



## **Climate Adaptive River Basin in Sayaboury Province (CARBS)**

**Environmental and Social Management Framework &  
Process Framework & Indigenous Peoples Planning  
Framework**

**Final Draft**

**June 2025**

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## **List of Acronyms**

CARBS	Climate Adaptive River Basins
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DWR	Department of Water Resources
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
ESMP	Environmental and Social Management Plan
ESSF	Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework
FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
DAFO	Department of Agriculture and Forestry
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
IPP	Indigenous Peoples Plan
IPPF	Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework
LRP	Livelihood Restoration Plan
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
PAP	Project Affected People
PF	Process Framework
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
SIPP	Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In April 2024, the WWF-Laos submitted a Project Identification Form (PIF) for funding consideration under the Least Developed Country Fund (LDCF) of Global Environmental Facility (GEF) 8 in consultation with the Department of Water Resources of the Lao Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. The GEF Council endorsed the PIF in June 2024 and WWF is now invited to develop a full CEO Endorsement Request to be submitted to the GEF Council by 15 June 2025. Entitled 'Enhancing Integrated Watershed Management and Climate Resilience for Vulnerable Communities in the Nam-Poui, Nam-Poun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng Basins in Lao PDR. This project is for a total amount of USD 6,772,477.

The project aims to address climate change impacts in six highly vulnerable districts spread across the Nam-Poui, Nam-Poun, Nam-Lay, and Nam-Houng basins in Sayaboury province, Lao PDR. These areas are prone to floods and drought, affecting subsistence agriculture communities, experiencing increasing risks of climate change. The project focuses on enhancing adaptation capacity to mitigate crop losses and reduce yields caused by climate variability and water scarcity. Key strategies include:

1. Mainstreaming Climate Adaptation: Integrating climate change adaptation into provincial water resource management and river basin management plans.
2. Community-Driven Implementation: Co-designing and implementing water resource and river basin management plans with community involvement to address climate impacts.
3. Building Resilience: Promoting climate-smart agriculture and diversifying livelihoods, especially for women heavily dependent on agriculture.
4. Knowledge Management: Disseminating lessons and experiences from the project to foster adaptive learning.

The project targets 25,000 direct beneficiaries, including 5,000 trained individuals of 18 villages in six districts (Thongmixay, Paklay, Phiang, Xaysathan, Xayabury, and Hongsai) of the province, and aims to manage 15,000 hectares of land and 1,000 hectares of river basin for climate resilience. It also seeks to integrate climate resilience into at least 13 policies and plans. The project will be executed by the Department of Water Resources, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) of Lao PDR and WWF-Laos as Executing Agencies and WWF-US as Implementing Agency (WWF GEF Agency).

The project is indicated category B under WWW Environmental and Social Safeguards Screening. The project is not limited to low risks activities such as policy reform, natural resource assessments and monitoring, monitoring and evaluation exercises, desk studies, workshops, meetings, scientific research and field surveys, research and extension in

agriculture, forestry, fisheries and natural resource management, remote sensing and geospatial analysis, capacity development, communication and outreach programs, including training and technical assistance, and/or investment readiness support. The project does include activities with communities in areas with Indigenous Peoples (IP) and vulnerable ethnic groups, grey infrastructure, and possibly activities to protect parts of the watershed which could affect access to certain areas. For these reasons, the project is determined as category B risk.

In line with WWF's SIPP (2019:40) and GEF safeguard requirements, an Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) will be prepared to address risks and impacts identified during Environmental and Social Screening. This ensures alignment with key standards, including biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and stakeholder engagement.

### 1.1. Objective of the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)

The preparation of this ESMF was required in accordance with the WWF's Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF), through guidance and procedures described in WWF's Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP), in order to identify and manage the environmental and social risks and impacts of the activities of the project "**Enhancing Integrated Watershed Management and Climate Resilience for Vulnerable Communities in the Nam-Poui, Nam-Poun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng Basins in Lao PDR**". The ESMF aims to outline the principles, procedures, and mitigation measures for addressing environmental and social impacts associated with the project in accordance with the laws and regulations of Lao PDR and with the ESSF.

Since the precise scope of activities that will be implemented as part of the project will only be determined during the implementation phase, site-specific social and environmental impacts are uncertain at this stage. Thus, the development of site-specific Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs), if necessary, will be developed prior to implementation of subprojects, and this ESMF sets out procedures for addressing potential adverse social and environmental impacts that may occur during project activities.

The specific objectives of the ESMF include the following:

- Carry out a preliminary identification of the positive and negative social and environmental impacts and risks associated with the implementation of the Project, including any Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) risks;
- Outline the legal and regulatory frameworks that are relevant and applicable to the Project implementation;

- Specify appropriate roles and responsibilities of actors and parties involved in the ESMF implementation;
- Propose a set of preliminary recommendations and measures to mitigate any negative impacts and enhance positive impacts;
- Develop a screening and assessment methodology for potential activities, that will allow an environmental/social risk classification and the identification of appropriate safeguards instruments;
- Set out procedures to establish mechanisms to monitor the implementation and efficacy of the proposed mitigation measures; and
- Outline requirements related to disclosure, grievance redress, capacity building activities, and budget required for the implementation of the ESMF.

## 1.2. Objective of the Process Framework (PF)

The Project triggers WWF's Standard on Access Restriction and Resettlement as it may restrict or otherwise affect access to natural resources and the livelihood activities of project affected people (PAP). This Process Framework (PF) describes the process by which affected communities participate in identification, design, implementation and monitoring of relevant project activities and mitigation measures. The purpose of this PF is to ensure participation of Project Affected People (PAP) while recognizing and protecting their rights and interests and ensuring that they do not become worse off as a result of the project. Specifically, the PF will:

- Describe activities that may involve new or more stringent restrictions on the use of natural resources in the project area.
- Establish the mechanism through which the Indigenous Peoples and local communities can contribute to the project design, implementation and monitoring.
- Identify the potential negative impacts of the restriction on the surrounding communities, including any gendered differences or SEAH risks associated with access restriction or differing uses of natural resources.
- Specify the criteria for the eligibility of economically displaced persons to receive compensation benefits and development assistance (no physical displacement will be allowed under this project or any WWF project).
- Describe the mitigation measures required to assist the economically displaced people in their efforts to improve their livelihoods, or at least to restore them, in real terms, while maintaining the sustainability of the landscape type, will be identified.

- Describe the grievance procedure or process for resolving disputes to natural resource use restrictions.
- Describe the participatory monitoring arrangements with neighboring community members.

As the project intends to enhance the livelihoods and resilience of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, the allocation of project benefits among local community members is particularly important. The intent of the framework is to ensure transparency and equity in the planning and implementation of activities by the project. This framework details the principles and processes for assisting communities to identify and manage any potential negative impacts of the project activities. Since the exact social impacts will only be identified during project implementation, the PF will ensure that mitigation of any negative impacts from project activities occurs through a participatory process involving the (potentially) affected stakeholders and rights holders. It will also ensure that any desired changes in the ways in which the indigenous communities exercise customary tenure rights in the project sites would not be imposed but should emerge from FPIC.

### 1.3. Objective of the Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF)

The target project areas and villages include indigenous groups. Based on WWF's Standard on IPs, the people affected by this project would thus be considered Indigenous, ethnic or tribal minorities. An Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework thus has to be prepared.

WWF recognizes Indigenous Peoples as communities with distinct cultural identities, historical ties to their ancestral lands, and unique governance systems. They emphasize principles like self-identification, territorial ties, and cultural distinctiveness. WWF adopts the statement of coverage contained in the International Labor Organization Convention 169 (ILO), which includes both indigenous and tribal peoples. Characteristics of indigenous and tribal peoples include social, cultural and economic ways of life different from other segments of the national population, traditional forms of social organization, political institutions, customs and laws and long-term historical continuity of residence in a certain area.

The WWF's Policy on Indigenous Peoples is triggered given that proposed project activities will involve Indigenous Peoples. Rather than IP, these groups are legally recognized as ethnic minorities in Laos. Therefore, an Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework thus has to be prepared. Ethnic people (Prai, Khmu, and Hmong) have been living in the basins for generations and their cultural and traditional values have evolved in response to their dependence on and use of natural resources from forests, grasslands, rivers, and wetlands. Among them, in target villages in Hongsa, Saysathan, and Sayaboury districts, the Prai

communities are the ethnic majority group living in and around the PA's buffer zones and corridors selected under the project.

An IPPF is developed to outline the principles, processes, and organizational structures for engaging with indigenous peoples (IPs) within the scope of the proposed project. The primary goal of the IPPF is to protect the rights of IPs, ensuring their participation and access to culturally appropriate benefits from the project. Specifically, the framework establishes policies and procedures for assessing project impacts on IPs and preparing an Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP). This plan serves as a detailed document to safeguard IP rights and ensure adherence to WWF's Indigenous Peoples Policy before implementing any project activities that may affect them.

The objective of the IPs Planning Framework (IPPF) is to clarify the principles, procedures and organizational arrangements to be applied to IPs for the Enhancing Integrated Watershed Management and Climate Resilience for Vulnerable Communities in the Nam-Poui, NamPoun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng Basins in Lao PDR. This framework will serve as a guidance to the project team to:

- (xi) Enable them to prepare an IPPs for specific activities proposed consistent with WWF's Environment and Social Safeguard Integrated Policies and Procedures.
- (xii) Engage affected IPs in a Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process.
- (xiii) Enable IPs to benefit equitably from the project.

#### 1.4. ESMF/PF/IPPF Preparation Methodology

The ESMF/PF/IPPF serves as a guiding document for identifying, assessing, and managing environmental and social risks and impacts of project activities and was prepared based on the following information:

- a. Understand the Project Context:** Project objectives and proposed activities were reviewed to understand the goals, components, and proposed activities of the project. Potential environmental and social risks associated with project activities were evaluated and identified, particularly those related to biodiversity, access to natural resources, climate change, pollution, and social inclusion. Various Environmental and Social Safeguards Policy of WWF, GEF and national legal frameworks were reviewed and determined its applicability to the project.
- b. Conduct a Scoping Study:** Assess and identify the environmental and social baseline of the project area (e.g., ecosystems, communities, climate change risks, livelihoods, cultural heritage, ethnic minority groups). Then key stakeholders (e.g., Indigenous Peoples and local

communities, government agencies, ethnic minority people) were identified and assessed for their interests and potential concerns. Various relevant national and local laws, WWF's and GEF's policies, and international agreements applicable to the project were reviewed. The scoping study was partly drawn on the information of the initial field visit of the WWF team.

**c. Site visit and Consultations with Indigenous Peoples and local communities and Indigenous Peoples:** After identifying potential sites and target communities with potential risks of climate change and anticipated social and environmental risks and impacts from proposed project activities, site visits and consultations were conducted with local authorities in six districts and target communities in March 2025. The consultations engaged Indigenous Peoples and local communities (including ethnic minority groups) and local government offices: Natural Resources and Environment, Agriculture and Forestry, Lao Women's Union and Lao Front for National Construction at provincial and district levels. These consultations aimed to gather baseline data on the social and cultural contexts and climate change-related risks in the project area to assess the potential impacts of project activities while also validating existing project information. A total of 14 separate male and female focus group discussions (FGDs) with villagers were conducted during the site visit and the inputs and feedback from consultation participants were incorporated into both the project documents and this ESMF.

**d. Assess Environmental and Social Impacts:** Classify project activities based on their risk levels (e.g., high, moderate, low). Then specific environmental and social risks and impacts (e.g., deforestation, habitat loss, displacement, cultural impacts) were identified and evaluated. Measures and strategies were developed to mitigate such potential impacts.

**e. Develop Management Plans:** ESMF and IPPF were prepared to identify measures to mitigate negative environmental impacts and enhance positive outcomes, drawing on review of international safeguards standards, especially ESSF and SIPP, and national policies, consultations with stakeholders, and site visits. The relevant laws and regulations of Lao PDR related to safeguards apply to the project since it is implemented within the jurisdiction of Lao PDR. WWF's SIPP applies since the project is managed by WWF, which is an implementing agency of GEF. To avoid duplications and for ease of reference, the ESMF, PF, and IPPF are combined into a single document.

## 2. Project Description

This chapter outlines the objectives of the Climate Adaptive River Basins in Sayaboury province (CARBS), its components, milestones, and key activities.

## 2.1 Project Objectives and Components

The project aims to enhance climate adaptation and the resilience of upstream and downstream communities in Sayaboury province, through integrated water resource management (IWRM), nature-based solutions (NbS), traditional grey infrastructure, and local livelihood diversification in the Nam-Poui, Nam-Poun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng Basins of Lao PDR.

The project will take a systems-based approach, accounting for the key transformational levels of governance (policies and plans), innovation and learning and multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration (people) to co-design appropriate solutions grounded in community needs at the local level. When underpinned by a strong foundation of knowledge and learning, an approach built on these pillars will facilitate the appropriate enabling environment created for lasting and scalable impact. This approach will help ensure that the range of climate adaptation risks and water resources are managed in an integrated manner, considering the spatial interlinkages and dependencies between land use, ecosystem health and underlying causes of vulnerability to climate change. Incentivizing community restoration of important upstream ecosystems will improve the provision of ecosystem goods and services and reduce the risk of droughts, floods and their impacts on local downstream communities, thereby increasing their resilience to the impacts of climate change. This requires a needs-driven approach and working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to co-design adaptation solutions for maintaining resilient livelihoods, with co-benefits of addressing the drivers of degradation and incentivizing sustainable practices.

The CARBS will take a bottom-up and community-oriented approach to address the impacts of flooding, droughts and seasonal variations in the four key watersheds of Sayaboury by mainstreaming climate change adaptation in IWRM planning and interventions and identifying and implementing strategies with communities to buffer livelihoods from climate change impacts. The project's Theory of Change (ToC) and transformation logic is grounded on the premise that: **if** the project can create a forum for surfacing community needs and leverage it to mainstream climate change adaptation and climate-informed disaster risk reduction into local river basin management plans and policies, together with building the requisite institutional and professional capacity (**Outcome 1.1**) uniformly across all six districts in Sayaboury province, and; **if** community-identified and implemented upstream and downstream IWRM and RBMP actions are informed by further climate crowd consultations and widely tested and collectively acknowledged (**Outcome 2.1**) at the watershed level, and; **if** the project can set up the conditions for the uptake of diversified climate-proof and genderinformed livelihood opportunities and locally-appropriate climate information (**Outcome 3.1**), and; **if** knowledge and lessons in IWRM and RBMP, along with decision support tools and climate information are democratized and disseminated widely through genderresponsive communications, visibility and outreach products (**Outcome 4.1**); **then** the project will be able to overcome the barriers preventing local climate adaptation and

resilience, and the threats to agricultural livelihoods and those particularly faced by local and highly vulnerable ethnic populations will be reduced to enable sustainable economic benefits and the lasting well-being of communities in the project area.

The project will build climate adaptation and climate resilience capabilities of vulnerable communities in the “at risk” and nationally prioritized watersheds of the Nam-Poui, NamPoun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng Basin in Sayaboury, while contributing to national efforts (and priorities) of the vision of the National Water Resources Policy, to restore watershed ecosystems and their services in the Sayaboury province. The project will particularly target marginalized and rural agriculture-dependent communities who rely on natural resources (including water, land and forests) for their livelihoods, while also being highly exposed to flood, drought and landslides with limited capacity to adapt to these climate events without external support. The project will support sustainable livelihoods that indirectly incentivize restoration and conservation efforts, while contributing to the country’s National Green Growth Strategy. On-the-ground efforts and testing of appropriate community-identified protective solutions, as well as locally tailored national IWRM actions will provide critical evidence, which can then be scaled across Lao PDR and beyond using the transformative enablers created through the mainstreaming, governance, capacity and knowledge pillars of the project.

Based on the climate rationale outlined in the sections above, the project will specifically target six districts (Thongmixay, Paklay, Phiang, Saysathan, Sayaboury, and Hongsa districts) in Sayaboury province that are most susceptible and vulnerable to climate change. The project’s long-term goal is to support the adaptation targets outlined by the government of Lao PDR in its most recent NDC to promote (i) climate resilience in farming systems and agriculture infrastructure; and ii) appropriate technologies for climate change adaptation, including nature-based and circular economy solutions. Water adaptation targets include i) managing surface water and groundwater for climate change resilience; ii) increasing water resource infrastructure resilience to climate change, including through nature-based solutions; and iii) strengthening early warning systems.

There are two main preconditions to the GEF Alternative:

- The local branches of government of Lao PDR are able to break silos and create the enabling conditions for a truly integrated and sectoral approach through enhanced policies and comprehensive framework allowing for collaboration and cross-sectoral dialogue, a forum for community voice in planning and information sharing to thrive between key actors on climate adaptation and disaster risk management;

- More sustainable and locally appropriate IWRM strategies and RBMP actions are tested and developed in tandem with community-level ownership, with an appreciation and respect for traditional knowledge and gender responsiveness, for vulnerable watersheds and agricultural practices and livelihoods.

This integrated approach aims to reduce the risk of climate change impacts over time by addressing the exposure, and sensitivity of agricultural livelihoods in vulnerable districts and increasing the adaptive capacity of communities. Each output addresses one or more barriers to the further promotion of climate change adaptation. Ultimate achievement of the project's objective is influenced by a number of assumptions regarding the willingness and capacity of government at different levels to engage in integrated planning exercises addressing flood and other climate-risks as part of a landscape or watershed level approach, the capacity of key sector and value chain actors to invest in climate-smart agricultural practices and nature-based solutions and the continuing access to climate information services and decision support tools.

***Component 1: Mainstreaming climate change adaptation (CCA) into planning and policy: integrating CCA into provincial WRM and river basin management plans***

This component will create an enabling environment for a scenario-based framework on sustainable climate change adaptation and resilience in northwestern Lao PDR through (i) climate risk-informed, integrated planning and mapping, with a particular emphasis on flood, drought and seasonal variation risks; (ii) strengthened policies, institutional coordination and cross-sectoral problem-solving, capacities for improved land use planning and adoption of IWRM and nature-based solutions in managing fragile upstream and downstream landscapes; and (iii) enhanced tools and knowledge sharing for policy support and to facilitate actions at scale.

Outcome 1.1 Policy, planning and technical capacities for CCA improved in 6 districts, 4 river basins and 1 province

Outputs:

- 1.1.1. Analysis of CCA integration in Water Resource Management in 4 river basins
- 1.1.2. Surface and Ground Water Resource inventory in 4 river basins
- 1.1.3. Training, workshops and consultations to integrate CCA, NbS and small-scale grey infrastructure into river basin plans and provincial adaptation plans
- 1.1.4. District level IWRM/river basin policies and plans developed

***Component 2: Community-driven interventions to improve climate resilience: NbS and small-scale grey infrastructure interventions on the ground***

Component 2 will build capacity for and demonstrate gender-informed community identified and delivered upstream and downstream IWRM interventions to reduce the impact of floods, drought and reduced water access on small scale and subsistence agriculture in the NamPoui, Nam-Poun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng watersheds to reduce flood and drought impacts to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Depending on the prioritization process, indicatively this might include interventions such as restoration of riparian zones, protection/management of natural wetlands, reforesting upper watersheds, rainwater harvesting and farm ponds, as well as other Nature-based Solutions (NbS), to allow for improved watershed function reduced erosion and siltation, flood water retention, aquifer recharge and shallow water storage.

Outcome 2.1. Water security improved in 18 communities through gender-responsive and locally informed WRM interventions

Outputs:

- 2.1.1 Local government and community-identified water-related NbS interventions implemented
- 2.1.2. Small-scale grey infrastructure interventions for climate resilience implemented

***Component 3: Enhancing Resilience: Promoting climate-smart agriculture and diversifying livelihoods***

This component will focus on testing out climate adaptive and gender-responsive community-based natural resource management, agriculture and livestock practices and livelihood diversification across the target project area where agriculture dependent communities are at risk - to be confirmed through Output 1.1.1. The project will also work to enhance local capacities for the production, dissemination and use of decision support tools, climate information, forecasts and early warnings.

Outcome 3.1 Resilience to climate change strengthened in 18 communities through climate-adapted agriculture, livelihood diversification, and CBNRM

Outputs:

- 3.1.1 Assessment of gender responsive climate-adapted agriculture, livestock, and other livelihood practices

3.1.2 Equipment, materials, and trainings for communities for livelihood enhancement and diversification

3.1.3 Climate information and early warning systems developed in target communities

***Component 4: Knowledge management and communications: Disseminating lessons and practices and experiences from the project to foster adaptive learning***

Under this component, the project will document, curate and catalogue the information and experiences generated throughout its implementation to ensure that lessons learned are used to inform future adaptation planning and implementation efforts in other districts of Sayaboury not included in the target area, within other basins in the province, and across other provinces with similar conditions, threats and barriers.

Outcome 4.1 Increased dissemination of knowledge, including lessons learned and good practices on integrating CCA in WRM                      Output:

4.1.1. Gender responsive knowledge management, communications, visibility and outreach products delivered to key audiences through appropriate and effective channels

M&e: Project implemented according to results-based management principles

ME1 Project M&E operational and capacity to collect and curate lessons learned from project activities.

ME3 Monitoring Reports submitted on time to the GEF Agency and GEFSEC

ME4 Project implementation coordinated and measured through a proactive steering committee and governance, inclusive monitoring and evaluation, and an operational environmental and social management mechanism.

