacity-building programs for them.

Some examples of the activities of the action plan implemented in Lao PDR included:

Strengthening and developing gender awareness and integration tools and approaches

The gender leaders contributed substantially in developing or strengthening gender integration tools and approaches within their respective organizations. One of the contributions was in developing and strengthening use of the Gender-MEL tool (for monitoring, evaluation and learning) in the Department of Forestry and the Department of Forest Inspection's planning system. This helped the Ministry collect sex-disaggregated data. They also developed and disseminated gender-responsive communication and extension materials, including handbooks on equitable occupational safety and health in wood processing factories, particularly focusing on safety and creating safe spaces for women workers.

Training workshops and mentorship to strengthen women's leadership

The gender leaders adopted the WAVES training approach and conducted several training workshops for diverse groups of partners at the national and village levels. For example, the Workshop on Dialogue for Solutions: Promoting Gender Equality in Forestry Sector allowed the gender leader to get a better understanding of the gaps and opportunities for integrating gender equality into the forestry sector.

A four-day workshop on Skills Development in Gender and Forestry was organized for 13 participants from the Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Production Forest Division and the Village Forest Division, the Department of Forestry, the Department of Forest Inspection and civil society organizations. This workshop determined their issues and needs and listed five priority areas for intervention.

Other trainings included Gender in Village Forest Management Planning in Xayaboury Province; Skill Development Training on Gender Mainstreaming in Forest and Forest Resource Inspection; and awareness-raising and training on gender roles in wood processing. A handbook on occupational safety and health in wood processing was developed in Attapue and Xayaboury provinces. The gender leaders also conducted a writing workshop for forestry officers and media for training on how to write stories and communicate with the media.

Action research, reviews and surveys to influence decision-makers and planning

The gender leaders from the Department of Forest Inspection conducted reviews and surveys on gender equality within their institution and highlighted the gender gaps, such as the minimal number of women in the organization and their capacity needs. The survey results were accepted by the Department and shared with the Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children to develop and support a gender mainstreaming action plan for the Department of Forest Inspection. With support from RECOFTC and partners, the gender leaders analysed the gender impacts on employees of small wood processing factories. They also supported efforts to increase the gender-sensitivity of members of the Lao Civil Society Organization Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Network.

Action research reveals inequalities in Lao PDR

Manilay Thiphalansy, WAVES focal point said that the gender leaders raised awareness with evidence-based data and used policy spaces to have a discussion on gender-related topics. They linked decision-makers from the national government and civil society organizations with the community by taking them for field visits. The gender leaders facilitated dialogue between government officials, civil society network members and villagers who were directly involved in wood processing through their Social and Gender Analysis of FLEGT: Analysing Opportunities and Risks for Wood Processing and Furniture in Small and Medium Enterprises in Lao PDR. The gender leaders discussed employee safety, women's responsibilities and safe spaces. This direct interaction enabled decision-

makers and network members to become more committed and conscious of their roles and duties.

In addition, the gender leaders' action research findings uncovered and articulated gender concerns in the wood processing industry, such as pay disparities between men and women. For instance, male wood processing workers aged 26–46 had an average monthly pay of US\$165–\$270, while women aged 19–47 received an average monthly pay of US\$151. Women were assigned more assistant roles or less-valuable supporting jobs and not given significant or leadership roles.

Inputs to forestry sector strategies and policies

The gender leaders provided inputs to the ongoing revision of the forest and land policy framework: the Forestry Strategy to the year 2020 and development of the Forestry Strategy to the year 2030, in collaboration with the Department of Forestry and the Department of Forest Inspection. Some of the indicators proposed in the strategy were inclusion of women leaders in decision-making by 2030; gender equality extension in the village forestry management plan; and safety, health and equality in the wood processing company. The gender leaders supported gender-inclusive provisions in timber legality definitions and monitoring systems. For example, Sisomphet Souvanthalisith from the Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children adopted the WAVES approach to develop a planning and monitoring tool for the Ministry of Planning that requires the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data.

