

# LIWG Newsletter Issue 2

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The [Land Information Working Group \(LIWG\)](#) is a civil society network that has existed in Lao PDR since 2007. Membership of LIWG is two-fold, consisting of core members and supporting members. The group was established so members could inform one another about land matters, as well as to develop common initiatives to address some land related issues.

## Highlight story.....



Discussion among participants for using legal calendar 2018

## Legal Calendar 2018 Launching Event

The legal calendar 2018 came to an end with the launching event that was organized on 19 December 2017. The Objective of the launching calendar are:

- The participants will be knowledgeable of published regulations and laws of the Lao PDR in the domain of land and natural resources management and some basic rights of the Lao citizens.
- The participants will be able to use the Calendar as a training tool to improve the knowledge of villagers and various stakeholders working at grass-root level on published regulations and laws of the Lao PDR in the domain of land and natural resources management and basic rights of Lao citizens.

*Read more detail inside.....*



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## Meeting and workshop organized by LIWG

### Steering committee meeting

As usual, to frequently update the performance and work of the secretariat, steering committee meetings are usually organized every month. During this quarter, three meetings took place.

### Core members meeting

The core members meeting, which is held every quarter to update on the work of the LIWG Secretariat, was organized in October 2017. The following issues were discussed:

- Presentations from the LIWG secretariat on past and future activities, and budget.
- Feedback shared on the workshop on Knowledge and Experience Sharing Sessions that was organized with the National Assembly on Land and Natural Resource Management from 28-29 September 2017 and highlight the outcomes of this successful event.
- The Laos-China Railway Project case study was presented to give general information and update about the current situation of the project, especially the part on compensation for affected people, given there was no clear information about the compensation process during this study. The discussion ended with one question remaining: “Who is really the owner of this China-Laos Railway Project, Laos or China?”.



*A tunnel of China-Laos railway under construction in northern Laos' Luang Prabang Province. Photo by XinhuaNet*

- An update about the land conflict taking place in Sekong province. One of LIWG member shared information to explain the situation as of today, while this conflict actually started back in 2006. The discussions were interesting and speaker left us with a message: “The justice system in Laos needs to be improved and its implementation needs to be more transparent”.

### “Echo training” on Sustainable Agricultural Investment



*Banana plantation in the northern Laos. Photo by Justine*

The sharing session **“Echo training” on Sustainable Agricultural Investment** was organized by LIWG on Oct 12<sup>th</sup> at the Helvetas Office and presented by Justine Sylvester, an LIWG member, following a conference on Sustainable Agricultural Investment, that Justine attended. The conference was organized by the Columbia Centre for Sustainable Investment (CCSI)’s Executive Training held in US from July 12 – 21, 2017.

Four main topics were discussed 1) Positive and Negative Implications of Agricultural Investment; 2) The Domestic Legal and Regulatory Framework; 3) A Rights-Based Approach to Agricultural Investment; and 4) International Guidance and Standards for Agricultural Investment.

In the discussions, participants shared how challenging it is to reach -

real responsible agribusiness investment in Laos as there are many persisting problems, such as ineffective law implementation, a big communication gap between the private sector and communities, etc. The lack of space for CSOs in Laos to promote sustainable investment was also identified as having a strong negative impact, impeding actions in this matter.

### The Lao PDR Emission Reductions Program

LIWG was invited by the UNFAO to participate to the Lao PDR Emission Reductions Program (ER Program) under the Carbon Fund of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF).

On 22nd November 2017, LIWG co-organized a national-level consultation meeting of land-related projects for the Land and Resource Tenure Assessment, at the Department of Forestry. The meeting’s aim was to get feedback and inputs from CSOs and other land related projects and served as a ‘kick-off’ point for the REDD+ / FCPF Carbon Fund Emissions Reduction Program (ER-P) of Lao PDR.

Results from the meeting include a matrix outlining the existing typologies, expanses, and legal and regulatory frameworks relevant to land and resource tenure in Lao PDR. This data will then be incorporated into the ER-P Document, which is due to be submitted in late January 2018.

Learn more what is ER program [here](#).