ME5 Monitoring of Gender Action Plan and Environmental and Social Safeguards Plan(s)

## 2.2. Project Area Profile

The project area consists of four river basins: Nam-Poui, Nam-Poun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng located in Sayaboury Province of Lao PDR, covering lowland and mountainous topographical landscape. Production and protection forests are a dominant area of the basins (see Figure 1). Particularly, the Nam Phoui National Protected Area (NPA) covers some parts of Nam Phoui and Nam Lay basins and majority of the Nam Phoun basin. The province is

characterized by mountainous terrain and significant elevation variations<sup>1</sup>. It is part of the Luang Prabang Range montane rainforest ecoregion straddling northwestern Lao PDR and Northern Thailand, of which over 50% of the ecoregion's natural forests remain unprotected<sup>2,3</sup>. This geography and mountainous topography play a crucial role in the province's climatic conditions. The climate of Sayaboury province is predominantly tropical, influenced by the monsoon season and prone to severe mountain rain shadow effects. The region experiences a clear division between the rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season, lasting from May to October, but with a trend towards later onset in more recent years, brings substantial precipitation, crucial for the agricultural practices in the area. The dry season, from November to April, is marked by lower precipitation with lower temperatures during November- February and higher temperatures in March-April. The average temperatures in Sayaboury varies, with the cooler months seeing average lows around 14.8°C and the warmer months reaching average highs of up to 33.9°C, with temperatures on the hottest days of the year sometimes exceeding 40°C. Situated along the Mekong River and its tributaries, the lowland areas of Sayaboury are inherently susceptible to flooding.

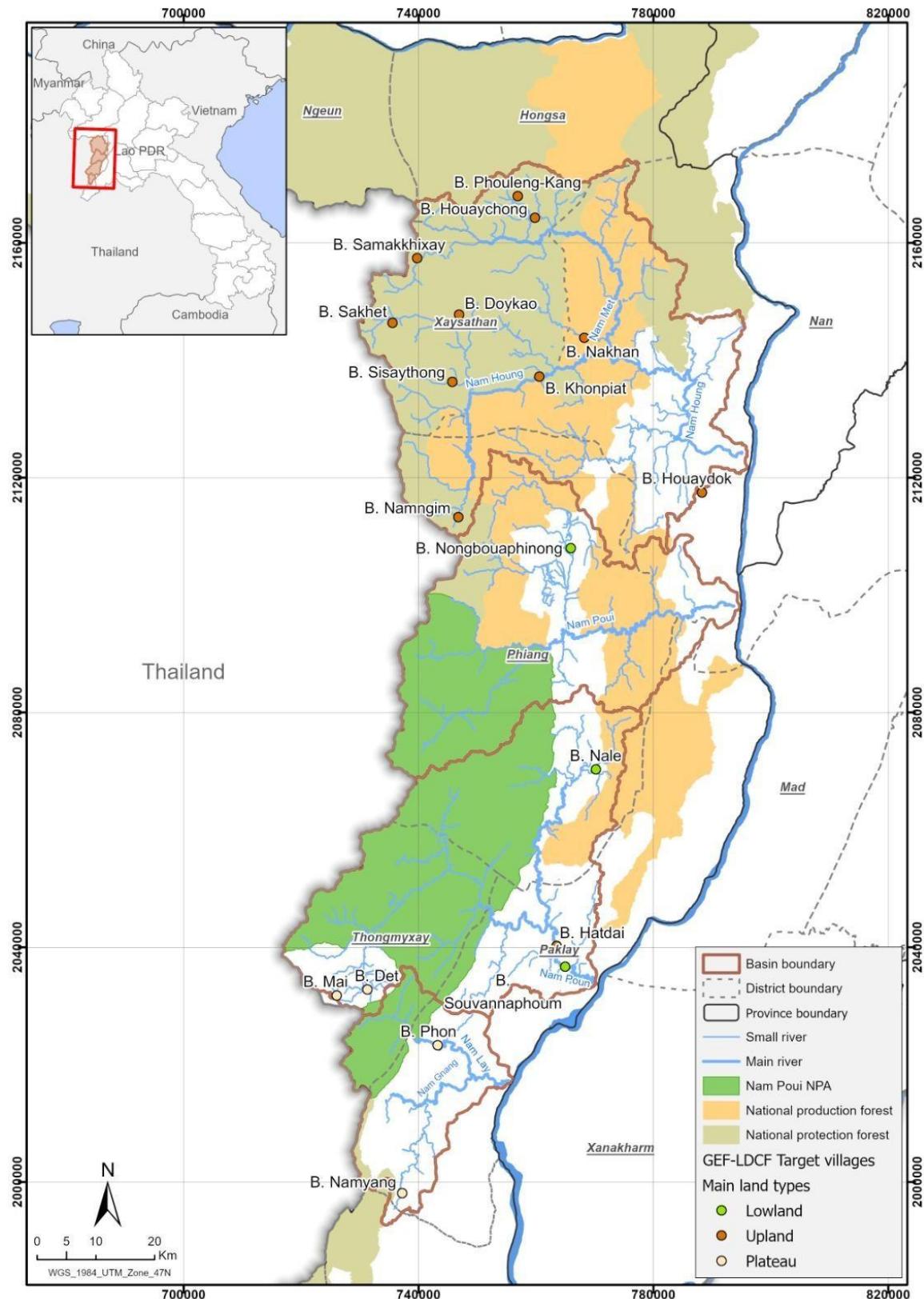
Besides, the project is located in a climate vulnerable, naturally flood-prone and mountainous area. It was selected due to its high vulnerability to climate change impacts. The impacts are largely attributed to highly rural and agriculture-dependent population and economy, including multiple numerous marginalized upland ethnic groups, many of whom are dependent on subsistence and shifting agriculture; higher than national average poverty levels; susceptibility to and high risk of floods in the lower-lying areas of the basins, as well as both droughts and climate-induced disruption to annual seasonal variation; and limited resources and infrastructure to adapt to and recover from climate risks.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Richard Laffort et Marc Dufumier, “From Slash-and-burn to Disk Ploughing: The Land Policy and Tractors Behind Erosion and Forest Pioneer Farming in Southern Sayaboury Province (Laos)”, *Moussons*, 910 | 2006, 109-130.

<sup>2</sup> Greater Mekong Subregion Atlas of the Environment. 2nd ed. Asian Development Bank. 2012. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/30074/gms-atlas-environment-2nd-edition.pdf>.

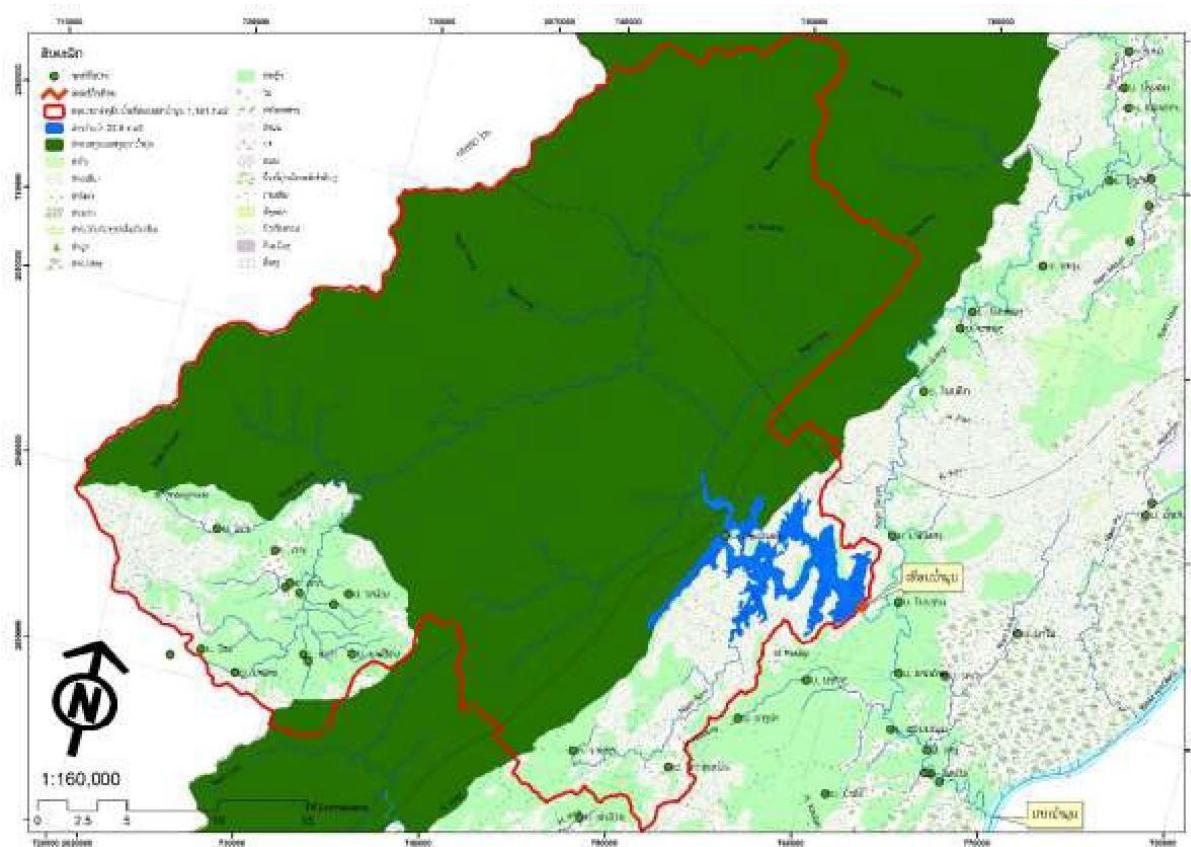
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oneearth.org/ecoregions/luang-prabang-montane-rainforests/>



**Figure 1: Map of project location**

***The Nam Phoun River Basin***

The Nam Phoun River Basin has an area of 1,969.69 sq km, covering 785.65 sq km of Phiang District, 459.64 sq km of Pak Lay District and 724.40 sq km of Thongmixay District. There are several streams, including Nam Hoy, Nam Yam, and other small river tributaries in the basin. Most of the basin area is located within the Nam Phoui NPA (see Figure 2). It was estimated that 1,722 hectares of the NPA area within this basin will be cleared/affected by the Nam Phoun hydropower project to be developed within the basin if the project moves forward. The NPA within the basin is a rich biodiversity area and a habitat for wild animals, including 50 mammals and 70 bird species. However, there are increasing challenges and threats on the forest resources due to high demand of land for agricultural activities, especially cassava plantation and uncoordinated land use between local agencies.



**Figure 2: Map of Nam Phoun River Basin**

***Nam Houng Basin***

The basin has a total area of 2,909.93 sq km, covering 880.58 sq km of Saisathan District and 225.62 sq km of Hongsa District and 1,372 sq km of Sayaboury District and 431.48 sq km of

Phiang District. Main tributaries of Nam Houng include Nam Tian, Nam Khan, Nam Met, Houay Chuang, and Houay Sa. The basin is largely mountainous topography. The PONRE of Sayaboury indicated a vast majority of the basin as forest land (see Figure 3) in its Nam Houng River Basin Management Plan. However, the large proportion of forest land in the basin was degraded and converted to upland agriculture for rice, cassava and job's tear.



Figure 3: Map of Nam Houng River Basin

#### *Nam Phoui River Basin*

Nam Phoui River Basin covers an area of 1,690.80 sq km, distributed in three districts: Phiang, Pak Lay and Sayaboury. Main tributaries of Nam Phoui are Nam Phoi, Nam Pone, Nam Moun and Nam Phiang. About 25% of the basin is located in the Nam Phoui NPA while national protection and production forest land represents more than 50% and agricultural land for another 25% (see Figure 4). It is widely seen on the ground during field visits that a large proportion of the indicated national production and protection forest areas have been degraded due to expansion of agricultural activities, especially for cassava plantation.

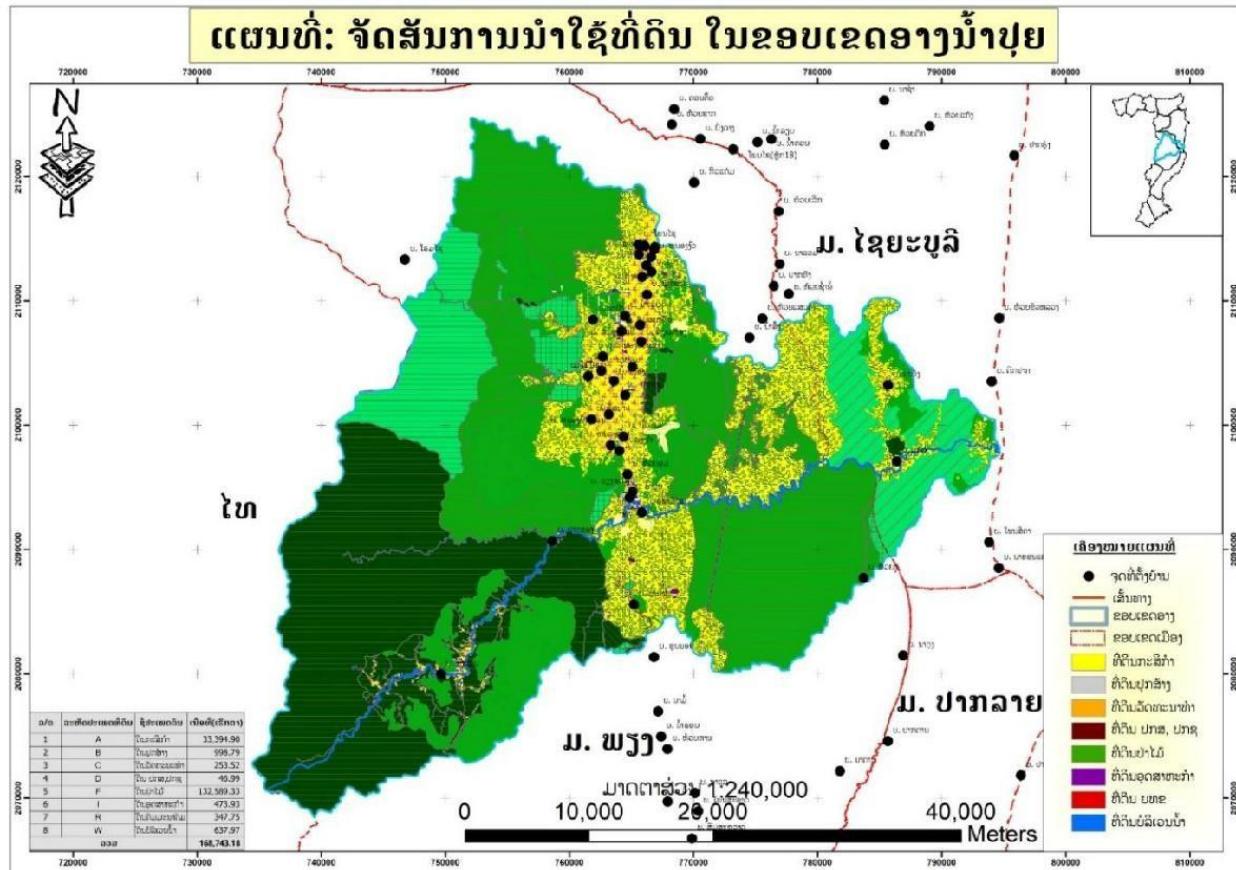


Figure 4: Map of Nam Phoui River Basin

### 2.3. Demographic and economic information

The province has an area of 1,553,800 ha divided into 11 districts, and a total population of 381,376 people. There are diverse ethnic groups in Sayaboury. Lao Loum are the dominant ethnic group and typically reside in the lowland areas and are primarily engaged in agriculture, including rice farming. The Prai and Khmu population represent the Mon-Khmer in the province and are a significant ethnic group in Sayaboury and live in upland areas, and many practice subsistence farming and rely on forest resources for their livelihoods. There are also Hmong group of Hmong-Mien group and Yao and Aka of Chine-Tibet group that live in higher upland areas, largely practicing upland shifting cultivation and subsistence livelihoods. The reliance on agriculture and natural resources, and the small scale, subsistence or shifting agriculture practices in Sayaboury intersects with climate vulnerability in the area. Women in Laos, in particular those in rural and remote communities, are largely representative in the informal and unpaid agriculture workforce and primarily responsible for the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

The economy of Sayaboury is primarily based on agriculture, with rice farming being the dominant activity. Other agricultural products include maize, cassava, job's tear and other vegetables, and livestock farming. In 2024, Per capita GDP for the 426,439 people of Sayaboury<sup>4</sup>. From 2012 – 2019 Sayaboury experienced annual average growth of 6.3% but in 2019-2021 this slowed to 2.8% and 3.6% respectively, mainly as a consequence of COVID19, after which growth started to climb again to 4.3% in 2022 and 5.1% in 2023. In 2024, the growth was 5.4% and GDP per capita was 2.615 USD, according to the provincial statistics data<sup>5</sup>. The growth was primarily contributed by the agriculture sector – 55%, industry – 24%, services – 20.5% and tax – 0.5%. The agriculture sector has grown significantly from 41.8% of the economy in 2012 to 56.1% in 2023 and 55% in 2024, while the industrial sector has also grown somewhat from 19.3% in 2012 to 22.1% in 2023 and 24% in 2024. On the other hand, the services sector has declined significantly from 38.1% of the economy to only 21.2% and 20.5% in 2024 in the same period. It is not clear what exactly accounts for this big reduction in the services sector, but overall, the economy of Sayaboury still faces challenges such as limited investment, infrastructure development and access to markets, which affect its overall growth potential and risk profile.

Within the agriculture sector, crops and livestock are by far the biggest components, with crops increasing from 25.3 to 36.8% of the total economy of Sayaboury between 2012 and 2023, and livestock increasing from 13.6% to 16.6% in the same period. The biggest proportion of the increase in crop production in Sayaboury comes from cassava growing. Cassava has become one of the most profitable crops in the Mekong region, which has been experiencing a cassava boom, triggered by an increasing demand from export markets, mainly from China and Thailand. Cassava has many advantages for farmers compared to other crops: it requires minimal labor and financial investment, it promises quick/high income, it has easy market access, often with buyers stationed in the village. Cassava has been expanding through many upland areas and has led to encroachment in protected areas. A recent study conducted by WWF and CARE International in Xayaboury province found that 85% of primarily female respondents indicated reduction in cultivable land and reduced water accessibility due to cassava farming, a shift from traditional agriculture towards commercial farming, and climate shocks in their communities. Information from the World Resources Institute (WRI) shows primary forest loss continuing from 2015 to 2019 at an average of around 60,000 hectares/year. After 2019 the rates continued to increase.

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<sup>4</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau (2024) *Results of new standards for GDP Calculation (2012) and Changes in GDP of Sayabouri province from 2012 to 2023*. Sayabouri Province

<sup>5</sup> The Department of Planning and Investment of Sayaboury Province (2024)

The four basins in Sayaboury were selected due to its high vulnerability to climate change impacts. The impacts are largely attributed to highly rural and agriculture-dependent population and economy, including multiple marginalized upland ethnic groups, many of whom are dependent on subsistence and shifting agriculture; higher than national average poverty levels; susceptibility to and high risk of floods in the lower-lying areas of the basins, as well as both droughts and climate-induced disruption to annual seasonal variation; and limited resources and infrastructure to adapt to and recover from climate risks.

## 2.4. IPs and Vulnerable Groups

### **(a) Overview of Indigenous Peoples Situation**

Ethnic groups often face social and economic disadvantages, making them particularly vulnerable to development projects. Many live in remote, hard-to-reach areas with limited access to essential government services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

Lao PDR, with a population of approximately 7.5 million, is the most ethnically diverse country in mainland Southeast Asia. The ethnic Lao comprise 62% of the population and are the dominant cultural and economic group. However, in several provinces and districts, ethnic minorities form the majority, and their artistic practices are prominent.

The Lao government officially recognizes 49 ethnic groups, categorized into four ethnolinguistic families: Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Mien, and Sino-Tibetan. The Lao-Tai family includes Lao, Lue, Phoutay, and other lowland groups, accounting for 62% of the population. Mon-Khmer groups such as Khmu, Khuan, and Samtao represent 24%, while Hmong-Mien groups like the Hmong and Yao make up 10%. Sino-Tibetan groups constitute the remaining 3%. Overall, ethnic minorities comprise around 37% of Lao PDR's population.