Development of networks for strengthened cooperation and coordination with forestry department and other relevant civil society networks

The gender leaders conducted a coordination meeting with diverse stakeholders to ensure synergies among ongoing initiatives and actors to avoid duplication. This meeting was attended by 41 participants (14 men and 27 women). They also formed a network of the WAVES gender leaders for regular tracking of their progress and exchange of experiences and technical inputs. The network also provided them with a space to discuss the gender issues they and partner staff members encountered and to develop strategies to address them.

Participatory review and learning

Two participatory learning, assessment and planning workshops took place at the national and regional levels after two years of implementation of the WAVES program. The main purpose was to collectively review the achievements and changes and to identify the barriers and opportunities that had emerged for future planning. The gender leaders and their partners collectively reviewed the WAVES process, their achievements and the changes that had occurred in their personal lives and within their institutions.

Findings and results

The gender leaders were situated in institutions that had limited exposure, skills or programs to address gender and social issues. They recognized these gaps and used their newly gained knowledge and skills on gender integration and relational leadership to make small but critical interventions. In the process, they also enriched and expanded their respective knowledge and skills.

Some achievements and results demonstrated during the WAVES program include:

Recognized for their quality of gender interventions and inputs

The WAVES program contributed to developing a group of gender resource persons in the forestry sector. The WAVES gender leaders were appreciated by their senior management, peers, partners and community stakeholders for the quality of gender training and interventions they delivered. Their interventions were recognized by the directors of the Department of Forest Inspection and the Department of Forestry for being rigorous and practical in terms of conceptual understanding. The trainings engaged the participants to collectively analyse the gender situation and determine the issues and opportunities to specifically resolve them through concrete plans. The gender studies and surveys informed the planning processes. Inputs into policy and program documents and processes were useful for the participants.

For example, in the Department of Forestry, the WAVES gender leader used the gender survey results to convince senior management to integrate gender equality into her project. She was able to improve the monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems to collect gender-disaggregated data and track the quality of participation of both women and men beneficiaries. In the Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, an increase in the number of women in decision-making positions was observed. The male gender leaders who were trained in gender concepts and relational leadership approaches for the first time became gender champions and resource persons. They were able to influence their own organization to integrate gender and to bring in other men and organizations to advocate for gender.

A male gender leader increases women's participation in village forest management planning

The village forest management planning allots forests and forest lands in the village administrative area, which is carried out both inside and outside a protection forest and in protected forests and production forests. The Five-Year Agriculture and Forestry Development Plan (2016–2020) targeted 1,500 villages through this program. According to the Forestry Strategy to the year 2020 and Forestry Strategy to the year 2030, all the components of the projects and programs related to agriculture, forestry and rural development should promote gender equality.

However, these visions and goals are not implemented and women's participation in the village forest management planning process is minimal, both as members and in decision-making roles. These gender gaps are not usually questioned nor addressed.

The WAVES gender leaders within the Department of Forestry coordinated and mobilized all stakeholders related to village forest management, such as the Department of Village Forest

Management and Non-Timber Forest Products and the local community. Together with the support from RECOFTC's focal point from Xieng Khouang Province, they provided gender integration into planning training.

The organizers required that 50 percent of the participants were women. The gender situation analysis conducted during the training clearly identified the gender issues, such as the extensive roles of women in the management of village forests and their low position in the management structure. This training program showed all three stakeholders how gender issues are neglected and ignored by their management system.

Analysis of the roles of women and men in the forest inspection revealed how women are excluded from technical roles, such as conducting investigations, inspecting saw mills and developing and updating the definition of FLEGT. Identification and articulation of these gender gaps became the entry points for addressing them.

Gender responsiveness requires expertise and resources

Although at a small scale, technical institutions have started to see the importance of having technical experts for gender integration. For example, the Department of Forestry and the Department of Forest Inspection now ensure that staff with knowledge or expertise on gender are sent to represent and provide gender inputs in policy reviews, planning meetings and monitoring activity. Before the program, any person who was free was sent to provide gender-related inputs.

The gender leaders from the Department of Forestry and the Department of Forest Inspection said that their own attitudes, along with their senior management and peers, had changed towards planning projects and programs. They recognized the critical need to invest both technically and financially in gender components of their programs. As one of the leaders explained, "I together with my other WAVES gender leaders are considered as gender resource persons and provided opportunities by our senior management to provide support in key planning and implementation processes

and do not face resistance as before. There is also a realization among the decision-makers that women staff should be given opportunities to go to the field and not be limited to desk jobs.”