## Turning land to Capital (TLIC) study sharing session

On 23 November, 2017, LIWG organized the study sharing session to present about the main findings of the study *“Turning Land to Capital (TLIC): Assessing Ten Plus Years of Policy in Practice”* to get feedbacks and comments from LIWG members and other stakeholders. The presentation was done by Miles Kenney-Lazar from Kyoto University, who conducted this study together with two other authors.

The findings highlighted the multiple contemporary meanings of TLIC existing today, depending on people and the fact the policy is understood in many different ways thus leading to different models associated with this TLIC policy (i.e. trading land for infrastructure, land-based financing of infrastructure, state land leases and concessions, and land titling and the creation of land markets).

There was an interesting discussion among participants and presenter, especially when it came to agree whether the TLIC policy is good in theory but bad in implementation? Or is bad in theory and bad in implementation?

The final version of the report will be available soon.



Land for sale along 450 year road

## Calendar 2018 Launching Event



The year-long process of developing the legal calendar 2018 came to an end with the launching event that was organized on 19 December 2017. This was the 9th edition of the legal calendar which started in 2010.

This year the calendar launching event opened with a speech from Ms. Celestine Kroeschell, Laos Country Director of Helvetas and Chair of LIWG. The calendar development taskforce's members presented the legal calendar 2018.

LIWG's members were also invited to share their lessons learned and experiences in using the legal calendar as a tool to disseminate policies, laws and regulations related to land, natural resources and gender to communities.

A gallery walk was organized to display the different versions of legal calendar, from the first edition in 2010 to the present one.

Many participants highlighted how useful it was to have the legal calendar to disseminate legal knowledge to communities in Laos.

A wide range of stakeholders participated to the event, from Government officials, academics, university students, CSOs and international organizations. The event was also covered by various press media in Laos.

Learn more the about calendar 2018 [here](#) and the launching event [here](#).

## Working Group/Taskforce

### Land Law Advisory Group

The Land Law Advisory Group frequently meets to get updates and to discuss the process of the Land Law revision. The group works closely with the secretary of the drafting land law committee to elaborate some common recommendations and overall support the secretariat in the land law revision.

Recently, the land law revision is in the process of consultation among the land law revision committee. It was first planned to be tabled at the National Assembly between March and April, 2018 but recent updates indicated it is most likely to be postponed to the end of 2018.

### The Land Sub Sector Working Group (LSSWG)

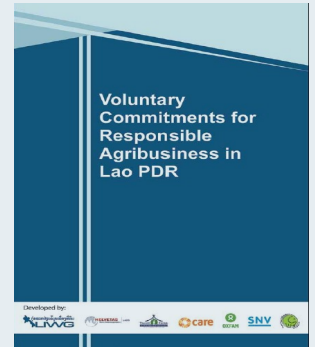
The Sector Working Group meeting was organized on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2017. Mr. Vongdean Vongsihalath, Director General of Land Department of MONRE and Chair of the Land Sub Sector Working Group, accompanied by Ms. Celestine Kroeschell, Chair of LIWG and co-chair of the LSSWG both attended the meeting. LIWG recommendations were incorporated into the LSSWG report and was presented in the SWG meeting by Mr. Vongdean Vongsihalath, whom supported the key recommendations from the different groups at LSSWG, and took the opportunity to present them during the meeting.

Learn more about key recommendations on land issue in Laos [here](#).

## Private Sector Engagement

The group has continued its work on the Voluntary Commitment for Responsible Agribusiness in Lao PDR (VCRA) and has finalized the accompanying monitoring framework. LIWG keeps on looking for endorsement of the VCRA by different stakeholders. Recently, the EU Chamber of Commerce accepted to endorse them and it received congratulations from the Interlaken Group.

Learn more about this Voluntary Commitments [here](#).



## LIWG's members/Initiative/Partners

### The Agro Biodiversity Initiative (TABI)

The Agrobiodiversity (ABD) platform, also known as The “[Pha Kao Lao](#)” Agrobiodiversity Resource Platform, aims to consolidate the wealth of written and oral knowledge in the country so it can be readily accessed and used by students, researchers, develop professionals, decision-makers, local communities and the private sector.