**Table 1: The population of Major Ethno-Linguistic Groups**

<b>Ethno-Linguistic Groups</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lao-Tai	4,050,384	62.4
Mon-Khmer	1,538,367	23.7
Hmong-Mien	629,627	9.7
Sino-Tibetan	188,239	2.9
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>6,492,000</b>	

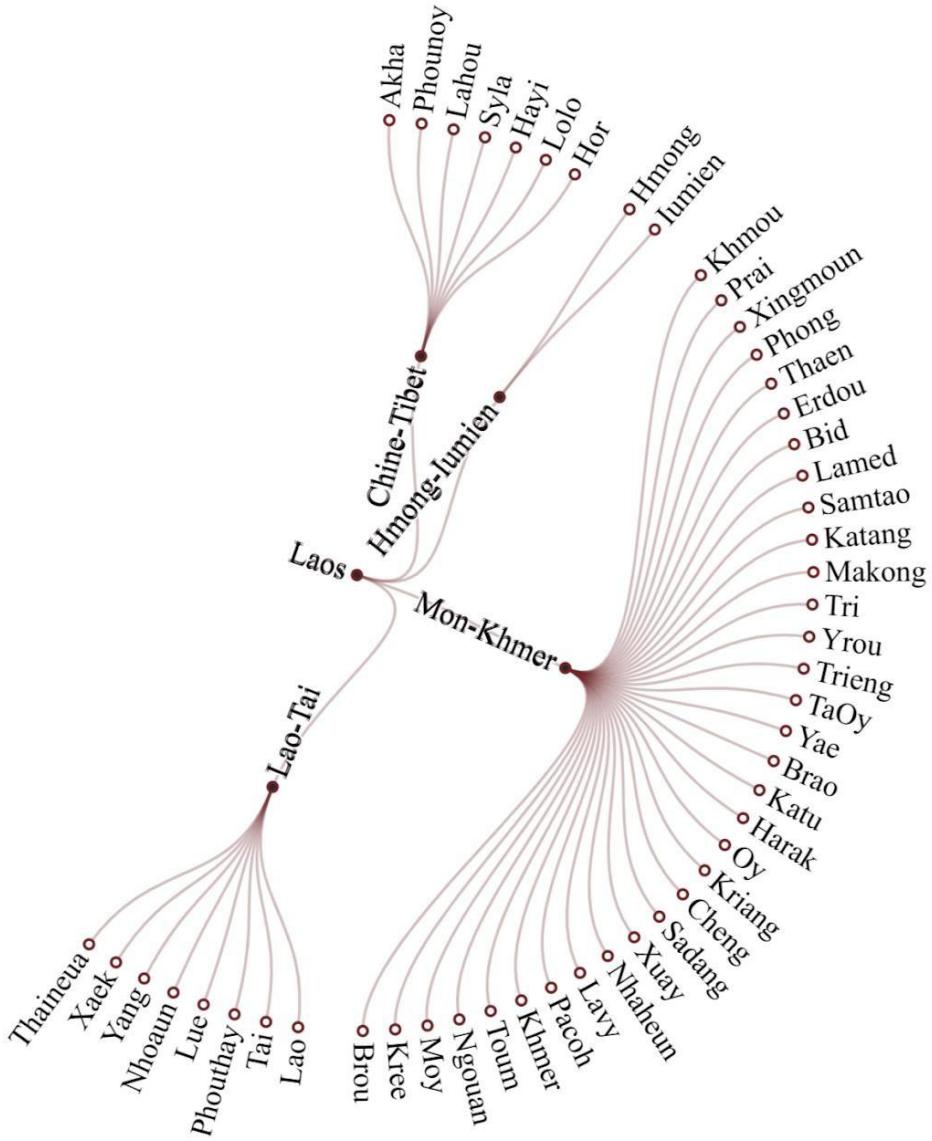
*Source: Lao Statistic Bureau. Results of Population and Housing Census 2015. Vientiane.*

The four primary ethno-linguistic families in Lao PDR are often reclassified based on three topographic zones, reflecting these groups' traditional environments. Both government and civil society commonly use the following terms:

The four primary ethno-linguistic families in Lao PDR are often reclassified based on three topographic zones, reflecting these groups' traditional environments. Both government and civil society commonly use the following terms:

- Lao Tai – Refers to lowland groups traditionally inhabiting valleys and plains. Predominantly engaged in paddy rice cultivation, practicing Buddhism, and wellintegrated into the national economy, they represent about 62% of the population.
- Lao Teung refers to upland communities, mainly from the Mon-Khmer groups, who traditionally live in mid-elevation hills. These groups practice swidden (slash-and-burn) agriculture, growing upland rice, maize, and root crops and often raising livestock. Many depend on forest resources and maintain varying levels of cultural assimilation with the Lao Tai. As indigenous inhabitants of Laos, they account for approximately 24% of the population.
- Lao Soung refers to highland groups residing in mountainous areas, primarily of SinoTibetan and Hmong-Mien origin. They practice swidden farming, and historically, some cultivate opium. Many originally migrated from southern China by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lao Soung groups comprise around 10% of the population.

In order to adapt to the new changes and bring forth unity among various ethnic communities in Lao PDR, the Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC) identified 49 ethnic categories and more than 160 ethnic sub-categories (see Figure 5). The official terminology used in the Constitution for describing the diverse population of the Lao PDR is “Bunda Chon Phao” or “all ethnic communities”, while the name of the groups is normally used to classify the EG. According to LFNC, the Lao ethnic communities are categorized into four ethno-linguistic communities as below:



**Figure 5: Diagram of minority groups in Laos**

Lao PDR is a culturally diverse country. Although the Lao language is the official language, other ethnic languages are still used among different ethnic groups. Most ethnic groups do not have written languages, and their traditional customs and religious beliefs vary according to the ethnic groups they belong to. Buddhists form the large majority, and they mainly belong to the general Lao peoples.

Many ethnic groups still cannot speak and read the Lao language and are thus unable to effectively make use of schools and health clinics, which have only Lao-speaking staff. Most of the ethnic groups are staying in the remote and mountainous areas of the country, and it is challenging to reach proper village development. Most of these people live in subsistence

agriculture. At the same time, efforts are being made by GoL and development partners to promote additional practices on handicrafts and local trade to improve the livelihoods of the poor ethnic groups. These broader characteristics of ethnic minority groups are also evident in the target villages of the project area.

Most ethnic groups in Lao PDR are poor and marginalized. Despite the efforts made by the GoL institutions to improve the socio-economic conditions of these people, many of them still lag behind other Lao mainstream groups, especially in terms of poverty rates, literacy, and health. In recent years, there has been a rapid decline in rural poverty in Lao PDR, while urban poverty reduction has stagnated. Regional disparities have narrowed, with poverty increasingly concentrated in urban centers and central regions, though the majority of the poor still reside in rural areas. Poverty remains highest among agricultural households, Hmong-Mien communities, and households led by individuals without lower secondary education or formal employment. The Mon-Khmer and Hmong-Mien groups are particularly vulnerable, with poverty rates of 42.3% and 39.8% (*Lao Statistics Bureau and World Bank. Lao PDR Poverty Profile and Poverty Assessment 2020. Retrieved from World Bank*), respectively. These groups face multiple challenges, including limited access to land, economic opportunities, cultural recognition, and political representation. In contrast, LaoTai has a significantly lower poverty rate at 15.4%. While poverty has declined more rapidly among the Lao-Tai, the Mon-Khmer continue to experience slower progress in poverty reduction.

### **(b) Ethnic groups in project sites**

Sayaboury Province, located in northern Lao PDR, covers 16,389 square kilometers and is one of the country's seven northern provinces. It is situated along the east bank of the Mekong River, with a 645-kilometer border adjoining Thailand to the west. The province's economy is primarily agriculture-based, producing key cash crops such as cotton, maize, beans, sesame, sweet tamarind, and oranges. Additionally, Xaignabouli is rich in natural resources, with gold, coal, copper, salt, manganese, and lignite deposits (*Lao News Agency. (2024). Sayaboury Overview. Retrieved from <https://kpl.gov.la/En/Page/Footer/Sayaboury.aspx>*).

#### **2.5. Gender**

While Lao PDR promotes and has demonstrated good progress in gender equality, including in various aspects, including management positions in public and private sector agencies. Likewise, the country has several legal frameworks and policies aimed at protecting ethnic groups and vulnerable populations. These include

- The Constitution of Lao PDR,
- The Ethnic Minority Policy,
- The National Socioeconomic Development Plan,

- Second National Plan of Action on Preventing and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children (2021-2025) and the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equity (2021-2025),
- The Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children, Law No. 56/NA, 23/12/2014,
- The Law on the Development and Protection of Women, No.08/NA, dated 22/10/2004, and
- The 5-year National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (NPAGE) (2021-2026).

The legal and policy frameworks indicated above are designed to promote women's health and reproductive health, political participation, economic empowerment, education, employment and social protection. Particularly, NPAGE targets relevant to CARBS project are: (i) ratio of women members in the national and regional committee to protect and control natural disasters and man-made disaster cover 30% of all positions; (ii) ratio of women who receive the training on protection and response to natural disaster and manmade disaster shall cover 40% of all participants; and (iii) ratio of women who receive training on sustainable agriculture shall cover 50% of all participants.

However, effective implementation and monitoring remain challenges, particularly in addressing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) risks. Besides, gender-based violence is reported to be a significant issue, with more than one-third of ever-partnered women reporting experiencing physical, sexual, or psychological violence in their lifetime. Nevertheless, only less than 2% of these women report such incidents to authorities, indicating a need for better support systems and awareness. This requires the country to ensure the protection and empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups, including rural ethnic minority groups, promoting and creating a more inclusive and equitable society. For the CARBS specific context, a gender action plan (GAP) will be separately prepared as a stand-alone document to provide detailed discussions of empowerment and inclusion of women in project activities to ensure gender equality while protecting women and vulnerable groups from violence and SEAH risks.

### 3. ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY, REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES

This chapter first outlines the laws and regulations of Lao PDR and the WWF's ESSF and SIPP that are applicable to the project and then discusses gaps between Lao laws and regulations and the SIPP. For the purposes of the **Climate Adaptive River Basins of Sayaboury Province (CARBS)** Project implementation, the principles and procedures of the ESSF and SIPP shall prevail in all cases of discrepancies.

### 3.1 Lao Policies, Laws, Regulations Guidelines

This chapter outlines the laws and regulations of Lao PDR and the WWF's ESSF and SIPP that are applicable to the project, and discusses gaps between Lao national laws and regulations and the SIPP. For the purposes of the "**Climate Adaptive River Basins of Sayaboury Province (CARBS)**" Project implementation, the principles and procedures of the ESSF and SIPP shall prevail in all cases of discrepancies.

#### **Laws on Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation**

- ***The Law on Environmental Protection, No. 29/NA, dated 18 December 2012:*** The law defines principles, regulations and measures related to protection, control, preservation and rehabilitation of the environment, in order to ensure environmental quality, reduction of impacts and pollution created by human activities. The law promotes the creation of a green, clean and beautiful environment free of pollution as a cornerstone in environmental management. Article 82 assigns village authorities with the duty to keep the village green, clean and beautiful and to protect streams and community forest. Articles of the law stipulate general requirements to develop and implement environmental management and monitoring plans, use clean technology and comply with the environmental standards, prevent and control pollution and clean-up and rehabilitate the environment in case of accidental release of hazardous chemicals. Articles 33, 34, 35 contain general requirements to strictly comply with the National Environmental Quality Standards and the National Pollution Control Standards. The law requires certain types of investment projects to conduct either an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and to prepare an IEE/EIA report for review and approval by Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) (for EIA) or Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE) for IEE.
- ***Law on Forestry (amended, No. 04/NA, 2019):*** This Law defines the fundamental principles, regulations and measures relating to the management, protection, development, use and inspection of forest resources and forest land, promotion of the restoration, plantation and expansion of forest resources to ensure abundance and the increase of forest coverage; become the tourism sites and the sustainable sources of livelihood and use of the people: ensure the protection of the quality of land, water, air, and environment in line with the green and sustainable direction; and contribute to the national socio-economic development. The project must strictly comply with Articles 80, 82, 87 in this amended Forestry Law.

- ***Law on Wildlife and Aquatic Animals (No. 07/NA, 2008):*** The Law on Aquatic Animals and Wildlife defines the principles, regulations and measures governing the natural aquatic animals and wildlife in order to promote the raising, breeding and use of the aquatic animals and wildlife for long term by avoiding the impacts to the environment and habitats, limiting the decrease and extinction of the aquatic animals and wildlife as well as mobilizing the people to be aware of the importance, raising the consciousness of love, care, cherishing and responsibly involving in the management, inspection, conservation, protection, development and use of wildlife and aquatic animals in a sustainable manner with the aim of ensuing the abundance of the ecosystem, contributing to the improvement of the living conditions of the multi-ethnic peoples and the potential in the national socio-economic development.
- ***Law on Water and Water Resources (amended, No. 23/NA, 2017):*** This Law comprises 14 Parts and a total of 103 Articles. The objective of this Law is to determine the principles, regulations and measures relating to the administration, management, protection, development and use of water and water resources, prevention of loss from water, rehabilitation of affected area to ensure the quality, volume of water and water resources to become sustainable with the aim of meeting the requirements for livelihood of the people and for agricultural, industrial production and services related to the protection of social and natural environment and the green development linked with national security and international integration to contribute to the protection and the socio-economic development of the nation.s
- ***The Decree on Environmental Impact Assessment No. 21/PMO of 31 January 2019:*** The decree defines the principles, regulations, and procedures on management, monitoring, and inspection of EIA to prevent, reduce, or restore negative environmental impacts and to ensure that the affected people are compensated and assisted in restoring and improving their living conditions. Article 9 categorizes projects in IEE (Group 1) type projects and EIA (Group 2) type projects. Articles 19 to 30 provide procedures for undertaking an EIA including the review and approval process and appointment of a panel of experts to assist with the technical review. Articles 36-39 include provisions on public involvement during the EIA process and project implementation. The decree sets out the investment projects' responsibilities for preparing and complying with their IEE/EIAs, and for monitoring and reporting on environmental impacts and mitigation measures.
- ***The Decree on National Environmental Standards, No. 81/GOL dated 21 February 2017:*** The decree determines ambient environmental quality standards and

emission limit values for air, noise, and wastewater emission from different types of activities.

- ***Ministerial Instruction on Hazardous Waste Management No: 0744/MONRE dated 11***

**February 2015:** The instruction identifies and classifies hazardous waste, includes provisions on import, export, transfer, storage, use, recycling and disposal of hazardous waste. The objective is to prevent and reduce the generation of hazardous waste.

- ***Ministerial Agreement No 8056/MONRE of 17 December 2013:*** The agreement determines the type and size of projects that shall undertake an IEE, EIA or none.

### **Specific Policies related to the project site**

In addition to the national legal and policy frameworks outlined above, there are specific river basin management plans as listed below:

- Nam Houng River Basin Management Plan (2025-2029)
- Nam Phoui River Basin Management Plan
- Nam Phoun River Basin Management Plan (2021-2025)

### **Laws on Labor and Working Conditions**

- ***Lao Labour Law, No. 43 NA, 24 December 2013:*** This law defines the principles, regulations and measures on administration and monitoring of labour skills development, recruitment, and labour protection in order to enhance the quality and productivity of work in society. Article 5 requires that all working conditions are safe, that salary or wages paid are in full, and that all responsibilities in regard to social insurance are implemented for the employees. Article 59 prohibits unauthorized forced labour in any form. Article 119 requires employers to maintain a safe workplace and ensure good work conditions for the health of the employees, and to provide appropriate facilitation of welfare for employees in the workplace. The employer shall supply information, recommendations, training and protection for employees so that they may undertake their work safely. The employer shall supply individual safety gear to employees in full and in good condition according to international standards. Article 122 requires that the employer must inspect and assess risks to safety and health of the workplace regularly and report the results to the Labour Inspection Agency at least once per year. Article 123: Companies with 100 or less employees must have at least one employee responsible for labour health and safety. Companies with over one hundred employees must appoint a unit and in case of necessity, a

safety and health board responsible for labour health and safety shall be established. Article 124: Companies with fifty or more employees must have a medical practitioner. Article 125: Workplace accident or occupational disease that causes major injury or death, must be reported to the Labour Administration Agency within three days. Article 128: If an employee is injured as a result of a labour accident or occupational disease, the employer or social insurance implementation agency must take responsibility for the cost of treatment as determined in the Law on Social Insurance.

- ***The Decree on Occupational Health and Safety No 22/GOL of 5 February 2019:*** The decree requires employers to provide annual health check-ups for its employees. Employers shall record work accidents and occupational diseases and report to the Labour Management Authorities. An employer or the social security organization is responsible for covering the cost of treatment, allowances and compensation to victims of work accidents or occupational diseases.
- ***Law on Hygiene, Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (No. 73/NA, 2019):*** The development of construction project shall be undertaken in accordance with the Law, regulations and measures on the management and monitoring of hygiene and health promotion activities to allow them to be implemented in an efficient, continual and sustainable manner, ensuring good health and longevity to the population, reduction of rate of sickness, mortality and combating against diseases.

### **Indigenous Peoples**

- ***The Constitution of the Lao PDR (1991, amended in 2015):*** The constitution formally recognizes the country as a multi-ethnic nation, referring to its diverse population as “ethnic groups.” Article 8 affirms the State’s commitment to promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups. It guarantees the rights of all groups to protect, preserve, and promote their unique customs and cultural heritage while prohibiting any acts of division or discrimination. Furthermore, it mandates the State to implement measures aimed at improving the economic and social conditions of all ethnic groups. Article 75 designates the Lao language and script as the official national language and script (Asian Development Bank. (2022). *Lao PDR: Poverty*. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/lao-pdr/poverty>).
- ***Decree on Ethnic Affairs (No. 207, Ministry of Home Affairs, GOL 2020):*** The decree establishes the principles, regulations, and measures for managing, monitoring, and evaluating ethnic affairs, aiming to promote unity, equality, respect, and solidarity

among all ethnic groups. Its purpose is to ensure the meaningful participation of all ethnic communities in national development and protection while safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests in accordance with the Lao PDR constitution and laws. The decree mandates equal opportunities for all ethnic groups in development processes and outlines specific economic support, public health, labor, and social welfare policies.

- **1992 Resolution on Ethnic Affairs in the New Era:** Issued by the Party Central Organization, the 1992 Resolution on Ethnic Affairs in the New Era outlines key directives for addressing ethnic group development. It consists of two main components: (i) an analysis of challenges related to planning and implementing development interventions in ethnic areas and (ii) a directive for all government agencies to formulate targeted development plans for rural and mountainous areas, particularly those inhabited by ethnic groups. The resolution emphasizes political and economic measures, including the cessation of shifting cultivation and the permanent settlement of communities practicing it, accompanied by livelihood improvement programs for ethnic populations.<sup>1</sup>
- **Lao Front for National Construction, Department of Ethnic Affairs:** The Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), specifically its Department of Ethnic Affairs, serves as the lead government body responsible for ethnic group affairs. LFNC's primary mandate is to foster unity and harmony among all Lao ethnic groups, officially recognized religions, social strata, and Lao communities abroad. Its roles include promoting the rights of all ethnic groups to actively participate in implementing national directives, the constitution, laws, and socio-economic plans. Additionally, LFNC supports preserving and promoting patriotic contributions, cultural heritage, and traditions of all Lao ethnic communities (Lao Front for National Construction, Department of Ethnic Affairs. (2024). Mandate and Functions Overview.)
- **The Ethnic Groups Committee under the National Assembly:** It is charged with drafting and evaluating proposed legislation concerning ethnic groups and lobbying for its implementation, as well as the implementation of socioeconomic development plans. Ethnic group research is the responsibility of the Institute for Cultural Research under the Ministry of Information and Culture. The lead institution for ethnic affairs is the mass (political) organization, the Lao National Front for Construction, which has an Ethnic Affairs Department.

- ***The 1992 ethnic group policy:*** ‘Resolution of the Party Central Organization Concerning Ethnic Group Affairs in the New Era’, focuses on gradually improving the lives of ethnic groups while promoting their ethnic identity and cultural heritage. It is the cornerstone of the national ethnic group policy. The policy addresses key issues related to national identity and equality between all ethnic groups in Lao PDR, with the objective to increase the level of solidarity among ethnic groups as members of the greater Lao family and improve the living conditions and social welfare of ethnic group women and children step by step.

#### **Gender, Gender-Based Violence, and Sexual Harassment**

- ***Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children (VAWC), No. 56/NA 2014:*** the law defines the principles, rules and measures for preventing and combating VAWC by prevention, protection, provision of assistance to victims of violence and handling of such violence to protect the rights and legitimate interests of women and children; aims to eliminate all forms of VAWC, uphold the roles and dignity of women and children, achieve gender equality, and contribute to developing society in order to maintain peace, public order, solidarity, justice and civilization, and protect and develop the country. The Law is designed to specifically address VAWC that results in or is likely to result in danger, harm, or physical, psychological, sexual, property or economic suffering by women and children.
- ***The Law on the Development and Protection of Women and Children (2004):*** The law is designed to guarantee and promote the roles of women, to define fundamental measures for developing and protecting the legitimate rights and interests of women, and to define the responsibilities of the State, society and family toward women. It has the following aims: promoting the knowledge, capability and revolutionary ethic of women; gender equality; eliminating all forms of discrimination against women; and preventing and combating trafficking in women and children, and domestic VAWC. This is in order to create conducive conditions for women to participate and be a force in national defence and development. The law defines sexual violence as ‘an act or attempted act that results in harm to the sexual rights of women and children such as rape, forced sex, any act of obscenity, sexually indecent assault, unwanted sexual comments or sexual touching, or the sending of women or children to another person for sexual purposes. The law encompasses domestic and public violence, including in educational institutions, workplaces and alternative care settings.

- ***The Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons, No. 73/NA of 17 December 2015:*** This law defines the principles, rules and measures regarding the administration, monitoring, supervision, inspection of anti-trafficking in persons to protect the rights, interests, lives, health, dignity, freedom of the citizens and to preserve national traditions and customs aiming at keeping the society safe and secure, in good order and contributing to the national development and protection. The law sets out preventive measures and enforcement measures to combat trafficking of persons and includes provisions on victim protection, compensation and assistance. The Ministry of Education and Sport is responsible for creating conditions which enable Lao citizens, notably women and children living in remote areas, to have access to basic general education and to prevent school children and students from becoming the victims of trafficking, and for incorporating anti-trafficking measures in educational curriculums; and creating favourable conditions for the victims to continue their education free of charge.
- ***The law on Lao Women Union (No. 31/NA, 2013):*** the law addresses the government of Lao PDR promotes the development, protection and advancement of women and supports their participation, decision-making and equitable benefit-sharing in all development activities according to Article 4.

### **Community Engagement**

There are several Lao national legal frameworks on stakeholder engagement and community consultation. The frameworks are set to promote and ensure engagement of stakeholders in planning and implementation of development projects. The most relevant legal frameworks on stakeholder engagement are as follows:

- ***The Agreement on the Approval and Enforcement of Guidelines on Public Involvement in Project Environmental Impact Assessment Process 707/MoNRE (05 February 2013):*** Defines processes and opportunities for communities to participate in planning and decision making related to investment projects and raises issues related to project implementation, including a process to resolve social and environmental impacts that may arise (and do this in a fair and conflict-free manner). The Agreement outlines two main objectives:
  - To ensure project implementation is in accordance with the rules and regulations, is transparent and involves everyone (particularly those affected by investment projects) and
  - To ensure affected people receive fair and reasonable treatment and compensation for the impacts that arise from investment projects.
- ***Ministerial Instruction on the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment for***

***Investment Projects and Activities No. 8030/MoNRE (17 December 2013):*** Article 2.14 on Public Involvement of the Project and Article 2.15 on Public Involvement Process provide instructions on how project-affected persons (PAP) and other stakeholders can participate in and receive information on the development plan of the investment projects and activities. The project has an obligation to cooperate and provide information on the local, social, environmental and natural environment status. It must report to stakeholders on the progress of environmental and social management and monitoring measures in the local area and nearby locations. In addition, key stakeholders have the right to participate in field inspections, monitoring activities and consultation meetings at all levels to comment on project preparation and review related environmental and social impact assessment reports.