Innovative and strategic approaches influenced policies and strategies

The gender leaders have realized that gender integration requires rigorous analysis and have understood the value of providing evidence and data to influence their institutions. They conducted studies and action research to reveal the gender inequality within organizations and in the community and used this evidence to provide inputs and interventions. For example, the gender leaders in the Department of Forestry and the Department of Forest Inspection included gender texts in a few policy documents, such as the Forestry Strategy to the year 2030, the Poverty Reduction Standard and Development PM Order 475/PMO and the Implementation Guidelines on Poverty Reduction Standard and Model. They also drafted safeguard policies for women in wood processing companies and included gender as a separate task in the terms of references. The gender leaders said that decision-makers now find it hard to reject proposals to integrate gender equality that are based on analysis and evidence.

Effective approach empowered gender leaders

Guidance, close engagement and targeted inputs by the WAVES country focal point proved to be an effective approach for helping the gender leaders use their knowledge and skills in their work. For example, they organized a meeting with their work team or their supervisor in their respective organizations to facilitate and support the implementation of their gender action plan. The WAVES focal point facilitated the meeting and engaged the director of the Department of Forestry to develop gender plans for the future. The focal point provided frequent coaching and mentoring support to the gender leaders, particularly from civil society organizations like the Lao CSOs FLEGT Network with: Lao Civil Society Organization Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Network. There, the focal point helped the gender leader to integrate gender equality into all stages of their project and to identify community women members as important stakeholders in the community.

Establishment of formal and informal networks promoted gender equality

The gender leaders found networks formed under the WAVES program to be useful for learning and sharing and for advocating for gender integration into their institution’s planning cycle. They expanded these networks and collaborated with like-minded civil society and non-government organizations, the private sector and multilateral organizations, such as the International Labour Organization, to promote gender equality. They used these platforms for capacity-building, sharing and exchange of knowledge, strategizing and garnering support from policymakers or decision-makers to invest in gender-related programs. For example, the gender leader from the Lao CSOs FLEGT Network had an important role in expanding the network to bring in government agencies, the private sector and other civil society organizations into one platform to invest in gender-related actions and resource persons within the private sector, such as the wood processing companies.

Increased self-awareness and confidence to work on gender equality

The gender leaders said that they feel confident to use and apply the new knowledge and skills gained during their training. They are able to analyse, articulate and use

gender language to influence policies and programs, voice opinions, negotiate with senior management and get their support and facilitate meetings. They are better able to manage barriers and resistance and protect themselves. One of the important aspects they learned was to be self-aware and use this awareness in their personal and professional lives. As one leader explained, “Now we are able to know what we don’t know and manage accordingly.”

Changed perception towards women in the forestry sector

The roles and responsibilities of professional and community women and men are gendered in the forestry sector. Women are usually assigned administrative jobs and responsibilities that require limited use of their technical forestry skills and knowledge. They have fewer opportunities to conduct challenging field work and are given limited roles in decision-making processes and positions. Due to these reasons, they are largely limited to deskwork and their growth and development are hindered. Even women themselves felt that they were not fit to perform technical tasks and challenging field work. According to the gender leaders, these attitudes and perceptions about women in the forestry sector are slowly changing. Women are starting to ask, “If men can do the job, why can’t women do it?” They have now started asking for staff diversity to promote more women in the organization into decision-making positions.