Pha Kao Lao consists of three components: Knowledge base, storytelling, and engagement.

The platform is expected to be launched in mid-2018. The initial offer will consolidate existing information of the 100 most economically important Non-timber Forest Products (NTFP) and provide more detailed information on a number of important species and products.

Recently, LIWG has decided to join this initiative which will allow for knowledge sharing between the platform and LIWG.

### Village Focus International (VFI)

A workshop titled “Making Responsible Business Work for Companies: Can companies do well by doing good?” was organized by Laos National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) and ASEAN CSR Network on December 19, 2017 in Vientiane, Laos.

The objective of the workshop was to discuss one of the growing movements in the business community today, namely the fact that companies around the world are increasingly looking beyond their bottom line, beyond charity and philanthropy and instead looking inward to how their business operations affects communities and the environment.

During the different session, a particular focus was placed on the most relevant issues in Laos, namely forced labour, human trafficking and land conflicts.

The representative from VFI, Ms. Vanida Khouangvichit, Policy Coordinator, was invited to contribute to the session about land issues in Laos. The focus of the presentation was about prevention of land conflict in the communities and on ensuring effective remedies were provided to communities affected by business activity.

### Mekong Regional Land Governance (MRLG)

A regional workshop on “Responsible Large-Scale Agricultural Investment in the Mekong” was organized in Vientiane, Laos from 15-17 November, 2017.

The workshop’ objective was twofold. First to explore the challenges of large-scale agricultural investments and second to identify solutions supportive of sustainable and pro-poor development, as well as economic growth.

Recommendations for alternative approaches to agricultural development and investment were also produced during the workshop, also aiming at being more inclusive of smallholder farmers.

The workshop brought together more than 100 participants from Government, private sector, research institutions, and civil society across the Mekong countries, including China, along with international organizations and partners.

This [regional workshop](#) was co-hosted by the Investment Promotion Department of the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Mekong Region Land Governance Project, with co-conveners, Oxfam and the Institute of Policy and Strategy and Agricultural Research and Development, Viet Nam (IPSARD).

### Lao Land Resource Center (LLRC)

The Lao Land Resource Center is a new project currently being developed for LIWG members. The overall objectives of the center are:

Support and facilitate CSOs and development partners to work together and influence discussions on land issues

Provide platforms -both physical and digital- for LIWG members to exchange expertise, experiences and lessons learned on land matters.

Soon, within the digital platform, there will be opportunity for members to be connected to [Open Development Mekong](#) to access data about development trends in the different countries of the Mekong Region. More specifically, through [Open development Laos](#), this platform will enable access to information about land and natural resources in Laos, both in Lao language and English.

The project is still at its initial stage but more updates about upcoming activities and events opened to LIWG members and public will be available soon.



## LIFE project



Training tools of LIFE team

The Land learning Initiative for Food security Enhancement (LIFE) under the LIWG organized a [community of Practice Workshop](#) on November 28, 2017 at Learning House, Vientiane.

The objective of the workshop were: to share experiences, lessons-learned and results of their coaching workshop; to identify capacity-building gaps and needs; and to determine priorities for LIFE and partners going forward. The workshop was attended by various LIFE partners.

During the workshop, the LIFE project's team presented the materials that have been used for organizing the coaching for their partners, consisting of posters, videos or games. They also presented the various methodologies used in the coaching workshop to explain different topics which can be for instance on land issues and contract farming.

Elaboration of case studies was also one topic discussed in the workshop. In this session, partners of LIFE were invited to share their case study findings related to land issue and contract farming. The participants found the methodologies created and used by the LIFE team were creative and found them useful to get people engaged.

## Latest news about land issue in Laos

### 2017 Round Table Implementation Meeting

The [Round Table Implementation Meeting \(RTM\) 2017](#) was held in November 22-23 under the theme “Greater Partnership for Implementation of the 8th NSEDP (National Social Economic Development Plan): Realizing Least Developed Country (LDC ) Graduation and Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”. Four key areas were discussed: Graduation from LDC status and integration of the SDGs; Realizing quality private sector investment for sustainable development; Investment in skills and labor force for human development; and Enhancing south-south cooperation and triangular cooperation.