The public involvement process requires that MoNRE, local administrations, investment groups and the project owner have joint duty and responsibility for conducting the process of public involvement with PAP and other stakeholders during the social and environmental impact assessment. The affected persons have the right to be involved in various stages of assessment, implementation and reporting. All reports, communications and disseminations of environmental and social impact assessment reports, including feedback from PAP and other stakeholders, should be conducted in Lao and local (ethnic) languages. The local authority of the village/district and district/province should be informed of and invited to join and provide feedback on project activities in their local areas. PAP and other stakeholders must have access to information about the project activities.

- ***Law on Handling of Petitions No. 012/NA (2015):*** Provides objectives, principles and processes for applying and handling different types of grievances, petitions and complaints that may be raised by citizens. The guideline instructs that all complaints and petitions are to be filed by their line authorities at the local level and up to the national level. The grievance redress processes are divided into three stages:
  - Proposals are to be submitted to, and resolved by, the directly concerned authorities
  - If the issue is not solved, then the grievance is to be submitted to, and resolved by, the judicial institutions at the district level
  - If the complainant is still not satisfied with the result, the petition is to be submitted to, and resolved by, the provincial assembly.
- ***Government Decree on Ethnic Groups No. 207/GoL (20 March 2020):*** Point 1, Article 17 on the dissemination of information, instructions, policies, laws and regulations to Lao multi-ethnic groups requires that information be presented via a translator,

newspaper and digital or electronic tools. Point 2 requires that the expansion of the communication network and media to the entire country be accessible for all ethnic groups. Point 3 requires the development and improvement of communication systems in the countryside, with the objective to improve quality and training to increase ethnic groups' access to information. Point 2, Article 18 on the access to legal information and justice promotes helping disadvantaged, vulnerable and disabled ethnic people access legal information and justice — ethnic groups can pursue justice procedures and official documentation and administration without incurring a fee.

- **Guideline on Ethnic Group Consultation (2012):** Issued by the Lao Front for National Development, it provides guidelines for consultation with ethnic groups. It aims to ensure *all* ethnic groups who benefit from or are potentially adversely affected by a development project, regardless of the funding source, are fully engaged in meaningful consultation at all stages — from project preparation to implementation. The guide also aims to ensure that potentially affected ethnic groups are fully informed of project objectives, including positive and adverse impacts on their livelihood and environment. Ethnic groups must be provided with opportunities to articulate their concerns. The guidelines provide principles and processes to assist with facilitating meaningful consultations to obtain free and informed consent from all ethnic groups affected by development projects in a culturally sensitive manner and prior to project commencement.

### 3.2 WWF Safeguards Standards and Procedures Applicable to the Project

WWF's safeguards standards require that any potentially adverse environmental and social impacts are identified and avoided or mitigated. Safeguards policies that are relevant to this project are as follows.

#### (i) Standard on Environment and Social Risk Management

This standard is triggered because Climate **Adaptive River Basins in Lao PDR** intends to support activities that result in a variety of environmental and social impacts. The Project is expected to have minimal anticipated negative impacts, largely from grey infrastructure and restriction of community's access to natural resources due to forest restoration.

**The precise location and impact of specific activities cannot be determined at this stage, and will only be known during project implementation. Thus, an ESMF is prepared to set out guidelines and procedures on how to identify, assess and monitor environmental and social impacts, and how to avoid or mitigate adverse impacts. Site-specific ESMPs will be prepared as required, based on principles and guidelines of the ESMF.**

(ii) Standard on Protection of Natural Habitats

WWF's mission is to protect natural habitats, and it does not undertake any projects that would result in conversion or degradation of critical natural habitats, especially those that are legally protected, officially proposed for protection, or identified as having high conservation value.

Overall, the CARBS activities will produce positive benefits. However, this standard is triggered since the project includes grey infrastructure such as small weirs for irrigation systems and groundwater extraction for some target villages that can cause adverse environmental impacts if not planned carefully. Thus, there should be a rapid environmental assessment of the impacts of planned infrastructure even if national laws do not require this for this type of infrastructure and any potentially adverse impact on natural habitats will be mitigated during project implementation.

(iii) Standard on Restriction of Access and Resettlement

The WWF's Standard seeks to ensure that adverse social or economic impacts on resource-dependent Indigenous Peoples and local communities as a result of restrictions on resource access and/or use are avoided or minimized and mitigated. The project does not involve resettlement, however there could be activities that can lead to restriction of access issues. Therefore, this standard is triggered and a Process Framework needs to be developed.

(iv) Standard on Indigenous Peoples

The WWF's standard requires ensuring that Indigenous Peoples' rights are respected, that IPs do not suffer adverse impacts from projects, and that IPs receive culturally appropriate benefits from conservation in line with the guiding principles of the ILO Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that underpin the GEF's Environmental and Social Safeguards Standards. The policy mandates that projects respect IPs' rights, including their rights to FPIC processes and to tenure over traditional territories; that culturally appropriate and equitable benefits (including from traditional ecological knowledge) are negotiated and agreed upon with the IPs' communities in question; and that potential adverse impacts are avoided or adequately addressed through a participatory and consultative approach. As there are ethnic minority communities residing in some target villages such as Prai, Hmong, and Khmu, the proposed activities under this project might potentially impact IP communities, thus triggering this standard. An Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework is developed.

(v) Standard on Community Health, Safety and Security

This Standard ensures that the health, safety and security of communities are respected and appropriately protected. The Guidance on Labor and Working Conditions requires employers and supervisors to implement all reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of workers through the introduction of preventive and protective measures. It also requires that the labor rights of project-employed workers are observed, as indicated in Annex 1: Screening Tool. Project activities should also prevent adverse impact involving quality and supply of water to affected communities; SEAH- related risks to both affected communities as well as project staff; safety of project infrastructure, life and properties; protective mechanisms for the use of hazardous materials; disease prevention procedures; and emergency preparedness and response.

This Standard has been triggered for two reasons, the first being that the activities include introduction of small-scale constructions such as small weirs and improvement of canals for irrigation systems, and there might be some issues related to community health, safety and security. The second reason is due to the risk of human-tiger conflict affecting project staff, partners, or stakeholders while carrying out the activities of the project. Although the project is designed explicitly to mitigate these risks, they are currently present in the project sites and pose potential risks to people and project implementation.

(vi) Standard on Pest Management

WWF-funded projects are not allowed to procure or use formulated products that are in World Health Organization (WHO) Classes IA and IB, or formulations of products in Class II, unless there are restrictions that are likely to deny use or access by lay personnel and others without training or proper equipment. The project will follow the recommendations and minimum standards as described in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides and its associated technical guidelines, and procure only pesticides, along with suitable protective and application equipment, that will permit pest management actions to be carried out with well-defined and minimal risk to health, environment, and livelihoods. This standard is not applicable as there will not be project activities that would involve the use of pesticides or related materials.

(vii) Standard on Cultural Resources

This Standard ensures that Cultural Resources are appropriately preserved, and their destruction, damage or loss is appropriately avoided. Physical cultural resources (PCR) include archaeological, paleontological, historical, architectural, and sacred sites including graveyards, burial sites, and sites of unique natural values. Intangible cultural resources include traditional ecological knowledge, performing arts, oral traditions and expressions,

traditional craftsmanship and social practices, rituals and events. The impacts on cultural resources resulting from project activities, including mitigating measures, may not contravene either the recipient country's national legislation or its obligations under relevant international environmental treaties and agreements. This standard is precautionarily triggered as the project activities proposed at the preparation stage would not affect any cultural and historical site of target communities, but in a later stage if the specific sites are identified the activities could potentially adversely affect physical or intangible cultural resources. The stakeholder engagement process and the FPIC process, where it concerns ethnic minorities, should be used to identify any potentially adverse impacts on these cultural resources and if so, find ways to avoid or if not possible, mitigate these impacts.

(viii) Standard on Grievance Mechanisms

Project-affected communities and other interested stakeholders may raise grievances at any time to the PMU and WWF. The PMU will be responsible for informing project-affected parties about the Accountability and Grievance Mechanism. Contact information about the PMU and WWF will be made publicly available. Relevant details are also provided in the Grievance Redress section of this ESMF.

The WWF Standard on Grievance Mechanisms is not intended to replace project- and country-level dispute resolution and redress mechanisms. This mechanism is designed to: address potential breaches of WWF's policies and procedures in a gender-responsive manner; be independent, transparent, and effective; be survivor-centered and offer protections to those reporting SEAH-related grievances; be accessible to project-affected people; keep complainants abreast of progress of cases brought forward; and maintain records on all cases and issues brought forward for review.

(ix) Standard on Public Consultation and Disclosure

This standard requires meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders, occurring as early as possible and throughout the project cycle. It requires the Project Team to provide relevant information in a timely manner and in a form and language that are understandable and accessible to diverse stakeholders. This standard also requires that information concerning environmental and social issues relevant to the project is disclosed for at least 30 days prior to implementation, and 45 days if the Indigenous Peoples Standard has been triggered. WWF will disclose safeguards documentation on its Safeguards Resources web page. The final safeguards documents should be published on the national websites of the Implementing Agencies and made available locally in specific locations. The project is also required to locally release all final key safeguards documents via hardcopy, translated into the local language

and in a culturally appropriate manner, to facilitate awareness by relevant stakeholders that the information is in the public domain for review.

(x) Standard on Stakeholder Engagement

This standard ensures that WWF is committed to meaningful, effective and informed stakeholder engagement in the design and implementation of all GEF and Green Climate Fund (GCF) projects. WWF's commitment to stakeholder engagement arises from internal standards such as WWF's Project and Program Standards (PPMS), as well as WWF's commitment to international instruments such as United Nations Declaration on Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Stakeholder engagement is an overarching term that encompasses a range of activities and interactions with stakeholders throughout the project cycle and is an essential aspect of good project management. The project has prepared a Stakeholder Engagement Plan that will be implemented during the project.

(xi) Guidance Note on Gender-based Violence and Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

All over the world, it is estimated that one in three women and girls experience GBV during her lifetime. A recent study conducted by IUCN, in collaboration with USAID as part of Advancing Gender in the Environment (AGENT), states that forms of GBV (ranging from sexual, physical and psychological violence, to trafficking, sexual harassment, sexual coercion and in some cases rape) can be linked to environmental issues.

Many projects implemented by WWF relate to effective management of protected areas and the landscapes in which they are located through support to law enforcement, patrolling and better management and restoration of landscapes by restricting access to natural resources. These activities can potentially give rise to GBV/SEAH risks where government-employed law enforcement officials/rangers/guards supported by the project may misuse the power of their positions by sexually exploiting women in Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This is a particular risk if women are collecting water or natural resources in a protected area. As another example, projects that promote alternative livelihoods, particularly ones that improve women's empowerment and decision making, can often lead to changes in power dynamics within communities and increase the risks of GBV/SEAH toward those empowered women.

GBV and SEAH in the implementation of WWF activities in projects and programs is unacceptable and requires timely, proportional, and appropriate action. WWF recognizes that to achieve biodiversity conservation it is vital to promote gender equality and make every effort to ensure that project activities implemented by WWF respect integrity and

human rights and mitigate any risk that gives rise to discriminatory and exploitative gender inequalities. WWF does support projects in areas where there is civil war, ethnic conflict, and insurgencies where there are existing GBV/SEAH risks. WWF therefore needs to understand these risks in order to avoid exacerbating local conditions that contribute to GBV/SEAH, which would undermine any conservation outcomes the project may seek to achieve.

For WWF projects, including GEF and GCF projects, under the Standard on Community Health and Security, the project team should identify any potential GBV/SEAH risks by screening proposed project activities using the following questions:

- i. Is there a risk that the project could pose a greater burden on women by restricting the use, development, and protection of natural resources by women compared with that of men?
- ii. Is there a risk that persons employed by or engaged directly in the project might engage in gender-based violence (including sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment)?
- iii. Does the project increase the risk of GBV and/or SEAH for women and girls, for example by changing resource use practices?
- iv. Does any mandated training for any individuals associated with the project (including project staff, government park rangers and guards, other park staff, consultants, partner organizations and contractors) cover GBV/SEAH (along with human rights, etc.)?

The identification of GBV/SEAH risks in a project is normally undertaken as part of project preparation and could be conducted during community/stakeholder consultations together with identifying potential risks and screening impacts on vulnerable groups, community health, safety and security, labor and working conditions, gender equality issues, and any other social or environmental risks. Any potential GBV/SEAH risk identified during this stage would be factored into the project's overall social risk, which, in turn, is factored into the overall environmental and social risk associated with a project.

(xii) Guidance Note on Labor and Working Conditions

As a conservation organization, WWF does not typically fund large infrastructure activities in conservation projects implemented by WWF's GEF and GCF Agency and therefore does not directly adversely impact labor and working conditions. However, WWF GCF Agency projects do implement projects in the forestry, agriculture and fisheries sectors, which may have potential unintended adverse impacts. This is mostly seen in financing activities necessary for strengthening protected area management systems, including construction of protected area administrative buildings, watch towers, or accommodations for park guards.

In such cases, these activities are usually executed by third party contractors who employ construction workers including sub-contractors. In such cases, WWF will ensure that any funding for such activities complies with WWF's Environment and Social Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP) and more specifically international labor and working condition standards such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and any relevant local labor standards of the project specific countries.

This Guidance Note provides detailed guidance of reasonable precautions to implement in managing principal risks to occupational health and safety. The following is based on the IFC's Environmental, Health, and Safety Guidelines (April 30, 2007), and covers the following general thematic areas:

1. General Facility Design and Operation
  - a. Integrity of Workplace Structures
  - b. Severe Weather and Facility Shutdown
  - c. Workspace and Exit
  - d. Fire Precautions
  - e. Lavatories and Showers
  - f. Potable Water Supply
  - g. Clean Eating Area
  - h. Lighting
  - i. Safe Access
  - j. First Aid
  - k. Air Supply
  - l. Work Environment Temperature
2. Training
  - a. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Training
3. Physical Hazards
  - a. Rotating and Moving Equipment
  - b. Rotating and Moving Equipment
  - c. Vibration
  - d. Electrical
  - e. Eye Hazards
  - f. Welding / Hot Work
  - g. Industrial Vehicle Driving and Site Traffic
  - h. Working Environment Temperature
  - i. Ergonomics, Repetitive Motion, Manual Handling
  - j. Working at Heights
  - k. Illumination

#### 4. Standards for Workers Living Conditions

- a. General living facilities
- b. Drainage
- c. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation and light
- d. Water
- e. Wastewater and solid waste
- f. Rooms/dormitories facilities
- g. Bed arrangements and storage facilities
- h. Sanitary and toilet facilities
- i. Toilet facilities
- j. Showers/bathrooms and other sanitary facilities
- k. Canteen, cooking and laundry facilities
- l. Medical facilities
- m. Leisure, social and telecommunications facilities

#### (xiii) Guidance Note on Projects Relating to Dams

In many river basins, WWF's freshwater conservation work is affected by the development of new dams or by the operations of existing dams. WWF is opposed to unsustainable dams that do not adhere to internationally recognized principles and criteria for good practice. WWF advocates that (1) no dams be built in, or affect, areas of high conservation value; (2) alternatives be fully considered before decisions are made to build new dams; (3) principles, tools, and inclusive and transparent processes be applied that make the best possible choices regarding the management of existing dams and development of new dams.

WWF actively works to assess existing dams to minimize impacts and maximize benefits and to reduce the demand for new dams. WWF advocates the improvement of operational management for environmental benefits at existing dams, through related policies, plans, or regulations. This can include:

- Establishing environmental flow regimes to restore ecological functions downstream of a dam by mimicking natural variability in river flows. Work may include assessment of environmental flow requirements, hydrological studies, design of reservoir releases, and policy work;
- Promoting retrofitting dams or infrastructure to improve performance and reduce need for new infrastructure;
- Promoting adaptation of existing infrastructure to allow for improved environmental performance; and
- Promoting decommissioning or removal of hazardous or obsolete dams.

## Dam Safety

Given the above instances, and in line with WWF Network's position on dams, WWF can:

- For GEF and GCF projects, partner with a GEF and GCF Implementing Agency that is accredited for Safety of Dams safeguards to jointly support such efforts, so long as the other agency's safeguards system is applied for the entire project;
- Implement projects that involve working with the government or relevant sector on strategic river basin planning, with the goal of restricting or concentrating dams to appropriate rivers and watersheds of lower conservation value (e.g., already altered);
- Implement projects that result in recommendations for environmental flow requirements for a stream or river (e.g., timing, volume, duration);
- Implement projects that involve working with governments to ensure better regulation of hydropower sector;
- Implement projects that build capacity in the hydropower sector and government ministries to improve environmental-based approaches/tools for sustainable development; and
- Implement small or minor water infrastructure work whose impact is deemed not to trigger Safety of Dams safeguards through WWF's Policy on Environment and Social Risk Management

### (xiv) Guidance Note on Ranger Principles

Rangers play a key role in protecting wildlife, managing protected areas, and resolving human-wildlife conflict. Rangers must act within the law and under high ethical standards in order to achieve positive outcomes from both people and nature. WWF only supports legitimate law enforcement activities that are carried out in a way that respects and protects the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and Indigenous Peoples. Certain measures are in place to uphold WWF's high ethical standards, including risk assessment, mitigation actions, and continuous monitoring throughout implementation.<sup>6</sup> Rangers are expected to adhere to the following principles:

- a. Act within the law.
- b. Ensure accountability.
- c. Build ranger capacity
- d. Support the welfare of rangers and their families.
- e. Partner with Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- f. Identify, monitor and plan for challenges.
- g. Maintain impartiality.

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<sup>6</sup> See [Ranger Principles document](#) for more details.

- h. Communicate regularly.
- i. Sanctions for malfeasance.

### 3.3 Gaps between Lao laws and policies and the WWF's SIPP

The Lao national environmental and social safeguards laws and policies aiming to manage and mitigate environmental and social risks, largely focus on development projects. However, there are several discrepancies when compared to international standards such as those set by WWF's ESSF and SIPP. The key discrepancies are indicated in Table 3 below.

**Table 2: Gaps between Lao legal frameworks and WWF's SIPP**

<b>Focal area</b>	<b>National laws</b>	<b>WWF's ESSF and SIPP</b>
Environmental standards and general environmental	<p>EIAAs are conducted for investment projects; GEF projects. It provides detailed EIAs that include social assessment type projects and EIA cumulative impact (Group 2) type projects (see assessments and long-term sustainability. However, this process may</p> <p>not always meet the comprehensive requirements of stakeholder standards. biodiversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WWF's ESSF is required for all investment projects; GEF projects. It provides detailed EIAs that include social assessment type projects and EIA cumulative impact (Group 2) type projects (see assessments and long-term sustainability. However, this process may not always meet the comprehensive requirements of stakeholder standards. biodiversity</li> <li>• WWF's ESSF emphasizes holistic assessments, including engagement, international offsets, and ongoing monitoring.</li> </ul>
Ethnic minority groups	<p>The Lao law recognizes the Convention 169 nor has it</p> <p>Peoples nation, referring to its signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of</p> <p>“ethnic groups.”</p> <p>Regulations and policies on</p> <p>ethnic minority groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lao has not ratified ILO and Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).</li> <li>• WFF's ESSF includes ethnic minorities in the unity, and participation in definition of Indigenous peoples and defines Indigenous</li> </ul>

In some major development Peoples rights to FPIC projects, plans for support processes and to tenure over to ethnic minorities' needs traditional territories.

are developed but hardly ● Furthermore, WWF's ESSF implemented. recognizes Indigenous Peoples' rights to not be harmed by development projects and to receive culturally appropriate benefits from interventions is central to the Indigenous Peoples standard.

Social inclusion and Stakeholder engagement is WWF's ESSF ensures FPIC and Stakeholder often limited and not explicitly prioritizes vulnerable engagement systematically integrated populations, while national laws into all stages of project may overlook these aspects. planning and implementation. Public

	consultations mostly take place with directly affected people and communities.	WWF's ESSF considers comprehensive stakeholder engagement throughout project design, implementation, and monitoring.
Biodiversity conservation and protected areas	National laws such as Forest Law, Wildlife Law National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan do not specify assessment approaches and measures to protect critical habitats.	WWF's ESSF prioritizes "no net loss" or "net gain" outcomes, surpassing national frameworks in biodiversity safeguards.

Grievance Mechanisms and Accountability	<p>A GRM exists and is a structured process in Laos. GRMs are broadly described in ESIA and their supplementary documents, but are often impractical and not always accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WWF's ESSF requires comprehensive grievance mechanisms for addressing stakeholder concerns promptly and effectively.</li> <li>WWF's ESSF has clear, accessible, and effective grievance redress mechanisms.</li> </ul>
Occupational health and safety	<p>There are national laws and policies on occupational health and safety, but lack of clear monitoring and compliance mechanisms.</p>	<p>Occupational health and safety measures will be undertaken in line with WWF's requirements and in compliance with this ESMF.</p>
Monitoring compliance	<p>Lao national laws have less rigorous monitoring mechanisms and these often lack transparency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WWF's ESSF mandates rigorous reporting, third-party validation, and communitybased monitoring, ensuring greater accountability.</li> <li>WWF's ESSF has</li> </ul>

		monitoring and compliance frameworks, including regular reporting, independent audits, and a Global Safeguards Unit for quality assurance.
Climate Change and Resilience	National policies and strategies on climate change do not adequately integrate climate risk	WWF's ESSF includes climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, often absent or
	assessments or emphasize resilience-building for ecosystems and communities.	underdeveloped national policies.

For the purposes of the Climate Adaptive River Basins of Sayaboury Province (CARBS), the provisions of the WWF's ESSF and SIPP shall prevail over Lao legislation in all cases of discrepancy.