Opportunities for WAVES in Lao PDR

- The gender leaders said that self-motivation, conceptual knowledge and gender analysis skills are essential to becoming gender leaders. The gender knowledge, skills and tools provided helped them explore and own the WAVES process. They also realized that support and acceptance from their senior management are crucial in taking forward the gender integration work.
- Although there is an increased awareness about the importance of integrating gender within the forestry sector, the wider forestry sector still does not consider gender equality as an integral component and hence has not prioritized it in the planning and budgeting processes. Gender is still viewed as a separate non-technical subject and not part of the forestry sector.
- Although WAVES training programs were carefully designed with intensive and step-by-step inputs, the gender leaders still require more in-depth knowledge, skills and experiences in gender advocacy and integration to make greater and sustained impacts. They said they still need more follow-up training and close guidance to independently conduct training and lead the gender integration work. There is a need to develop a critical mass of gender resource persons to expand the work that the WAVES program has started. The knowledge and skills of the institutions and the gender leaders are critical and need to be adequately supported financially and technically.
- The gender action plans of the gender leaders were not embedded within their respective organization’s plans or workplans but were considered as an add-on activity. They had to negotiate for time and space to implement it. Therefore, it was challenging for them to integrate it into their organization’s existing plans.

- The gender leaders are fairly new with brief experiences of working on gender issues. Simple communication and training materials and guidelines in their language are needed for them to independently conduct training and analysis.
- The stereotypical narratives that women are weak and unable to perform technical tasks within the forestry sector remain a huge barrier for professional and community women, and their contributions are not fully recognized or understood. Gender as a subject is also framed as “women’s business” and not considered part of the organizations’ overall program. This makes it difficult to engage the institution and prioritize gender equality as an important component of their work. It is a challenge to integrate it into the planning cycle and allocate financial and technical resources.

Recommendations

The WAVES training package is thoughtfully developed to ensure that the participants engage, learn, own and apply the knowledge gained. The coaching and mentoring aspects of the package were found to be useful because this aspect is usually not included in other gender trainings. Although the WAVES package is very effective and appropriate, the evaluation found that it needs to be reviewed in the following areas and continued for the following groups and institutions.

Gender leaders, particularly young and male leaders with limited experience in gender integration, require close and regular guidance and coaching to roll out their action plan independently. The WAVES package should include differential mentoring components and steps for these groups. For example, it could develop and include separate mentor and mentee training packages for new and male gender leaders and mature gender leaders.

- Follow-up gender training and mentoring for the staff of the private sector (small and medium-sized enterprises in Xayaboury, Attapue and Khammoun provinces) should be continued and connected to the safety standards training.
- Additional staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and The Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, the Department of Forestry and the Department of Forest Inspection, including production forests, plantation forests and the Village Forest Unit at the national, provincial and community levels should be trained on gender analysis and integration. The WAVES package should be revised to include training and guidance on conducting gender responsive monitoring.
- Although on a small scale, the assessment revealed that several changes have occurred in the lives of the gender leaders and in the forestry and agriculture sectors that they are engaged with. These changes, if documented systematically, can be used to scale up the WAVES approach within these sectors and across sectors. Thus, develop a baseline to measure the changes and capture the stories of change in the forestry and agriculture sectors.
- The group of gender leaders, including male champions and their networks created by the WAVES program, should be further strengthened and expanded. Collaborate with and mobilize other like-minded organizations from civil society and non-government organizations, the private sector and government departments to support gender leaders, male champions and their networks.

Endnotes

1. Pretty, J.N., Guijt, I., Thompson, J., and Scoones, I., *Participatory Learning and Action: A trainer's guide*, IIED Participatory Methodology Series. London: Sustainable Agriculture Programme, IIED, 1995; WOCAN, *Training Manual-Gender Integration in Planning*, 2011.
2. Gurung, B., and Menter, H., *Mainstreaming Gender-sensitive Participatory Approaches: The CIAT case study*. In *Scaling Up and Out: Achieving Widespread Impact Through Agricultural Research*, D. Pachico, ed. Cali, Colombia: Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, 2004; WOCAN, *Framework for Assessing Participatory Action Research Program Activities*, 2010.