Regarding to land management mentioned in the [final report of RTM 2017](#), the government was commended for the progress on Land law revision which heralds an enhancement for land management, tenure, security and compensation. This helps underline the centrality of land as an asset, in particular for the poor.

### Land management deficiencies addressed as ministry meets

The fact a national master plan on land allocation has not yet been officially approved and the general lack of regulations have caused complications in land management and losses to state revenues.

The second nationwide meeting on land identified factors as well as the ways to mitigate issues in land management over the past decade. At the meeting the report identified 10 main factors leading to poor land management.

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Mr. Sommad Pholsena presided over the meeting which opened from 20-22 December, 2017. [Learn more here](#).

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith has stressed that the government's policy on [land use should add value to land and benefit everyone](#) in the country. He discussed the policy with officials from various sectors and local authorities during the national meeting held from 20-22 December, 2017.

### 100 families are affected by Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Khongphapheng, Champasak province

Currently, a feasibility study on developing the Khongphapheng Special Economic Zone (SEZ) has completed after [Lao government gave the green light for a Chinese company to conduct a feasibility study on developing this SEZ](#) in southern Laos' Champasak province, southern of Laos. This SEZ is known as “Mahanati Siphandone SEZ”.

This SEZ will be developed in 2018 and will cover 9,800 ha with total investment amounting to \$ 9 billion. The project is expected to be completed in the year of 2050. Estimations show that at least 100 families will be affected by this development project.

Read more [here](#) and see the video of the master plan of this SEZ (scroll down from the top to see video) [here](#).



Twin building planned to build in 4000 islands

## Lao Government gave green light to Vietnamese company for rubber plantation in Saravan province

The ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) organized a ceremony to celebrate a concession for rubber plantation that has been agreed upon between Lao government and Cao Su Cuang Tri Company and which authorizes setup of a processing factory in Samouay district, Saravan province. .

In December 20, 2011, the company signed a MOU with the Lao government to undertake a feasibility study for exploration of a total surface of 947 ha but finding of the study concluded that the available area for rubber plantation was 500 ha.

This is the first concession that the Lao government has granted to foreign investors for rubber plantation after [it suspended rubber concessions back in June 2012](#). At the same time, Lao scholars see that the rubber plantation concession policy in Laos is in the uncertain situation.

Learn more about this [here](#).



Rubber plantation in Ban Yeup , Sekong province

## LIWG Communication strategy

### Communication Channels

#### Google Group:

As part of information sharing regarding to land matters in Laos among members, LIWG secretariat regularly share news and information both in English and Lao to ensure that members are well informed for the situation of land issue in Laos. This is also a platform for members to exchange and sharing information to one another.

#### Website:

This is another information channel for LIWG members. The LIWG secretariat regularly shares news and uploads documents/publications related to land and natural resources to the website. The number of visitor to our website is increasing. In December, 2017 we had 10872 visitors. Visit our website for news and updates: [www.laolandinfo.org](http://www.laolandinfo.org)

#### Facebook:

LIWG Facebook page is used for sharing news, events and information related to land issues and relevant LIWG's activities in a dynamic manner. The number of followers and page like continue increasing. Until now, there are 4,478 people liking and 4,490 people following our page.

Follow us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/laolandinfo/>

## LIWG next quarterly topics (January – March 2018)

- ◆ LIWG Annual General Meeting
- ◆ Interactive learning and sharing session amongst Lao staff from Lao CSOs and INGOs that work on Land, Forest, Natural resources and Environment
- ◆ Calendar Launching event at provincial level
- ◆ Land Information Learning Center (LI LC) events

### Announcement

Congratulations to the LIWG International Coordinator, Ms. Violaine Fourile for the birth of her daughter, Amandine, on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2017. During her maternity leave, LIWG secretariat welcomed a replacement, Ms. Jeanne Battello to work as LIWG Volunteer of International Coordinator from November, 2017 – March, 2018.

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Fb: Land Information Working Group