#### 4. ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The CARBS aims to address the impacts of flooding, droughts and seasonal variations in the four key watersheds: Nam-Poui, Nam-Poun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng Basin Sayaboury by mainstreaming climate change adaptation in IWRM planning and interventions and identifying and implementing strategies with communities to buffer livelihoods from climate change impacts. The project will build climate adaptation and climate resilience capabilities of vulnerable communities in the “at risk” and these watersheds, which are nationally prioritized, while contributing to national efforts of the vision of the National Water Resources Policy, to restore watershed ecosystems and their services in the Sayaboury province. While the project is anticipated to deliver significant positive environmental and social benefits, it is important to recognize and assess any potential negative impacts from the project during project implementation.

#### 4.1 Adverse Environmental Impacts

The project consists of four components, and the potential negative environmental impacts will vary, depending on activities proposed in each component, as discussed below.

##### Component 1: Mainstreaming climate change adaptation in IWRM.

This component will create an enabling environment for a scenario-based framework on sustainable climate change adaptation and resilience in northwestern Lao PDR. This component has one outcome: Improved Planning and Capacities for CCA at the provincial/district/basin levels and there are three outputs under this outcome.

**The output 1.1** is designed to develop a scenario-based framework for CCA and disaster risk management to strengthen local planning, policies, programs, and their financing. The output is comprised of three main activities: 1) identify current and future high-risk zones for climate change-induced flooding and drought within the Phoun, Lay, Houng, and Pou River Basins using existing hydrological models, and evaluate protective grey, green and mixed infrastructure options for the identified areas; 2) develop and validate strategies for integrated, gender informed, climate-resilient flood and drought management in the headwaters and lowland areas of the Houng, Lay, Phoun, and Pou river basins (Consider for whole district); and 3) evaluate the existing hydrological monitoring network for river basins, including village weather stations, and identify options and priorities to increase efficiency.

**Output 1.2** aims to provide technical assistance, training, workshops and bottom-up community consultations to integrate CCA, NbS and small-scale solutions into IWRM/river basin management plans. Activities involved in output 1.2 include 1) delivery of genderresponsive technical assistance through a suite of facilitated thematic workshops and planning sessions for climate change adaptation and disaster risk management; 2) climate crowd community consultations to ensure a bottom-up perspective and provide a detailed understanding of how climate change is experienced at the local level; and 3) establishment of a range of adaptive management decision-making tools and models focused on future climate risk and response options.

**Output 1.1.3** aims to Forum for community and gender-responsive voices into planning. Output 1.1.3 covers activities: 1) Conduct gender analysis to understand the different needs, priorities, and challenges faced by various gender groups within the community; Organize meetings or forums at times and locations that are accessible to all genders, considering work and family responsibilities, safety, and accessibility to prioritize activities to address gender gaps; and Provide training for community leaders, gender advocates, and project participants on gender-responsive planning and inclusive decision-making. Based on the outputs and respective activities outlined above, district level IWRM/river basin management policies and plans will be developed as output 1.14.

It can be noted that activities for Component 1 primarily focus on planning and documentation, and training for capacity building with no direct field implementation and infrastructure and physical intervention. As such, any adverse environmental impact to local biodiversity, wildlife and their habitats will be minimal and can be mitigated.

**Component 2: Co-designing and implementing water resource and river basin management plans with community involvement to address climate impacts**

The outcome under Component 2 will build capacity for and demonstrate gender-informed community identified and delivered upstream and downstream IWRM interventions to reduce the impact of floods, drought and reduced water access on small scale and subsistence agriculture in the Nam-Poui, Nam-Poun, Nam-Lay and Nam-Houng watersheds to reduce flood and drought impacts to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This component has two expected outputs. Output 2.1.1 will develop 1) local government and community-identified gender-responsive IWRM interventions to reduce the impact of floods, drought, seasonal variation strengthening resilience through NbS approaches (reforestation, management of natural wetlands, rainfall harvesting, farm ponds) and 2) Establish Fish Conservation Zones and regulations with the target communities. While output 2.1.2 will provide interventions designed to strengthen water security of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Activities under output 2.1.2 are: Ground water extraction and small-scale irrigation co-designed in accessible and inclusive approaches and Co-identification of the need for, and co-design of weirs, small reservoirs, ground-water extraction and irrigation schemes for the target communities; and coordination with other donors/investors to support appropriate infrastructure development exercising Free Prior and Informed Consent.

The component and its activities will integrate both technical knowledge transfers and physical interventions such as restoration of riparian zones, protection/management of natural wetlands, reforesting upper watersheds, rainwater harvesting and farm ponds, as well as other Nature-based Solutions (NbS), to allow for improved watershed function reduced erosion and siltation, flood water retention, aquifer recharge and shallow water storage. The interventions will also include investments in solutions that enhance water supply reliability, indicatively this could include nature-based solutions for capture and storage (e.g., shallow natural water storage in floodplain lakes and ponds and grey infrastructure or combined grey-green small-scale infrastructure options including weirs, small-scale irrigation, and ground water extraction systems to increase water security will be co-designed with Indigenous Peoples and local communities and government agencies. While the NbS interventions, particularly restoration of riparian zones, protection of natural wetlands and reforestation watershed areas can be significant benefits for environmental protection, development of grey infrastructure such as small-scale weirs, irrigation and groundwater extraction systems are estimated to have medium-low adverse environmental impacts to local water resources

and river ecosystems. Based on the project framework, pilot grey infrastructure will be delivered for 6 communities in 2 districts. Environmental impacts from the pilot infrastructure shall be minimized through mitigation measures as outlined in Table 4 below. The project will complete safeguard eligibility and impact screening (see Annex 1) prior to commencement of civil works on the ground and a site-specific environmental management plan for any grey infrastructure subproject, if necessary.

**Component 3: Building Resilience: Promoting climate-smart agriculture and diversifying livelihoods, especially for women and agriculture dependent communities**

The outcome of this component is to strengthen the adaptive capacity of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to mitigate flood and drought, seasonal variations risk and reduced water availability to crop yield and livestock. The outcome consists of two outputs. This component will focus on testing out climate adaptive and gender-responsive communitybased natural resource management, agriculture and livestock practices and livelihood diversification across the target project area where agriculture dependent communities are at risk - to be confirmed through Output 1.1.1. The project will also work to enhance local capacities for the production, dissemination and use of decision support tools, climate information, forecasts and early warnings.

Under Component 3, activities to improve adaptation capacity will include (i) participatory and gender-responsive preparation and implementation of Village Forest Management Plans (VFMPS) ensuring the long-term sustainable supply of forest products and ecosystem services to the communities from the forests within their village boundaries (**Output 3.1.1**); (ii) ensuring gender-informed climate resilience is built into livelihoods, by promoting a shift towards modifying current agriculture practices to become more climate smart and promoting context appropriate livelihood diversification, products, methods and practices (**Output 3.1.2**). These strategies could indicatively include but are not limited to: i) climatesmart agriculture (e.g. agroforestry, intercropping, minimum-tillage, integrated soil fertility management, water harvesting and management); ii) silvopastoral systems to support subsistence animal husbandry; iii) cultivation and sale of NTFPs; iv) seed banks and seedling stocks; and v) other similar climate adaptation and resilient livelihood practices. In upstream locations, an underlying focus of the project will be to purposefully select diverse, high-value tree species that benefit agricultural livelihoods, restore ecosystem services and enhance carbon stocks, thereby prioritizing solutions that deliver landscape management and restoration co-benefits in parallel. Importantly, the project will audit and future-proof local value chains and adapt them in a manner that helps get commodities to market. **Output 3.1.2** will be made possible through hands-on workshops, technical assistance and training,

fieldschool sessions and the provision of essential tools and equipment, all of which will be sensitive to gender considerations.

Lessons from the past will also be used to inform livelihood enhancement activities. The project will explore, test out and implement diversified livelihood options to augment farmers' income for periods when they cannot rely on farming. As part of this Component's third output, the project will work with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to build capacity (**Output 3.1.3**) on the use of climate information, forecasts and early warning systems (including those which draw from traditional environmental knowledge), to further enhance risk management and preparedness. The project will build on the results of GEF SAMIS and its follow-up project, expected to be funded by the Green Climate Fund, which produce and disseminate agro-climate information services, to ensure that information and warnings reach the 'last mile' and that vulnerable farmers and communities are equipped to prepare for floods and droughts, and able to mitigate their impacts.

As can be seen, the proposed activities of Component 3 focus on the adaptive capacity of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to mitigate flood and drought, seasonal variations risk and reduced water availability to crop yield and livestock with gender equality and sensitivity. The activities, if successful, will enhance environmental benefits through community forest protection and reforestation of watershed areas, sustainable supply of forest products for communities, ecosystem services, enhancement of carbon stocks, and improvement of soil fertility. Another benefit includes community's resilience to climate change risks through dissemination of local climate information, and forecast and early warning systems in place in target villages. Therefore, the activities will have minimal environmental risks and impacts, which can be mitigated.

#### **Component 4: Knowledge management and communications**

Component 4 comprises two: 1) Gender-responsive knowledge management, communications, visibility and outreach products and 2) Project benefits and climate change adaptation practices are documented and disseminated to Indigenous Peoples and local communities through learning, using innovative and locally adapted means. The project will document, curate and catalogue the information and experiences generated throughout its implementation to ensure that lessons learned are used to inform future adaptation planning and implementation efforts in other districts of Sayaboury not included in the target area, within other basins in the province, and across other provinces with similar conditions, threats and barriers. Underpinning this component will be a knowledge management strategy and communications plan (**Output 4.1.1**), cognizant of gender considerations.

Communications materials (publications, videos etc.) will be produced to align messaging, increase visibility and exposure at events, and data sharing facilitated.

The project will also develop a knowledge management system and engagement strategy to share information on approaches to further promote nature-based adaptation approaches at national levels as well as regionally and globally and will establish knowledge management vehicles (people, process and technology) to enable the transformation of information into know-how and use this to inform future planning exercises and efforts to better mainstream nature-based adaptation, as well as undertaking planning towards future replication and scaling. Learning from the project will also be used to inform regional and global work on adaptation and resilience through engagement with other GEF and related adaptation projects and programmes such as the Sustainable Rice Landscapes Initiative (SRLI). As a part of outreach efforts, as well as to ensure their strong involvement in decision making and equitable benefit from the project, the project will develop innovative locally adapted dissemination systems including exchange visits and peer learning, as well as community gatherings (**Output 4.1.2**).

Similar to components 1 and 3, Component 4 prioritizes knowledge management and dissemination of knowledge products to local stakeholders and communities. The component will not involve any grey infrastructure and thus no environmental risks and impacts are expected from activities associated with Component 4.

#### 4.2 Environmental Mitigation Measures

**Details of proposed mitigation measures for environmental risks associated with project activities are summarized in Table 3 below.**

**Table 3: Anticipated Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

Project Activity	Potential impact	Proposed mitigation measures	Responsible party
<b>Component 2: Community-Driven Implementation: Co-designing and implementing water resource and river basin management plans with community involvement to address climate impacts</b>			
Establish Fish Conservation Zones (FCZ) and regulations with the target communities through inclusive consultation and knowledge capture processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restrict fishing in certain areas can lead to increased fishing pressure in other areas, potentially causing overfishing and habitat degradation elsewhere.</li> <li>- Changes in fish populations within FCZs can alter the balance of local ecosystems, potentially affecting other species and ecological processes.</li> <li>- If not properly managed, FCZs can lead to water quality issues such as eutrophication, where nutrient buildup causes excessive algae growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the planning and management of FCZs, helping ensure that the zones are effective and equitable.</li> <li>- Implement adaptive management practices, allowing for adjustments based on monitoring and feedback, helping to address any unforeseen impacts.</li> <li>- Integrate FCZs with other conservation and management efforts, helping mitigate displacement effects and ensure broader ecosystem health.</li> <li>- Raise awareness about the benefits and importance of FCZs, helping gain community support and compliance.</li> <li>- Conduct focus group discussions with communities about fishing practice and changes of fish catch to design proper fish conservation.</li> </ul>	WWF technical team PMU and Safeguards and gender specialist

Ground water extraction codesigned in accessible and inclusive approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excessive groundwater extraction during dry months would lower the water table, making it difficult for nearby wells to reach water.</li> <li>- Groundwater and surface water are interconnected. Over-extraction can reduce the flow of water in streams and lakes, potentially affecting aquatic ecosystems.</li> <li>- The extraction of large volumes of groundwater can cause the ground to sink, leading to land subsidence. This can damage nearby infrastructure like buildings and roads.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regulate the amount of groundwater extracted to ensure it does not exceed the natural recharge rate.</li> <li>- Implement water-saving technologies and practices for communities in domestic use to reduce the demand for groundwater.</li> <li>- Avoid development of groundwater extraction points in areas prone to land subsidence and protect recharge zones from contamination.</li> <li>- Training and awareness raising for water saving and maintenance of ground water extraction systems.</li> </ul>	<p>WWF technical team Safeguards and gender specialist</p>
Development of small-scale irrigation co-designed in accessible and inclusive approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weirs for small-scale irrigation systems can change the natural flow of rivers, potentially affecting downstream ecosystems and water availability.</li> <li>- Weirs can cause sediment to accumulate, which can reduce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Closely consult with Indigenous Peoples and local communities and local government stakeholders prior to design of small-scale irrigation systems.</li> <li>- Conduct Environmental Impact screening/Assessments to understand and mitigate potential impacts before construction.</li> </ul>	<p>WWF technical team safeguards and gender specialist Contractor</p>

	<p>water quality and affect aquatic habitats.</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The construction and operation of weirs can disrupt local wildlife habitats, particularly for species that rely on free-flowing rivers.</li> <li>- Stagnant water behind weirs can lead to reduced oxygen levels and increased temperatures, which can negatively impact aquatic life.</li> <li>- Improperly designed or maintained weirs can increase the risk of flooding upstream.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement sediment management practices to prevent accumulation and maintain water quality.</li> <li>- Design and construct fish passages, if necessary, in weir designs to allow aquatic species to migrate freely.</li> <li>- Ensure regular maintenance of weirs to prevent structural failures and manage water flow effectively.</li> <li>- Engage Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the planning and management of weir projects to ensure sustainable practices and address local concerns.</li> </ul>	

### **Summary of key environmental risks, mitigation measures, and monitoring**

<b>Safeguard Standard</b>	<b>Key Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation/Enhancement Measure</b>	<b>Monitoring Indicator</b>
Natural habitats	Grey infrastructure such as small weirs for irrigation systems and groundwater extraction for some target villages could potentially negatively affect natural habitats when not planned carefully.	Requires rapid environmental assessment of the impacts of planned grey infrastructure and any potentially adverse impact(s) on natural habitats needs to be mitigated during project implementation.	# Rapíd Environmental Assessments per # grey infrastructure.

## 4.3 Adverse Social Impacts

### Component 1

To strengthen local resilience to climate change in the flood- and drought-prone areas of Xayabouly Province, the project will support provincial, district, and community-level authorities in integrating climate adaptation into their planning and budgeting processes. Through inclusive consultations, training, and data collection, government staff and community representatives—including women and vulnerable groups—will collaborate to identify climate risks, design locally tailored responses, and implement practical solutions such as nature-based interventions. Activities will take place across four river basins over the next few years, utilizing both scientific analysis and local knowledge to develop future climate scenarios, enhance water resource management, and ensure that community voices are incorporated into long-term policies through structured forums and participatory planning mechanisms.

**Table 4: Anticipated social impacts from component 1**

Social Impact	Associated Risk	Safeguard Action
Inclusive, scenario-based climate planning improves local ownership and future resilience.	Exclusion of vulnerable groups in planning due to language, gender, or power barriers.	Ensure culturally appropriate and gendersensitive consultations and communication, including use of non-technical language, local language (if needed with translation), avoidance of gender and cultural biases, and respect of local culture, at all levels with diverse representation.
Use of traditional and scientific knowledge increases local relevance and acceptance of plans.	Technical approaches may overshadow local knowledge or community input.	Value and incorporate local knowledge through participatory assessments and scenario planning.
Strengthened institutional capacity enables effective and inclusive adaptation responses.	Weak coordination or limited capacity may result in poor safeguard application or follow-through.	Provide training on safeguards and inclusive planning tools; integrate feedback mechanisms into processes.

Community forums promote voice and social accountability in local climate planning.	Forums may be dominated by local elites or fail to reflect broader community concerns.	Set inclusive representation criteria; support facilitation to ensure all voices are heard.
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## Component 2

This component is expected to deliver significant social benefits by enhancing water security, restoring ecosystems, and fostering local resilience through community-led, nature-based solutions. Activities such as watershed rehabilitation, small-scale water infrastructure, and drought management planning will help safeguard livelihoods, particularly for smallholder farmers and vulnerable communities. Inclusive processes aim to empower women and marginalized groups while integrating local knowledge into resource planning and climate-smart agriculture.

However, there are potential social risks that must be managed. Restoration and infrastructure activities may restrict access to land or water resources, particularly for those who rely on them for their daily needs. Without careful design, new water-use rules or benefit distribution could create inequality or conflict. Additionally, if upstream communities do not see direct benefits, tensions may arise. To mitigate these risks, the project must employ participatory planning, ensure transparent benefit-sharing, and enhance the capacity of local stakeholders to implement safeguards effectively. In areas with ethnic minorities a free, prior and informed consent process is required to assure any negative impact is identified and accordingly avoided or if not possible, mitigated.

**Table 5: Anticipated social impacts from component 2**

Social Impact	Associated Risk	Safeguard Action
Gender-informed and community-driven water and land use planning builds resilience and ownership.	Exclusion of women, ethnic groups, or vulnerable voices from decision-making processes.	Apply gender-responsive, culturally inclusive planning processes; ensure active roles for diverse stakeholders.
Nature-based interventions restore ecosystems and reduce climate risks for communities.	Restoration activities may restrict traditional access to land, forests, or water resources.	Conduct participatory resource mapping, apply Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and develop fair and transparent land and resource use agreements.

Small-scale infrastructure and climate-smart agriculture strengthen food security and adaptation.	New land or water use practices may disrupt traditional systems or create inequities in access.	Co-design interventions with local users, assess the impacts on livelihoods, and promote equitable access to training.
Dry season water use plans and agro-met services enhance climate change preparedness for smallholders.	New rules may create local tensions if introduced without consultation or clear communication.	Facilitate consensus-building processes; use trusted local institutions to promote and monitor implementation.

### Component 3

Aims to enhance climate resilience among agriculture-dependent communities by promoting gender-responsive, climate-smart agricultural practices, sustainable forest management, and diversified livelihoods. Participatory Village Forest Management Plans (VFMPs) will help secure long-term benefits and ecosystem services for forests. Local livelihoods will be enhanced through context-appropriate practices such as agroforestry, silvopasture, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and improved water and soil management. The component will also build local capacity for using climate information and early warning systems, incorporating both scientific and traditional knowledge. A special focus is placed on empowering women, youth, and marginalized groups through targeted technical training, hands-on support, and inclusive data collection systems.

However, social risks include the possibility of unequal access to new livelihood opportunities, land/resource disputes due to VFMP implementation, and marginalization of women or ethnic groups if engagement is not meaningful. There is also a risk that climate information and tools may not reach or be usable by remote or less-educated communities. To address these risks, the project must ensure inclusive planning; apply Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) where required; tailor training to diverse needs; and integrate community feedback into ongoing planning and monitoring processes.

**Table 6: Anticipated social impacts from component 3**

Social Impact	Associated Risk	Safeguard Action
Climate-resilient livelihoods and diversified income sources strengthen household adaptation capacity.	Unequal access to training, tools, or markets may exclude poor, remote, or marginalized households.	Apply inclusive targeting, tailor support, and build capacity for vulnerable groups, especially women and ethnic communities.

Community-based Forest and land management improves long-term access to ecosystem services.	Forest plans (VFMPs) or land-use decisions may restrict access or cause disputes among resource users.	Conduct participatory planning with FPIC; ensure clear land/resource use rights and equitable benefitsharing.
Local technical training and leadership opportunities empower women, youth, and underrepresented groups.	Existing gender or social norms may limit meaningful participation or leadership roles.	Provide dedicated, gendersensitive training spaces; monitor inclusive participation and feedback.
Community climate information and early warning systems enhance preparedness and risk management.	Tools may be too technical or not reach low-literacy, remote, or disadvantaged populations.	Use visual, local-language formats and grassroots channels for dissemination; incorporate traditional knowledge.

#### Component 4

Focuses on capturing, documenting, and sharing the lessons, experiences, and results generated throughout project implementation to inform climate adaptation planning and replication efforts beyond the target areas. A gender-sensitive knowledge management and communication strategy will guide the development of materials, including publications, videos, and learning tools, to ensure visibility, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with national and regional adaptation priorities. The component will promote peer learning through community exchange visits, locally adapted dissemination approaches, and participatory events. It will also strengthen national and regional knowledge systems to mainstream nature-based solutions and build institutional capacity for scaling up successful models across Lao PDR and similar regions. Lessons will contribute to broader adaptation platforms, including GEF and global learning initiatives.

**Table 7: Anticipated social impacts from component 4**

Social Impact	Associated Risk	Safeguard Action
Knowledge sharing enables replication and informs future planning at local, national, and regional levels.	Lessons may overlook local diversity or be generalized, limiting relevance in other contexts.	Ensure documentation reflects varied social, cultural, and gendered experiences; apply inclusive KM approaches.

Community exchange visits and peer learning build local capacity and empower marginalized voices.	Women, youth, and ethnic groups may be excluded from participation due to selection bias or social norms.	Use inclusive participant selection and provide logistical support (e.g., transport, childcare, interpretation).
National outreach and communication strengthen visibility of community-based adaptation practices.	Local voices may be underrepresented in national or global knowledge products and policy dialogues.	Prioritize inclusive storytelling and diverse representation in all communication materials and outreach events.
Gender-responsive KM tools improve access and uptake of adaptation knowledge and forecasts.	Communications may remain top-down or inaccessible for low-literacy or remote audiences.	Apply a gender lens to materials; use visual tools, local languages, and community-friendly channels.