Annex: Actions undertaken by the gender leaders

	Activities	With whom
1.	Conducted the workshop of Dialogue for Solutions: Promoting Gender Equality in Forestry Sector in Lao PDR, Department of Forestry Meeting Room, Vientiane (8 October 2018)	41 participants (27 women) from Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Department of Forestry, Department of Forest Inspection, the private sector, civil society, international NGOs and government representatives
2.	Conducted consultation Workshop and Training on Skills Development in Gender and Forestry, Vientiane (17–19 October 2019)	30 participants (11 women) from Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, Department of Forest - the Production Forest Division and Village Forest Division, the Department of Forest Inspection, Green Community Development Association and Gender Development Association
3.	Conducted training workshop on gender in village forest management planning, Xayaboury Province (9 July 2020)	33 participants (16 women), with 23 from the District and Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office, 8 representatives from communities and 2 from civil society organizations
4.	Conducted training workshop on skill development training on gender mainstreaming in forest and forest resource inspection, Vientiane (27 August 2020)	Total 21 participants (13 women) from the Department of Forest Inspection and a civil society organization
5.	Conducted consultation workshop on revision of Forestry Strategy to the year 2020 and development of the Forestry Strategy to the year 2030 structure on gender, Vientiane (1 September 2020)	30 participants (28 women) from the Department of Forest Inspection, the Vientiane Provincial Agriculture and Forest Office, the Department of Forestry and a civil society organization
6.	Conducted awareness-raising and training on gender role in wood processing and dissemination of Handbook on Occupational Safety and Health in Wood Processing, Attapue Province (9–11 September 2020)	35 participants (12 women): 13 from the government authority - the Department of Forest Inspection, the Department of Forestry, the Department of Labour and Social Welfare, the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office and the Women's Union, 20 from private companies and 2 from civil society organizations

	Activities	With whom
7.	Conducted training on writing workshop for gender leaders in the forestry sector and media, Vientiane (30 September 2020)	10 participants (6 women): 5 gender leaders and 2 technical staff from the Department of Forest Inspection and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and 3 from the media
8.	Conducted workshop on use of the monitoring and evaluation system tool in gender-related activities in forestry, Vientiane (30 November–1 December 2020)	31 participants (23 women): 29 from the Department of Forest Inspection, the Department of Forestry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Women's Union and 2 from civil society organizations
9.	Conducted awareness-raising and training on gender roles in wood processing and dissemination of Handbook on Occupational Safety and Health in Wood Processing, Xayaboury Province (16–18 December 2020)	32 participants (18 women): 22 from the Department of Forest Inspection, the Department of Forestry, the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office, the Department of Labour and Social Welfare and the Women's Union, 7 from private companies, 2 from civil society organizations and 1 from the media
10.	Data collection and analysing gender equality in the forestry sector, from national to local levels for 2015–2020	51 participants at the national level from the Provincial and District Agriculture and Forestry Offices and related agencies and the Lao Civil Society Organization Association group members
	Meeting on gender mainstreaming in the Forest Sector (Department of Forestry, Department of Forest Inspection, RECOFTC, gender WAVES) to Summarize Data Collection at the central level (8 September 2020)	18 participants at the provincial level from the Provincial and District Agriculture and Forestry Offices, the Department of Forest Inspection and the Provincial Office for Forest Inspection were interviewed on the responsibility of gender in the forestry sector, including organizations within the civil society network
	Meetings and dissemination of data collection in Xayaboury Province (6 April 2021)	
	Compiled and analysed data and write a report (1–30 July 2021)	
	Dissemination meeting of Department of Forestry and Department of Forest Inspection results (2 August 2021)	

	Activities	With whom
11.	Completed story from gender leaders related to their topics and interests	6 gender leaders and 1 technical staff person: 2 from the Division for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, 2 from Production Forest Division and Village Forest Division, 2 from Department of Forest Inspection and 1 from the Lao Biodiversity Association
	The pathway of gender mainstreaming in the forestry sector and linking gender equality in the Forestry Strategy to the year 2030	
	Gender equality in forest inspection work	
	Lao forestry women leaders in decision-making by 2020	
	Gender equality extension in the village forestry management plan	
	Safety, health and equality of gender in wood processing companies	



At RECOFTC, we believe in a future where people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. We take a long-term, landscape-based and inclusive approach to supporting local communities to secure their land and resource rights, stop deforestation, find alternative livelihoods and foster gender equity. We are the only non-profit organization of our kind in Asia and the Pacific. We have more than 30 years of experience working with people and forests, and have built trusting relationships with partners at all levels. Our influence and partnerships extend from multilateral institutions to governments, private sector and local communities. Our innovations, knowledge and initiatives enable countries to foster good forest governance, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.



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