**Table 8: Summary of key social risks, mitigation measures, and monitoring**

Safeguard Standard	Key Risk	Mitigation/Enhancement Measure	Monitoring Indicator
Indigenous Peoples	Disregard or violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities in decisionmaking processes	Develop an IPPF, including a process for applying Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) to any activity that could affect the rights of Indigenous Peoples in accordance with ILO Convention 169 and UNDRIP.	# of consents (quantitative) and qualitative feedback about the process.
Gender Equality and Women's Rights	Exclusion of women from decision-making processes.	Apply gender-responsive and culturally appropriate consultation methods; ensure diverse representation.	% of participants from target groups; qualitative feedback
Restriction of Access and resettlement	Restriction of access to land, forests, or water due to forest plans or nature-based solutions.	Develop a Process Framework. Conduct participatory land/resource mapping, apply FPIC, and develop benefit-sharing agreements. Identify customary rights, analyze impacts on livelihoods, and develop agreements on mitigation and, if needed, compensation.	% of FPIC processes completed; grievances resolved

<b>Community Health, Safety and Security:</b>	Grey infrastructure and water management activities upstream can affect communities, including communities downstream, and their health, safety and security.  Human-wildlife conflict affecting community members while implementing grey infrastructure.	Implementing mitigation measures described above in table 3.	
<b>Physical and Cultural Resources</b>	Possible implementation of activities in areas with physical and cultural resources. To be defined in the Stakeholder Engagement (SE) and the FPIC processes.	To be defined.	To be defined.
Conflict Sensitivity	Unequal access to training, tools, or markets, especially for remote or marginalized groups.	Utilize inclusive targeting, tailor training to local contexts, and offer ongoing support to vulnerable groups.	% of women/ethnic participants trained; satisfaction surveys
Stakeholder Engagement (SE)	Climate forecasts and early warning tools are not reaching remote or low-literacy communities.	Utilize local languages, visual aids, and trusted community channels for effective dissemination.	% of target HHs reached; user feedback on usefulness

#### 4.5 Process Framework: Livelihood Restoration Measures

A Process Framework is prepared when the CARBS Project may cause restrictions in access to natural resources in legally designated parks and protected areas. The purpose of the process framework is to establish a process by which members of potentially affected communities participate in the design of project components, determination of measures necessary to address the requirements of ESSF and SIPP, and implementation and monitoring of relevant project activities. Any change in and impact on land use and displacement of people due to project components and their activities should be based on free, prior, and informed consultations of the affected communities and relevant authorities, which should be carried out prior to finalizing any usage changes. Livelihood-related support during project implementation will be provided to the

households (HH) of all communities impacted by project-induced restrictions of access to natural and community resources within the targeted areas. This process will be organized in the following manner:

- *Screening*
- *Social assessment*
- *Livelihood Restoration Plans*
- *Mitigation measures as part of a livelihood restoration plan*
- *Compensation*

The level of detail of the Process Framework may vary depending on project activities, characteristics of restrictions and their impacts, and the number of people affected. The Process Framework supplements the project's environmental and social assessment with a participatory framework focused on the potential impacts of access restrictions.

Specifically, the Process Framework should include the following elements:

- *Project background:* Briefly describe the project and components or activities that may involve new or more stringent restrictions on natural resource use.
- *Participatory implementation:* Describe the process by which potentially affected persons will participate in determining potential measures that lead to access restrictions, mutually acceptable levels of resource use, management arrangements, and measures to address impacts on affected communities. The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and the methods of participation and decision-making should be described; decisionmaking may include the establishment of representative local structures, the use of open meetings, and involvement of existing local institutions, being sure that marginalized/vulnerable groups (such as women and youth) are able to participate in decision-making processes. Methods of consultation and participation should be in a form appropriate for affected communities and where it concerns Indigenous Peoples it should follow the criteria as defined in ILO Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for the application of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). The participatory implementation should also comply with public involvement processes indicated in the Lao Ministerial Instruction on Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Process of the Investment Projects and Activities (2014). If activities include voluntary relocation of people, the project can only support these activities if there is free, prior, and informed consent and all costs including those for reestablishing livelihoods are financed by the project.
- *Potential impacts:* Describe the process by which potentially affected communities will be involved in identifying any adverse environmental and social impacts associated with project activities, including:

- the types and extent of community use (and use by men and women) of natural resources in relevant areas, and the existing rules and institutions for the use and management of natural resources, including customary use rights. It is common for communities in rural Laos (the majority of which are ethnic people) where water supply or water source is scarce to rely on the stream/river. More specific, any activities of CARBS that reduce the stream's quantity, flows, and quality will impact downstream communities. Any project activities that involve limiting access to, diversion, blocking, or use of water from a stream, either temporary or permanent, will directly impact the downstream community. Thus, there should be rapid assessment of such impacts prior to implementation of relevant project activities.
- the threats to and impacts on the relevant areas from various activities in the area of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and other stakeholders (e.g. external poachers and traders, development activities);
- the potential livelihood impacts on men and women of new or more strictly enforced restrictions on use of resources in the area.

*Eligibility criteria:* The eligibility criteria would determine which groups and persons are eligible for assistance and mitigation measures while discouraging ineligible persons, such as opportunistic settlers, from claiming benefits. The project first needs to obtain baseline information on land use zoning and livelihood activities of the target village, primarily to determine what livelihood activities could be affected and who the groups are to be affected by land zoning, but also to show whether illegal activities exist (e.g., wildlife poachers, dynamite fishers) so to develop just and appropriate measures. The project needs to work with the government to understand the scale of these illegal activities and identify who is engaged in them. If the issue involves a large-scale external party that may require the attention of the local authorities; the project, and PMU have to decide whether to include them in the target area. However, if the activities are at the community or household level for basic livelihood activities, such as the regular practice of upland agriculture or opening of new land for cultivation - a vulnerability screening criteria/checklist shall be applied to confirm the socioeconomic status of HHs. If the affected household is considered vulnerable, landless, and very poor and is engaged in such activities for survival and livelihood purposes, they are eligible for mitigation and compensation for limited access to livelihood resources. Mitigation could include reallocating community land to affected households if the project acquires the land by replacing the cultivated area with the community land to ensure their standard of living, i.e. their family income or livelihood is equal or better than before.

The criteria may also distinguish between persons utilizing resources unsustainably for opportunistic, short term economic gain or for supporting their livelihood, and between groups with customary rights, poor and vulnerable groups, and non-residents or

immigrants. The criteria need to account for variations in seasonal use of lands by Indigenous Peoples and local communities and pastoralists. The eligibility criteria should also establish a cut-off date.

- *Measures to assist affected persons to improve their livelihoods:* Describe methods and procedures by which communities will identify and choose potential mitigating or compensating measures to be provided to those adversely affected, and procedures by which adversely affected community members will decide among the options available to them. The measures will seek to improve livelihoods in real terms to pre-displacement levels, while maintaining the sustainability of the park or protected area. However, in some circumstances affected communities may agree to restrictions without identifying one-for-one mitigation measures as they may see the long-term benefits of improved natural resource management and conservation. Possible measures may include:
  - special measures for recognition and support of customary rights to land and natural resources
  - transparent, equitable, and fair ways of more sustainable sharing of the resources
  - access to alternative resources or functional substitutes
  - alternative livelihood and income-generating activities
  - health and education benefits
  - obtaining employment, for example as park rangers or eco-tourist guides, as well as in wider project functions, such as stakeholder engagement, technical advising or monitoring and evaluation
  - technical assistance to improve land and natural resource use, and marketing of sustainable products and commodities.
- *Conflict resolution and grievance mechanism:* Describe the process for resolving disputes relating to resource use restrictions that may arise between or among affected communities, and grievances that may arise from members of communities who are dissatisfied with the eligibility criteria, community planning measures, or actual implementation. Procedures should consider local dispute resolution practices and institutions.
- *Implementation and monitoring arrangements:* Describe the implementation arrangements, including activity timetable and the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, such as the implementing partner, affected communities, and relevant government agencies. Provide clear delineation for administrative and financial responsibilities under the project. Describe arrangements for participatory monitoring of project activities and the effectiveness of measures taken that seek to improve incomes, livelihoods and living standards.

#### 4.6 Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF)

The project and its activities will respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and ethnic groups vulnerable to violation of their rights as recognized in ILO Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

##### (a) IP Population of Project Sites

Most of the population in the project area belongs to Lao linguistic ethnic groups; however, several ethnic minority groups, including the Prai, Khmou, Hmong, and Iu Mien, are also present. Among these, the Prai—part of the Mon-Khmer ethno-linguistic family—constitute the majority population in six villages across Hongsa, Sayaboury, and Saysathan districts. The Khmou, another Mon-Khmer subgroup, reside in 11 villages across six districts, generally representing a small portion of each village's population, except in Houay Dok, which comprises approximately 87% of the population. Small numbers of Hmong are found in Nakouang (Sayaboury District), Koykao (Saysathan District), and Hatdai and Phon (Pak Lay District). Additionally, six individuals from the Iu Mien group live in Doykao village, Saysathan District. Details of the ethnic composition are discussed in Table 4 below.

While it is acknowledged that these ethnic groups are present in the project-targeted villages, the specific locations and activities under the project have yet to be finalized. Therefore, it remains uncertain whether project interventions will occur on lands traditionally claimed or used by these groups or if their livelihoods will be directly impacted. Appropriate measures and support mechanisms will be developed, and pre-screening of social and Environmental impact needs to be conducted once project sites and activities are defined during the project preparation and implementation.

**Table 9: Ethnic group populations in 18 target villages**

No	District	Village	# Family	Population		
				Village	# Female	# Total
1	Hongsa	Phou Laeng-Tai	116	Prai	353	650
				Lao	5	12
				Khmou		18
2		Houay Chaung	421	Prai	1,104	2,316
				Lao	26	57
				Khmou	3	9
3		Khonpiat	157	Prai	430	964

4	Sayabouri	Nakouang	139	Lao	336	623
				Prai	19	33
				Hmong	1	3
5	Saysathan	Houay Dok	153	Lao	34	89
				Khmou	359	696
				Prai	3	4
				Nhoaun	3	7
6	Saysathan	Samakhi	102	Lao	1	1
				Prai	269	519
7		Doykao	246	Lao		339
				Prai		672
				Nhoaun		5
				Khmou		53
8	Sisaythong	129	Lao	Hmong		16
				Imien		6
9		Sakhet	62	Lao	0	4
				Prai	331	659
10	Pak Lay	Nam Phoun	187	Lao	145	291
				Khmou	2	2
11	Had Dai	286	Lao	470	973	1
			Khmou	1	3	
			Hmong	653	1,295	
12	Nam Yang	260	Lao	49	105	
			Khmou	682	1,390	
13	Phon	635	Khmou	0	1	
			Lao	1,592	3,160	
			Leu	0	36	
			Khmou	16	58	
			Hmong	1	6	
			Tai Dam	26	53	
14	Thongmixai	Mai	304	Lao	747	1,480
				Khmou	13	16
15		Det	224	Lao	526	1,042

				Khmou	17	27	
16	Phiang	Nongbuaphinon g	164	Lao	405	867	
				Nhoaun	53	112	
17		Ban Nale	278	Lao	672	1,370	
18		Namngim	70	Khmou	21	36	
				Lao	119	243	
				Prai	3	7	

### (b) Project Impacts on IPs Groups

CARBS project aims to benefit local stakeholders and communities, including Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minority groups. The benefits include engagement of local institutions that enable/ensure Ethnic Group community participation in resource planning and management, provision of non-destructive livelihood opportunities, improved availability of resources: water, and other forest products, improved soil fertility, decreased soil movement and reduced vulnerability to risks of climate change, enhanced biodiversity, and empowered ethnic groups to utilize their natural resources.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned benefits, the Project could also bring about or reinforce a number of adverse social impacts that can be mitigated, such as the ones outlined below.

- Marginalized members of participating communities may not be able to engage with project activities or have equal opportunities to participate in decision making processes during project implementation.
- Proposed land tenure arrangements for the conservation of reforestation and forest restoration in the four river basins may restrict access to resources, affect customary land rights, and create some level of economic displacement (particularly for marginalized people and ethnic groups). This can cause potential for restriction of availability, quality of and access to resources, potential economic displacement due to loss of access to resources due to imposed land acquisition or restriction of access, possible effect upon land tenure arrangements and/or community-based property rights/customary rights to land, and/or resources. If main livelihood activities pre-exist in a newly identified watershed conservation area, this may limit community's access to resources and continued cultivation on that land. Access restriction to resources, including land, needs mitigation measures, including compensation if necessary.

### (c) Mitigation Planning

The project will identify measures and actions in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy that avoid, or if avoidance is not possible, reduce potentially significant adverse social and environmental impacts to acceptable levels. Specifically, the ESMP: (a) identifies and summarizes all anticipated significant adverse social and environmental impacts; (b) describes – with technical details – each mitigation measure, including the type of impact to which it relates and the conditions under which it is required (e.g., continuously or in the event of contingencies), together with designs, equipment descriptions, and operating procedures, as appropriate; (c) estimates any potential social and environmental impacts of these measures and any residual impacts following mitigation; and (d) takes into account, and is consistent with, other required mitigation plans (e.g. for displacement, indigenous peoples). The mitigation planning can follow key steps and processes below:

- Screen for Impacts: Identify Indigenous communities, especially those marginalized and vulnerable to human rights violations, in the project area and assess potential risks including environmental and social context.
- Conduct Impact Assessment: Gather baseline data, assess risks, and engage Indigenous communities through consultation.
- Ensure Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC): Seek consent from Indigenous communities for any project activities affecting their lands or resources and proceed with said activities if consent is given.
- Develop Mitigation Measures: Create strategies to minimize risks, protect livelihoods, safeguard cultural heritage, and address environmental impacts.
- Monitor and Evaluate: Involve Indigenous communities in monitoring, provide feedback mechanisms, and adapt measures as needed.
- Capacity Building: Train both Indigenous communities and project staff to enhance understanding and engagement.

#### (d) Steps for Formulating an IPP

WWF's Standard on Indigenous Peoples requires that, regardless of whether Project affected IPs are affected adversely or positively, an IPP needs to be prepared with care and with the full and effective participation of affected communities.

The requirements include screening to confirm and identify affected IP groups in the project areas, social analysis to improve the understanding of the local context and affected communities; a process of free, prior, and informed consent with the affected IPs' communities in order to fully identify their views and to obtain their broad community support to the project; and

development of project-specific measures to avoid adverse impacts and enhance culturally appropriate benefits.

Minimum requirements for projects working in areas with IPs are:

- Identification of IP groups through screening;
- Assessment of project impacts;
- Consultations with affected IP communities following FPIC principles and obtain their broad community support;
- Development of sites specific IPs plan (IPP) to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits; and
- In activities with no impacts, the requirements could be limited to consultations during implementation to keep Indigenous Peoples and local communities informed about project activities and documentation of all consultations held.

#### (e) Development of IP Plans (IPP)

Based on the results of the social assessments, an IP Plan shall be developed for each project site.

The contents of the IPP will depend on the specific project activities identified and the impacts these activities may have on IPs in the project area. As a minimum, the IPP should include the following information:

- ✓ Description of the IPs affected by the proposed activity;
- ✓ Summary of the proposed activity;
- ✓ Detailed description of IPs' participation and consultation process during implementation;
- ✓ Description of how the project will ensure culturally appropriate benefits and avoid or mitigate adverse impacts;
- ✓ Budget;
- ✓ Mechanism for complaints and conflict resolution; and
- ✓ Monitoring and evaluation system that includes monitoring of particular issues and measures concerning indigenous communities.

For project activities that may result in changes in IPs' access to natural resources for their livelihoods, the provisions of the Process Framework (Section 4.5) should be followed.

#### (f) Free, Prior and Informed Consent Framework

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is an approach for ensuring that the rights of IPs are guaranteed in any decision that may negatively affect their lands, territories or livelihoods. It ensures that they have the right to give or withhold their consent to these activities without fear

of reprisal or coercion, in a timeframe suited to their own culture, and with the resources to make informed decisions.

FPIC is composed of four separate components:

- Free—Without coercion, intimidation, manipulation, threat or bribery.
- Prior—indicates that consent has been sought sufficiently in advance, before any project activities have been authorized or commenced, and that the time requirements of the indigenous community's consultation/consensus processes have been respected.
- Informed—Information is provided in a language and form that are easily understood by the community, covering the nature, scope, purpose, duration and locality of the project or activity as well as information about areas that will be affected; economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts, all involved actors, and the procedures that the project or activity may entail.
- Consent—The right of IPs to give or withhold their consent to any decision that will impact their lands, territories, resources, and livelihoods.

The processes of consultation and obtaining FPIC will be applied to all the aspects of the project (financed under WWF) that may negatively affect the rights of the IPs and ethnic minorities. FPIC will be required on any matters that may negatively affect the rights and interests, water areas, lands, resources, territories (whether titled or untitled to the people in question) and traditional livelihoods of the IPs concerned.

Thus, FPIC is integral to the execution of the proposed project, as the project areas include diverse indigenous communities. WWF recognizes the strong cultural and spiritual ties many IP groups have to their lands and territories and committed to strengthen these ties in all WWF/GEF/GCF funded projects. FPIC gives IPs the freedom to determine their own development path and biodiversity conservation. The following checklist (Box 1) may assist in helping to determine whether some Project activities may require an FPIC process.

**Box 1. Checklist for appraising whether an activity may require an FPIC Process**

1. Will the activity involve the use, taking or damage of cultural, intellectual, religious and/or spiritual property from IPs?
2. Will the activity adopt or implement any legislative or administrative measures that will affect the rights, lands, territories and/or resources of IPs (e.g. in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources; land reform; legal reforms that may discriminate de jure or de facto against IPs, etc.)?
3. Will the activity involve natural resource extraction such as logging or mining or agricultural development on the lands/territories of IPs?

4. Will the activity involve any decisions that will affect the status of IPs' rights to their lands/territories/water resources, resources or livelihoods?
5. Will the activity involve the accessing of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and Indigenous Peoples and local communities?
6. Will the activity affect IPs' political, legal, economic, social, or cultural institutions and/or practices?
7. Will the activity involve making commercial use of natural and/or cultural resources on lands subject to traditional ownership and/or under customary use by IPs?
8. Will the activity involve decisions regarding benefit-sharing arrangements, when benefits are derived from the lands/territories/resources of IPs (e.g. natural resource management or extractive industries)?
9. Will the activity have an impact on the continuance of the relationship of the IPs with their land or their culture?
10. Will the interventions/activities restrict on access to NTFPs, timber, lands, etc. and other sources of livelihoods and community resources?

If the answer is 'Yes' to any of these questions in Box 1, FPIC will be required of the potentially affected indigenous peoples for the activity that may result in the impacts identified in the questions. When an FPIC process is required, a stakeholder consultation process will need to be initiated to define and agree on an FPIC process with the community or communities. The IPs who may be affected by the Project will have a central role in defining the FPIC process, based on their own cultural and governance practices. The consultation process should be launched as early as possible to ensure full, effective and meaningful participation of IPs.

All consultations with IPs should be carried out in good faith with the objective of seeking agreement or consent. Consultation and consent are about IPs' right to meaningfully and effectively participate in decision-making on matters that may affect them. Consultations and information disclosure are integral parts of FPIC process and any development support planning for IPs to ensure that the priorities, preferences, and needs of the indigenous groups are taken into consideration adequately. With that objective in view, a strategy for consultation with IPs has been proposed so that all consultations are conducted in a manner to ensure full and effective participation. The approach to full and effective participation is primarily based upon transparent, good faith interactions, so that everyone in the community is empowered to join fully in the decision-making process. It includes providing information in a language and manner the community understands and, in a timeframe, compatible with the community's cultural norms.

The affected IPs will be actively engaged in all stages of the project cycle, including project preparation, and feedback of consultations with the IPs will be reflected in the project design, followed by disclosure. Their participation in project preparation and planning has informed project design and will continue to actively participate in the project execution. Once the IPP or

livelihood restoration plan (LRP) is prepared, it will be translated into local languages (as applicable) and made available to them before implementation, including in formats other than written documents if and when requested by the communities.

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) of MONRE shall ensure adequate flow of funds for consultation and facilitation of planned activities within the IPP. Project brochures and pamphlet with infographic containing basic information such as sub-project location, impact estimates, and mitigation measures proposed, and implementation schedule will be prepared, translated into a language understandable to the IPs, and distributed among them. If literacy is low in the communities, other means of communication must also be agreed upon with them, especially targeting community members who may have lower literacy levels.

A range of consultative methods will be adopted to carry out consultation including, but not limited to: focus group discussions (FGDs), public meetings, community discussions, and in-depth and key informant interviews; in addition to the censuses and socioeconomic surveys.

The key stakeholders to be consulted during screening, impact assessment; design and implementation of IPP, LRP and Process Framework (PF) include:

- All affected persons belonging to IPs/marginalized groups;
- Appropriate government Departments/Ministries
- Provincial and municipal government representatives;
- Insert relevant community cooperatives, management structures, umbrella bodies, etc; ●  
The private sector:
- Academia representatives.

The project will ensure adequate representation of each group of stakeholders mentioned above while conducting consultations using various tools and approaches.

The views of IPs communities are to be considered during execution of project activities, while respecting their practices, beliefs and cultural preferences. A consent will be sought prior to data collection and engagement of IPs and they can withdraw their consent at any moment in time. It is important to keep engagement active during project implementation. The outcome of the consultations will be documented into the periodical reports and included in the project's trimester progress reports. The Project Manager, with support of the Safeguards Specialist will also ensure that affected people are involved in the decision-making process.

### **Procedures to seek FPIC**

Project interventions and activities adversely affecting the IPs, therefore, need to follow a process of free, prior, and informed consent, with the affected IPs in order to fully identify their views and

to seek their broad community support to the project; and development of projectspecific measures to avoid adverse impacts and enhance culturally appropriate benefits.

Community involvement is a critical component of FPIC, as FPIC is a collective process, rather than an individual decision. In practice, FPIC is implemented through a participatory process involving all affected groups that is carried out prior to the finalization or implementation of any project activities, decisions or development plans. FPIC is established through good faith negotiation between the project and affected IPs. A facilitator should support this process, a person who will be available throughout the Project, who speaks the necessary languages and is aware of the project context. This person may or may not be part of the PMU but should be agreeable to all parties involved.

Box 2 below outlines some generic steps to be followed for FPIC with the affected IPs in order to seek their broad community support.

**Box 2. Steps for Seeking FPIC from Project Affected Indigenous Peoples**

1. Identify communities, sub-groups within communities, and other stakeholders with potential interests/rights (both customary and legal) on the land or other natural resources that are proposed to be developed, managed, utilized, or impacted by the proposed project activity.
2. Identify any rights (customary and legal) or claims of these communities to land or resources (e.g., water rights, water access points, or rights to hunt or extract forest products) that overlap or are adjacent to the site(s) or area(s) of the proposed project activity;
3. Identify whether the proposed project activity may diminish the rights, claims, or interests identified in Step 2 above and also identify natural resources that may be impacted by this project and the legal and customary laws that govern these resources;
4. Provide the details of proposed project activities to be implemented along with their likely impacts on IPs either positively or negatively, as well as the corresponding proposed mitigation measures in a language or means of communication understandable by the affected IPs;

5. All project information provided to IPs should be in a form appropriate to local needs. Local languages should usually be used and efforts should be made to include all community members, including women and members of different generations and social groups (e.g. clans and socioeconomic background);
6. Selection of facilitator, who will be available throughout the Project, who speaks the necessary languages and is aware of the project context, and is culturally and gendersensitive. The facilitator should be trustworthy to affected IPs. It will also be helpful to involve any actors which are likely to be involved in implementing the FPIC process, such as local or national authorities
7. If the IP communities are organized in community associations or umbrella organizations, these should usually be consulted.
8. Provide sufficient time for IPs' decision-making processes (it means allocate sufficient time for internal decision-making processes to reach conclusions that are considered legitimate by the majority of the concerned participants)
9. Support a process to create a mutually respected decision-making structure in cases where two or more communities claim rights over a project site.
10. If FPIC is not familiar to the community, engage in a dialogue to identify existing decision-making structures that support the principles underlying FPIC.
11. Identify the community-selected representative(s) or “focal people” for decision making purpose-- identification of the decisionmakers and parties to the negotiation.
12. Agree on the decisionmakers or signatory parties and/or customary binding practice that will be used to conclude the agreement, introducing the chosen representatives, their role in the community, how they were chosen, their responsibility and role as representatives;
13. If consent is reached, document agreed upon outcomes/activities that are to be included into the project, and agree on a feedback and a project grievance redress mechanism. Agreements reached must be mutual and recognized by all parties, taking into consideration customary modes of decision-making and consensus-seeking. These may include votes, a show of hands, the signing of a document witnessed by a third party, performing a ritual ceremony that makes the agreement binding, and so forth;
14. When seeking “broad community consent/support” for the project, it should be ensured that all relevant social groups of the community have been adequately consulted. This may mean the project staff have to seek out marginalized members, or those who don't have decision-making power, such as women. When this is the case and the “broad” majority is overall positive about the project, it would be appropriate to conclude that broad community support/consent has been achieved. Consensus building approaches are often the norm, but “broad community consent/support” does not mean that everyone has to agree to a given project;
15. When the community agrees on the project, document the agreement process and outcomes including benefits, compensation, or mitigation to the community,

commensurate with the loss of use of land or resources in forms and languages accessible and made publicly available to all members of the community, providing for stakeholder review and authentication;

16. The agreements or special design features providing the basis for broad community support should be described in the IPs Plan; any disagreements should also be documented; and

17. Agree on jointly defined modes of monitoring and verifying agreements as well as their related procedures: how these tasks will be carried out during project implementation, and the commission of independent periodic reviews (if considered) intervals satisfactory to all interest groups.

(a) Disclosure

The final IPPF and PF and any site specific IPPs and LRP will be disclosed on the website of the DWR and the website of WWF and made available to affected IPs; information dissemination and consultation will continue throughout project execution. Summaries of IPPs and mitigation measures proposed in IPPs will be translated into the Lao language and paper copies will be made available to the affected persons in the office of relevant local authorities.

(b) Institutional and monitoring arrangements

The Safeguards Specialist will be responsible for the development and implementation of the IPPF and any IPP, with support from the PMU Project Manager on logistical matters (e.g., conducting field visits, reaching out to IP communities, convening meetings, etc.).

The Safeguards Specialist will periodically report on the implementation of the IPPF/IPP to the Project Manager, DWR of MONRE, and WWF US. Monitoring and reporting will be undertaken together with reporting on the other ESMF commitments (as indicated in Section 5.4).

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

### 5.1. Procedures for the Identification and Management of Environmental and Social Impacts

The following is an exclusion list of activities, which will not be financed by the **CARBS** project. This includes activities that:

- Lead to land management practices that cause degradation (biological or physical) of the soil and water. Examples include, but are not limited to: the felling of trees in core zones and critical watersheds; activities involving quarrying and mining; commercial logging; or dredge fishing.

- Negatively affect areas of critical natural habitats or breeding ground of known rare/endangered species.
- Significantly increase GHG emissions.
- Use genetically modified organisms or modern biotechnologies or their products.
- Involve the procurement and/or use of pesticides and other chemicals specified as persistent organic pollutants under the Stockholm Convention or within categories IA, IB, or II by the World Health Organization.
- Develop forest plantations.
- Result in the loss of biodiversity, alteration of the functioning of ecosystems, and introduction of new invasive alien species.
- Involve the procurement or use of weapons and munitions or fund military activities.
- Lead to private land acquisition and/or physical displacement and voluntary or involuntary relocation of people, including non-titled and migrant people.
- Contribute to exacerbating any inequality or gender gap that may exist.
- Involve illegal child labor, forced labor, sexual exploitation or other forms of exploitation.
- Adversely affect indigenous peoples' rights, lands, natural resources, territories, livelihoods, knowledge, social fabric, traditions, governance systems, and culture or heritage (physical and non-physical or intangible) inside and/or outside the project area.
- Negatively impact areas with cultural, historical or transcendent values for individuals and communities.

In advance of the initiation of any project activity, the Safeguards Specialist should fill in detailed information regarding the nature of the activity and its specific location in the *Safeguards Eligibility and Impacts Screening* form (Annex 1). Part 1 of this form comprises of basic information regarding the activity; Part 2 contains basic “pre-screening” questions. If the response to any of the questions in these two parts is “Yes”, the activity will be deemed ineligible for funding under the Project. The executing partners will thus be required to change the nature or location of the proposed activity so that it complies with all safeguards requirements and all responses at the *Safeguards Eligibility and Impacts Screening* form are negative.

If the activity is deemed eligible according to Part 2, an environmental and social screening procedure will be carried out in accordance with Part 3 of *Safeguard Eligibility and Impacts Screening* format, which is based on the WWF’s SIPP and applicable Lao laws and regulations. The executing partners shall respond to the specific questions in Part 3 of the form, provide general conclusions regarding the main environmental and social impacts of each proposed activity, outline the required permits or clearances, and specify whether any additional assessments or safeguard documents (e.g., ESMP) should be prepared.

Issues that are considered as part of this environmental and social screening include the following:

- a. Need for government-land acquisition;
- b. Environmental impacts (e.g., dust, noise, smoke, ground vibration, pollution, flooding, etc.) and loss or damage to natural habitat;
- c. Social impacts: identification of vulnerable groups or indigenous peoples, impacts on community resources, impacts on livelihoods and socio-economic opportunities, restrictions of access to natural resources, land usage conflicts, impacts on tangible or intangible cultural heritage, etc.; and
- d. Health and safety issues (both for workers and for Indigenous Peoples and local communities).

The screening of each activity should be undertaken by the Safeguards Specialist. If the screening process indicates that additional assessments or safeguards documents shall be prepared, these should be carried out by the executing partners prior to the start of activities.

If the screening reveals adverse environmental or social impacts that may arise from the planned activity, an ESMP should be prepared. The ESMP should be prepared by the Safeguards Specialist, in collaboration with the Project Manager(s).

## 5.2. Guidelines for ESMP Development

In case that the Environmental and Social screening process identifies any adverse environmental or social impacts as a result of specific project activities, the Safeguards Specialist in collaboration with the Project Manager(s) should develop a site- and activity-specific ESMP. The ESMP should be prepared before the initiation of the project activity and closely follow the guidance provided in this ESMF.

The ESMP should describe adverse environmental and social impacts that are expected to occur as a result of the specific project activity, outline concrete measures that should be undertaken to avoid or mitigate these impacts, and specify the implementation arrangements for administering these measures (including institutional structures, roles, communication, consultations, and reporting procedures).

The structure of the ESMP should be as follows:

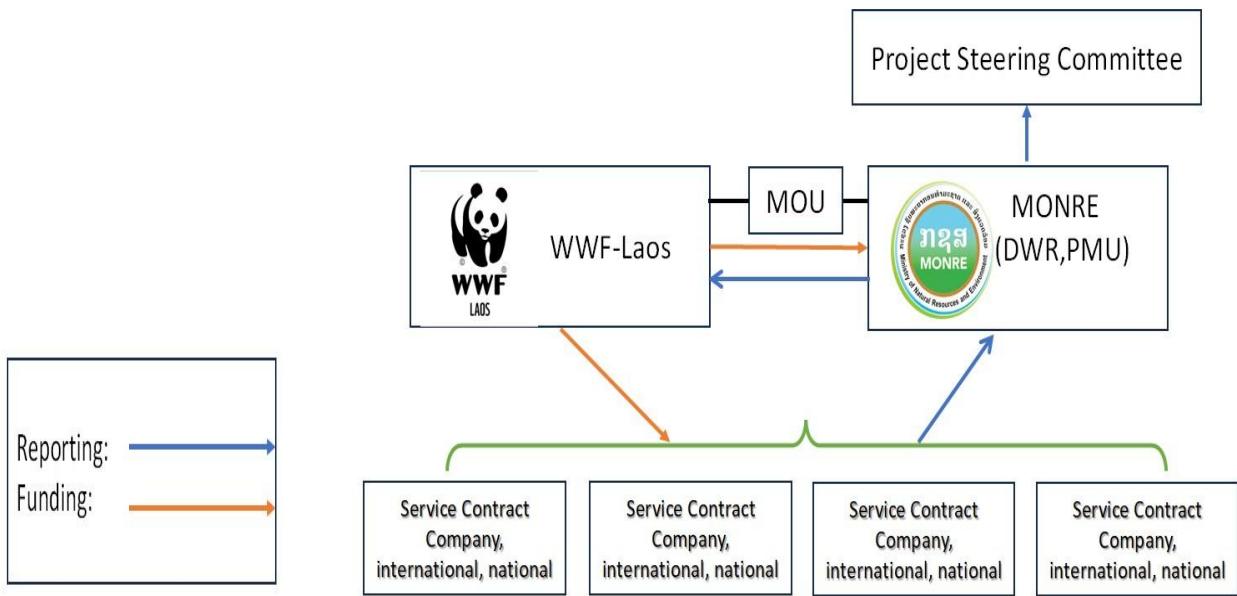
- (i) **A concise introduction:** explaining the context and objectives of the ESMP, the connection of the proposed activity to the project, and the findings of the screening process.

- (ii) **Subproject description:** Objective and description of activities, nature and scope of the project (location with map, construction and/or operation processes, equipment to be used, site facilities and workers and their camps; bill of quantities if civil works are involved, activity schedule).
- (iii) **Baseline environmental and social data:** Key environmental information or measurements such as topography, land use and water use, soil types, and water quality/pollution; and data on socioeconomic conditions of the local population. Photos showing the existing conditions of the project sites should also be included.
- (iv) **Expected impacts and mitigation measures:** Description of specific environmental and social impacts of the activity and corresponding mitigation measures.
- (v) **ESMP implementation arrangements:** Responsibilities for design, bidding and contracts where relevant, monitoring, reporting, recording and auditing.
- (vi) **Capacity Need and Budget:** Capacity needed for the implementation of the ESMP and cost estimates for implementation of the ESMP.
- (vii) **Consultation and Disclosure Mechanisms:** Timeline and format of disclosure.
- (viii) **Monitoring:** Environmental and social compliance monitoring with responsibilities.
- (ix) **Grievance Mechanism:** Provide information about the grievance mechanism, how PAPs can access it, and the grievance redress process.
- (x) **A site-specific community and stakeholder engagement plan:** In order to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and local communities and other relevant stakeholders are fully involved in the implementation of the ESMP, a stakeholder engagement plan should be included in the ESMP. Specific guidelines on community engagement are provided in Section 5.8 below.

### 5.3. Stakeholders' Role & Responsibilities in the ESMF Implementation

#### (a) General

The institutional arrangement (Figure 6) for project implementation includes WWF as the GEF Agency, DWR as the Lead Executing Agency, and a Project Steering Committee.



**Figure 6: Project Institutional Arrangement**

**DWR is the Lead Executing Agency** for the project, which will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of project activities. As part of its responsibilities, DWR will host a Project Management Unit (PMU). The PMU will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the project, including project administration (including issuing sub-grants), project management, and monitoring and reporting. The PMU will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the project, including project administration (including issuing sub-grants), project management, coordination, and monitoring and reporting.

**Project Steering Committee (PSC):** will oversee and guide the project. The PSC will be composed of government representatives from the central (Ministry and Department) and local (provincial and district) levels together with WWF in an observer role. The PMU will act as the secretariat for the PSC.

**WWF GEF Agency:** WWF-US, through its WWF GEF Agency will: (i) provide consistent and regular project oversight to ensure the achievement of project objectives; (ii) liaise between the project and the GEF Secretariat; (iii) report on project progress to GEF Secretariat (annual Project Implementation Report); (iv) ensure that both GEF and WWF policy requirements and standards are applied and met (i.e. reporting obligations, technical, fiduciary, M&E); (v) approve annual workplan and budget; (vi) approve budget revisions, certify fund availability and transfer funds;

(vii) organize the terminal evaluation and review project audits; (viii) certify project operational and financial completion, and (ix) provide no-objection to key terms of reference for project management unit.

**(b) Safeguards Implementation**

Specific arrangements and responsibilities related to the implementation of environmental and social safeguards requirements, as stated in this ESMF/PF are as follows:

**GEF Implementing Agency:**

- WWF GEF Agency in WWF-US: provides general oversight project execution.

**GEF Executing Agencies:**

- The Department of Water Resources of MONRE
- The Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE) with support from WWF-Laos.

The agencies will be responsible for:

- Hosting the PMU
- Preparation of procurement plans
- Preparation of terms of references
- Management of consultant activities
- Management of output deliverables
- Maintenance of records of all project-related documentation
- Management and administration of the Knowledge Management Plan
- Preparation of technical progress reports
- Consultation with project stakeholders
- Coordination with project partners, including sub-grantees.
- Development of semi-annual and annual progress reports

**Project Steering Committee:**

- Provide executive and strategic guidance.
- Ensure alignment with national and GEF requirements and standards.

**WWF-Laos:**

- Financial management and preparation of financial reports for the project
- Sub-grant assessments, awards and management
- Procurement (based on plans developed with the PMU)
- PMU Staff recruitment (recruited by WWF-Laos on behalf of government but hosted at DWR offices)
- Technical assistance to support government and sub-grantee delivery of the project.
- Support and recommendations on specific safeguards issues if required

**PMU:**

- Ensure project oversight and coordination for effective and timely implementation of safeguard commitments as per Environmental management plan
- Deliver project results in alignment with WWF/GEF project standards.
- Development and management of detailed work plans and timeframes

**Safeguards and Gender Specialist within PMU:**

- Take overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with the ESMF Safeguards and associated annexes.
- Confirm that bidding documents and contracts incorporate relevant environmental and social safeguard clauses, with particular attention to occupational health and safety provisions.
- Submit reports on safeguard implementation and compliance to the PSC and WWF GEF Agency.
- Screen all project activities to assess potential environmental and social impacts.
- Develop site-specific Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs) where required.
- Oversee contractors to ensure adherence to safeguards requirements.
- Organize consultation meetings with local stakeholders to provide updates on project activities, ensuring inclusive and participatory engagement, including FPIC principles for Indigenous Peoples, and thoroughly document all consultations.
- Conduct field visits to monitor project activities and verify compliance with safeguard requirements.
- Facilitate the disclosure of safeguards-related documents to relevant stakeholders.
- Monitor safeguards implementation and ensure sub-projects follow the best practices and guidelines outlined in the ESMF.
- Manage the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), including tracking grievances, overseeing resolution processes, and providing feedback to complainants.

- Advise the Project Manager on safeguard-related issues and support adaptive management as necessary.
- Report on safeguards performance to the Project Steering Committee, WWF GEF Agency, and other relevant stakeholders.

#### 5.4. Monitoring

The compliance of Project activities with the ESMF will be thoroughly monitored throughout the project implementation period as outlined below:

- ***Monitoring at the project level***

The Project Management Unit (PMU) holds the overall responsibility for implementing the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and monitoring compliance with the project's environmental safeguard activities. This is to ensure that all activities are aligned with the required standards and guidelines for environmental and social safeguards throughout the project lifecycle.

The GESI and Safeguards Expert plays a crucial role in ensuring the successful implementation of field activities while maintaining compliance with the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF). His or her responsibilities include providing technical support to project staff in conducting environmental and social screenings, developing Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs), and preparing other necessary compliance documentation. They also oversee the project's Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), evaluating the effectiveness of grievance resolution to ensure timely and satisfactory outcomes for all stakeholders.

In addition, the expert monitors and reports on overall safeguards compliance. These reports are shared with key stakeholders, such as the Project Manager of the PMU, the Technical Team Leader, the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) and Communication Officer, the Project Coordination Committee (PCC), the Project Steering Committee (PSC), and the WWF GEF Agency. By fulfilling these responsibilities, the Safeguards Expert upholds high standards of environmental and social accountability throughout the project.

- ***Monitoring at the field activity level***

The GESI and Safeguards Expert is responsible for overseeing all field activities to ensure they fully comply with the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and adhere to the environmental assessment and clearance requirements set by MONRE. The Expert must also ensure that all external contractors and service providers involved in the project meet the safeguard requirements specified in the ESMF, Process Framework, Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF), and Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) for a project site specific, as applicable. Likewise, the Expert is required to prepare and submit monthly monitoring reports to the Project Management Unit (PMU).

***Disbursement of project funds will be contingent upon their full compliance with the safeguards requirements.***

- ***Monitoring at the agency level***

WWF as the project's implementing agency and DWR the executing agency are responsible for overseeing compliance with the ESMF.

In order to facilitate compliance monitoring, DWR will include information on the status of ESMF implementation in the six-monthly Project Progress Reports (PPRs) and the annual Project Implementation Review (PIR) reports.

## 5.5. Community Engagement

Community consultation has been an integral part of these assessments as well as the proposed project design and will be carried out as a continuous process through the project cycle. This section describes the community engagement during project preparation and implementation. This section is an overview, whereas the full details will be written out in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

The objectives of community engagement are to (i) offer opportunities for stakeholders to raise their concerns and submit their opinions, to incorporate this into the project when possible, and to provide this feedback to communities, (ii) create avenues for complaints handling and grievance management, (iii) create opportunities for information sharing and disclosure, (iv) foster strong project community relationships, and (v) ensure meaningful consultation and the consideration of community's expectations and concerns into the implementation arrangements for the project, including feedback on environmental and social mitigation measures and other technical issues and their implementation. Strategies and approaches for communication at various stages of the project are discussed below.

### (a) Community engagement during Project Preparation

During project preparation, various stakeholder consultations were conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the project's context and to formulate an effective execution strategy. These consultations included national-level workshops involving government officials, relevant ministries, agencies, NGOs, and other key stakeholders and provincial-level consultations, involving relevant local stakeholders. The workshops and consultations focused on aligning the project with national and local policies, identifying institutional and regulatory opportunities, and incorporating insights from civil society to address local needs and concerns.

Input from these diverse groups helped refine the project design, ensure inclusivity, and establish a clear execution strategy, covering timelines, resource allocation, and risk management. This collaborative and inclusive approach aimed to create a project that is both feasible and sustainable, with broad-based support from all stakeholders.

(b) Community engagement during ESMF/PF Preparation

WWF's requirements emphasize the need for a comprehensive Environmental and Social Impact Assessment that incorporates the active participation of Indigenous Peoples. This approach ensures that both environmental and social issues of a project are thoroughly assessed to identify potential risks and opportunities to the environment and Indigenous Peoples and local communities. By including ethnic minority communities in the study, WWF aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the local livelihoods, culture, and values. The early engagement of the community also aligns with the Decree on Environmental Impact Assessment (2019) of Laos. All community engagement activities require the participation of the village authority, depending on the scope and scale of activities. Village development committees are responsible for sector works, including youth and women Unions. The village committee /authority can also help facilitate and support communication with the community or specific groups within the community.

The communities residing in 18 target villages of six districts are prioritized for the community engagement for preparing the ESMF, as they are the ultimate recipients of both the negative impacts and benefits arising from the project. These impacts could range from changes to natural resources, ecosystems, and livelihoods to potential opportunities such as employment, improved infrastructure, and community development. The consultations aimed to engage target communities by informing them about the project's objectives and activities, while also discussing potential adverse impacts and benefits to gather their input on how to avoid or mitigate such effects and optimizing benefits.

A series of consultations with local stakeholders were carried out to prepare the ESMF to ensure inclusivity and representation of diverse community perspectives. A total of 14 separate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with male and female groups. The discussions engaged various stakeholders, including ethnic minority people, community leaders, marginalized people. The discussions served as a platform for participants to voice their concerns, experiences, and recommendations regarding the project. In addition to the FGDs, discussions were held with key stakeholders at provincial and district levels such as PONRE, Department of Agriculture and Forestry (DAFO), Lao Women's Union (LWU), and LFNC.

The consultations engaged 104 participants, including the Prai and Kmu ethnic minority people, comprising 50% or 52 of the participants. This demonstrates a significant level of engagement from ethnic minority communities, ensuring their voices and concerns were well-represented in

the consultation process. Besides, women represented 41% of the participants, indicating their active involvement and growing role in decision-making processes and gender equality within project target villages. The balanced representation of both ethnic groups and women highlights the inclusiveness of the consultation process and underscores their critical role in shaping environmentally and socially sustainable interventions. The details of ethnic group representatives in the consultations are provided in table 10 below.

**Table 10: community stakeholders engaged during ESMF preparation**

District	Village	Total participant/women	Ethnicity			Nhoaun	Lue
			Lao	Prai	Khmu		
Sayaboury	Konpiat	14/6	2	12	0	0	0
	Sakhet	17/8	1	16	0	0	0
Pak Lay	Souvannaphoum	14/7	13	0	1	0	0
	Nam Yang	18/8	18	0	0	0	0
Hongsa	Houay Chouang	12/6	11	0	1	0	0
Phiang	Nongbouaphinong	21/11	8	0	0	12	1
Thongmixay	Deth	8/2	7	0	0	1	0
Total		104/44	60	28	2	13	1

(c) Community engagement during project implementation

The communities residing in and around the project area are the ultimate recipient of project impacts and benefits, and therefore a key stakeholder- their participation and support is key to project success. In order to achieve this, the project has outlined strategies that will be implemented to support appropriate and inclusive community engagement during project implementation. These include:

- Meaningful information in a format and language that is readily understandable
- Information dissemination in advance of consultation activities when possible
- Information dissemination in a manner and location easy for stakeholders to access it
- Establishment of a dialogue that gives the Project and communities the opportunity to exchange views and information, and have issues heard and addressed
- Inclusiveness in representation of views, including those of women, the elderly, people living with a disability, ethnic peoples, and other vulnerable people, as necessary
- Removal of any identified obstacles to participation so that views of different stakeholders can be obtained
- Clear mechanisms for responding to people's concerns, suggestions, and/or grievances

- Incorporation of feedback of stakeholders into project design, and report back to stakeholders
- Stakeholder engagement monitoring activities
- Incorporation of stakeholder engagement as part of the Project management responsibilities of project staff, especially the Safeguards Expert.

The project will promote two-way communication with target communities through consultations to share information about the project and get feedback, including on issues such as project activities and potential benefits and impacts on local livelihoods and ways to mitigate potential project risks and impacts. To include viewpoints from vulnerable and ethnic minority people, the project will facilitate small, focused meetings where vulnerable stakeholders and ethnic minority groups are more comfortable asking questions or raising concerns.

Although Lao is the official language, some ethnic group members of Prai, especially women in target villages in Saysathan still do not speak and/or understand Lao well. Therefore, during project implementation and additional data collection, the engagement process will consider the needs of diverse groups by providing good facilitation through appropriate translators or ethnic language speakers to address language barriers. During the consultation, both project information and its grievance mechanism should be available for participants and will be translated into IPs' language by a local interpreter. This will ensure that stakeholders understand project information and meaningfully participate in the consultation and discussion. In addition, the project will pay special attention to ethnic and gender sensitivity by considering ethnic groups' gender perspectives and incorporating them into the communication strategy.

The project will also prepare a stand-alone Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) and Gender Action Plan (GAP), which will provide comprehensive discussions on gender and stakeholder engagement. These Plans will be followed to ensure that stakeholders are engaged in project implementation and particularly in the further assessment of social and environmental impacts and the development of appropriate management measures. Project Stakeholder Engagement Plans will be updated during project implementation based on the assessments and management plans conducted in line with this ESMF, as needed.

## 5.6. Guidance for SEAH Risk Mitigation

A detailed plan to address SEAH risks will be developed within the first six months of project startup, using both information already included in the GAP and updated procedures for SEAH-specific grievances outlined in below. This will include:

- a. Inclusion of any identified SEAH-related risk mitigation measures into the project's annual workplan and budget and annual reporting requirements.

- a. This will require the participation of the entire PMU in reviewing any identified risks and mitigation measures to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities and the responsibilities of project partners, contractors, and any other entities who will receive GEF funding for this project.
- b. Develop a communication mechanism between the local project partners (Natural Resources and Environment offices at provincial and district levels) and the Safeguards in order to address in a timely manner any SEAH situation that may arise at the territorial level. This early warning system will be included in the project's security protocol, and will require:
  - a. Reporting any such grievances or challenges within a defined time period of no less than 5 business days. This shall hold true even if grievances are informally submitted (i.e. not through an official GRM)
  - b. The confidentiality of anyone who has received a complaint or become aware of a SEAH-related situation, including protecting the personal identifiable information of all parties- both the potential victim(s) and potential perpetrators(s).
  - c. Strengthen the capacities of the project's implementing partners on prevention of GBV and SEAH as well as WWF policies and codes of conduct to address SEAH risk. These trainings will be conducted in partnership by the project's Gender & SEAH and ESS Specialists and should include:
    - a. Training within the first 3 months of project implementation that have been prepared with oversight and final approval from the WWF GCF AE Safeguards and Gender Leads.
    - b. Be mandatory for all implementing partner staff who will be involved in the GCFfinanced activities.
  - e. Strengthen the landscape technical committees so that they can establish rapid response mechanisms to address issues associated with threats to environmental leaders and gender-based violence. This includes, but is not limited to:
    - a. In cases of such threats, provide them with additional resources to ensure a timely response that is focused on the well-being of anyone who is threatened.
    - b. Provide the same GBV and SEAH training to these committees that the implementing partners will receive.
  - f. Strengthen the capacities of the entities that participate in the multi-stakeholder bodies that will be strengthened by the project, so that specific prevention and rapid response measures are included to address GBV and SEAH-specific threats, including social and environmental leaders they may work with.
    - a. Provide the same GBV and SEAH training to these multi-stakeholder bodies that the implementing partners will receive.

## 5.7. Communications and Disclosure

All affected communities and relevant stakeholders shall be informed about the ESMF requirements and commitments. The executive summary of the ESMF will be translated into Lao language and made available along with the ESMF and SEP on the websites of DWR, as well as the websites of the WWF GEF Agency. Hard copies of the ESMF will be placed in appropriate public locations and at DWR. Project Managers and the Safeguards and Gender Specialists at DWR will be responsible for raising community awareness regarding the requirements of the ESMF and will also ensure that all external contractors and service providers are fully familiar and comply with the ESMF and other safeguards documents.

During the implementation of the project, activity-specific ESMPs shall be prepared in consultation with affected communities and disclosed to all stakeholders prior to project concept finalization. All draft ESMPs shall be reviewed and approved by DWR in consultation with the PSC and WWF GEF Agency in advance of their public disclosure. The PMU must also disclose to all affected parties any action plans prepared during project implementation, including gender mainstreaming.

Disclosure should be carried out in a manner that is meaningful and understandable to the affected people. For this purpose, the executive summary of ESMPs or the terms and conditions in environment clearances should be disclosed on DWR and WWF websites. The disclosure requirements are summarized in Table 4 below.

**Table 11: Disclosure framework for ESMF related documents Documents to be**

**Frequency      Where disclosed**

Environment and Social Management Framework	Once in the entire project cycle. Must remain on the website and other public locations throughout the period. in project areas	On the websites of DWR and WWF. Copies should be available at PMU Office at DWR , and in local municipal offices project
Environmental and Social Management Plan/s	Once in the entire project cycle for every activity that requires ESMP. Must remain on the website and other disclosure locations throughout the period.	On the websites of DWR and WWF. Copies should be available at BFAR, and in local website municipal offices in project areas project
Safeguards	Monthly PMU Office, and in local	Copies should be available at Progress Report municipal offices in project areas

Minutes of Formal Public Consultation Meetings	Within two weeks of meeting WWF. Copies should be	On the websites of DWR and available at PMU office and in local municipal offices in project areas
Grievance redress process project cycle	Quarterly, throughout the should be available at the PMU	On the website of DWR. Copies office

## 5.7. Capacity Building and technical assistance

Capacity building activities will be provided as needed by WWF US or WWF Laos to DWR to provide the latter with ESMF/PF/IPPF implementation requirements and good practices. These will focus in particular on issues related to preparation of LRP s and IPPs, organization of consultations, operationalization of the GRM, and monitoring of ESMF implementation. The budget for capacity building shall be included in Component 4 of the project.

## 5.8. Grievance Mechanisms

The project will have a direct and tangible effect on Indigenous Peoples and local communities and individuals residing within or in the vicinity of project sites. There is thus a need for an efficient and effective Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) that collects and responds to stakeholders' inquiries, suggestions, concerns, and complaints. This section will describe the details of the GRM, including details on the process to submit grievances, how long the PMU will have to respond, and who on the PMU will be responsible for its implementation and reporting.

The GRM will be operated based on the following principles:

1. ***Fairness:*** Grievances are assessed impartially and handled transparently.
2. ***Objectiveness and independence:*** The GRM operates independently of all interested parties in order to guarantee fair, objective, and impartial treatment to each case.
3. ***Simplicity and accessibility:*** Procedures to file grievances and seek action are simple enough that project beneficiaries can easily understand them and in a language that is accessible to everyone within a given community, especially those who are most vulnerable.
4. ***Responsiveness and efficiency:*** The GRM is designed to be responsive to the needs of all complainants. Accordingly, officials handling grievances must be trained to take effective action upon, and respond quickly to, grievances and suggestions.

5. **Speed and proportionality:** All grievances, simple or complex, are addressed and resolved as quickly as possible. The action taken on grievance or suggestion is swift, decisive, and constructive.
6. **Participation and inclusiveness:** A wide range of affected people—communities and vulnerable groups—are encouraged to bring grievances and comments to the attention of the project implementers. Special attention is given to ensure that poor people and marginalized groups, including those with special needs, are able to access the GRM.
7. **Accountability and closing the feedback loop:** All grievances are recorded and monitored, and no grievance remains unresolved. Complainants are always notified and get explanations regarding the results of their complaint. An appeal option shall always be available.

Complaints may include, but not be limited to, the following issues:

- (i) Allegations of fraud, malpractices or corruption by staff or other stakeholders as part of any project or activity financed or implemented by the project, including allegations of gender-based violence or sexual exploitation, abuse, or harassment;
- (ii) Environmental and/or social damages/harms caused by activities financed or implemented (including those in progress) by the project;
- (iii) Complaints and grievances by permanent or temporary workers engaged in project activities.

Complaints could relate to pollution prevention and resource efficiency; negative impacts on public health, environment or culture; destruction of natural habitats; disproportionate impact on marginalized and vulnerable groups; discrimination or physical or sexual harassment; violation of applicable laws and regulations; destruction of physical and cultural heritage; or any other issues which adversely impact communities or individuals in project areas. The grievance redress mechanism will be implemented in a culturally sensitive manner and facilitate access to vulnerable populations. Special training will be provided for the ESS Specialists within the first 6 months of project implementation, or before the GRM is finalized, whichever is sooner. This will help to ensure they have the capacity to address SEAH-related grievances in a culturally sensitive and victim-centered way.

- (1)** Disseminating information about the GRM:
- (2)** Submitting complaints:
- (3)** Processing complaints:
- (4)** Acknowledging the receipt of complaints:
- (5)** Investigating complaints:
- (6)** Responding to complainants:
- (7)** Appeal:

**(8) Monitoring and evaluation:**

The GRM seeks to complement, rather than substitute, the judicial system and other dispute resolution mechanisms. All complainants may therefore file their grievance in local courts or approach mediators or arbitrators, in accordance with the legislation of Laos PDR.

In addition to the project-specific GRM, a complainant can submit a grievance to the WWF GEF Agency. A grievance can also be filed with the Project Complaints Officer (PCO), a WWF staff member fully independent from the Project Team, who is responsible for the WWF Accountability and Grievance Mechanism and who can be reached at:

Email: [SafeguardsComplaint@wwfus.org](mailto:SafeguardsComplaint@wwfus.org) Mailing

address:

Project Complaints Officer  
Safeguards Complaints,  
World Wildlife Fund  
1250 24th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20037

Stakeholder may also submit a complaint online through an independent third-party platform at  
<https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/59041/index.html>

## 5.9. Budget

The ESMF implementation costs, including all costs related to compensation for project affected people and preparation of documents related to safeguards, gender and stakeholder engagement, and training activities will be fully covered by the project operation budget. The project estimates and indicates the budget for gender, safeguards, and stakeholder engagement specialists in the budget for the project output 1.1.1, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, and 3.1.2. It will be the responsibility of the Safeguards Specialist to ensure that sufficient budget is available for all activity-specific mitigation measures that may be required in compliance with the ESMF. Given the nature of project activities, a part-time Safeguards Specialist will be employed and 100% of their time will be dedicated to ensuring the ESMF implementation and compliance. The project manager in PMU will oversee the ESMF implementation.

Budget for capacity building on [ESMF/PF/IPPF] implementation, travel costs and workshops and meetings for safeguards monitoring (including travel, workshops and meetings) will be included in the overall monitoring and evaluation budget under Component 4 of the project.

## Annex 1. Safeguard Eligibility and Impacts Screening

This screening tool needs to be filled out for each activity or category of activities included in the annual work plan and budget. In addition, the screening tool needs to be completed whenever management measures or management plans are developed and/or when project intervention areas are determined.

The tool will be filled out by the Safeguards Specialist and reviewed by the M&E Officer. The decision on whether a Site-Specific Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) or LRP is required shall be made by the Safeguards Specialist in consultation with the WWF GEF Agency Safeguards Specialist, based on the information provided in this screening form, as well as interviews with the PMU staff, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and any other relevant stakeholders.

### Part 1: Basic Information

1	<b>Activity Name</b>		
	<b>Description of Activity ("subactivities")</b>		
2	Type of Activity:	New activity <input type="checkbox"/>	Continuation of activity <input type="checkbox"/>
3	Activity location:		
4	Total size of site area		
5	Activity implementation dates		
6	Total cost		

(Move to Part 2 after filling in all the information in the table above)

### Part 2: Eligibility Screening

No.	Screening Questions: <i>Would the project activity</i>	Yes	No	Comments/ Explanation
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1	Lead to land management practices that cause degradation (biological or physical) of the soil and water? Examples include but are not limited to: the felling of trees in core zones and critical watersheds; activities involving quarrying and mining; commercial logging; or dredge fishing.			
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No.	Screening Questions: <i>Would the project activity</i>	Yes	No	Comments/ Explanation
2	Negatively affect areas of critical natural habitats or breeding ground of known rare/endangered species?			
3	Significantly increase GHG emissions?			
4	Use genetically modified organisms or modern biotechnologies or their products?			
5	Involve the procurement and/or use of pesticides and other chemicals specified as persistent organic pollutants under the Stockholm Convention or within categories IA, IB, or II by the World Health Organization?			
6	Develop forest plantations?			
7	Result in the loss of biodiversity, alteration of the functioning of ecosystems, and introduction of new invasive alien species?			
8	Involve the procurement or use of weapons and munitions or fund military activities?			
9	Lead to private land acquisition and/or the physical displacement and voluntary or involuntary relocation of people, including non-titled and migrant people?			
10	Contribute to exacerbating any inequality or gender gap that may exist?			
11	Involve illegal child labor, forced labor, sexual exploitation or other forms of exploitation?			
12	Adversely affect indigenous peoples' rights, lands, natural resources, territories, livelihoods, knowledge, social fabric, traditions, governance systems, and culture or heritage (physical			

	and non-physical or intangible) inside and/or outside the project area?			
13	Negatively impact areas with cultural, historical or transcendent values for individuals and communities?			
Please provide any further information that can be relevant:				

If all answers are “No”, project activity is eligible and move to Part 3

If at least one question answered as “yes”, the project activity is ineligible, and the proponent can reselect the site of project activity and do screening again.

#### Part 3: Impacts screening

Answer the questions below and follow the guidance to provide basic information regarding the suggested activity and describe its potential impacts.

No	Would the project activity: .	Yes/No	Provide explanation and support documents if needed
<i><b>Environmental Impacts</b></i>			
1	Result in permanent or temporary change in land use, land cover or topography.		

2	Involve clearance of existing land vegetation		If yes, number of trees to be cut down: Species of trees: Are the trees protected: Total land area of vegetation cover removed: Estimated economic value of the trees, crops and vegetation to be cut down / removed and any replacement costs (e.g., fees, registration, taxes): <i>Provide additional details:</i>
3	Does the activity involve reforestation or modification of natural habitat? If yes, will it involve use or introduction of non-native species into the project area?		
4	Will pesticides be used? If so, are they on the list of those excluded by the Stockholm Convention?		
5	Result in environmental pollution? This may include air pollution, liquid waste, solid waste, or waste as the result of earth moving or excavation for example		
6	Trigger land disturbance, erosion, subsidence, or instability?		
7	Result in significant use of water, such as for construction?		

8	Produce dust during construction and operation?		
9	Generate significant ambient noise?		
10	Increase the sediment load in the local water bodies?		
11	Change on-site or downstream water flows?		
12	Negatively affect water dynamics, river connectivity or the hydrological cycle in ways other than direct changes of water flows (e.g. water filtration and aquifer recharge, sedimentation)?		

13	Result in negative impacts to any endemic, rare or threatened species; species that have been identified as significant through global, regional, national, or local laws?		
14	Could the activity potentially increase the vulnerability of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to climate variability and changes (e.g., through risks and events such as landslides, erosion, flooding, or droughts)?		

***Socio-Economic Impacts***

15	Negatively impact existing tenure rights (formal and informal) of individuals, communities or others to land, fishery and forest resources?		
16	Operate where there are indigenous peoples and their lands/territories/waters are located?  OR  Operate where any indigenous communities have close cultural/spiritual or land use relationships? If yes to either, answer questions below:		
	f. Has an FPIC process been started? b. Will any restrictions on their use of land/territories/water/natural resources be restricted?		
17	Restrict access to natural resources (e.g., watersheds or rivers, grazing areas, forestry, non-timber forest products) or restrict the way natural resources are used, in ways that will impact livelihoods?		

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18	Restrict access to sacred sites of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (including ethnic minorities) and/or places relevant for women's or men's religious or cultural practices?		
19	Operate where there are any cultural heritage or religious or sacred sites that may be impacted by the project?		
20	Undermine the customary rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to participate in consultations in a free, prior, and informed manner to address interventions directly affecting their lands, territories or resources?		

***Labor and Working Conditions***

21	Involve hiring of workers or contracting with labor agencies to provide labor? If yes, answer questions a-b below.  c. Are labor management issues prevalent in the landscape? d. Are illegal child labor issues prevalent in the landscape?		
22	Involve working in hazardous environments such as steep, rocky slopes, areas infested with poisonous animals and/or disease vectors?		

***Minorities and Vulnerable Groups***

23	Negatively affect vulnerable groups (such as ethnic minorities, women, poorer households, migrants, and assistant herders) in terms of impact on their economic or social life conditions or contribute to their discrimination or marginalization?		
24	Stir or exacerbate conflicts among communities, groups or individuals? Also considering dynamics of recent or expected migration including displaced people, as well as those who are most vulnerable to threats of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment.		

***Occupational and Community Health and Safety***

25	Involve any risks related to the usage of construction materials, working high above the ground or in canals where slopes are unstable?		
26	Expose local community to risks related to construction works or use of machinery (e.g., loading and unloading of construction materials, excavated areas, fuel storage and usage, electrical use, machinery operations)		
27	Generate societal conflicts, increased risk of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment or pressure on local resources between temporary workers and Indigenous Peoples and local communities?		
28	Work in areas where forest fires are a threat? If yes, how recently was the last one?		
29	Work in areas where there the presence or history of vector-borne diseases (some examples include malaria, yellow fever, encephalitis)		

***GBV/SEAH Risks***

30	Is there a risk that the project could pose a greater burden on women by restricting the use, development, and protection of natural resources by women compared with that of men?		
31	Is there a risk that persons employed by or engaged directly in the project might engage in gender-based violence (including sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment)? The response must consider risks not only at the beneficiary level, but also to workers within all the organizations receiving GEF funding.		

32	Does the project increase the risk of GBV and/or SEAH for women and girls, for example by changing resource use practices or singling out women and girls for training without complimentary training/education for men? The response must consider all workers within the organizations receiving GEF funding.		
33	Does any mandated training for any individuals associated with the project (including project staff, government officials, park rangers and guards, other park staff, consultants, partner organizations and contractors) cover GBV/SEAH (along with human rights, etc.)?		

***Conflict Sensitivity and Risks***

34	Are there any major underlying tensions or open conflicts in the landscape/seascape or in the country where the landscape/seascape is situated? If yes, answer a-d below		
	e. Is there a risk that the activities interact with or exacerbate existing tensions and conflicts in the landscape/seascape? f. Do stakeholders (e.g. implementing partners, rights holders, other stakeholder groups) take a specific position in relation to the conflicts or tensions in the landscape/seascape or are they perceived as taking a position? g. How do stakeholders perceive WWF Country Office and its partners in relation to existing conflicts or tensions? h. Could the conflicts or tensions in the landscape/seascape have a negative impact on the activities?		
35	Could the activities create conflicts among communities, groups or individuals?		
36	Are some groups (stakeholders, rights holders) benefiting more than others from the activities? And if so, how is that affecting power dynamics and mutual dependencies?		
37	Do the activities provide opportunities to bring different groups with diverging interests positively together?		

**List of documents to be attached with Screening form:**

<b>1</b>	<b>Layout plan of the activity and photos</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Summary of the activity proposal</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>No objection certificate from various departments and others relevant stakeholders</b>

**Screening Tool Completed by:**

Signed:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Screening Conclusions [TO BE COMPLETED BY Safeguards Specialist]**

i. Main environmental issues are:

ii. Permits/ clearance needed are:

iii. Main social issues are:

iv. Further assessment/ investigation needed and next step.

- a. Need for any special study:.....
- b. Preparation of ESMP (main issue to be addressed by the ESMP):.....
- c. Preparation of LRP (main issue to be addressed by the LRP):.....
- d. Any other requirements/ need/ issue etc:

**Screening Tool Reviewed by:**

Signed:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_