

Gender?

- By definition, 'Gender' refers to culturally based expectations of roles and behaviours of both men and women. It distinguishes between the biology of sex and the socially constructed tasks and functions attributed to men and women in society.



- **Gender in Laos?**

In Laos, similarly to other poorest & developing countries around the world, inequality is evident and rampant – between the rich and poor, between urban & rural, between men & women, with 'access' at the crux in the ongoing tug of war between exclusion vs. inclusion.

Although women in Laos are economically active especially in agriculture and small scale informal income generation, women generally experience a lower standard of living than men. They disproportionately suffer the consequences of not enough access to resources, further compounded by the "double-load" they bare, on and off the field, with work, family and home. This severely restricts their ability to engage in training/learning & income generating activities, and to participate in decision making processes at any level. It is a common scene in Lao's rural areas to see a mother sandwiched between a bundle of wood on her back & a baby wrapped around her front.

At the policy level, the Government of the Lao PDR has taken progressive steps & devised an ambitious poverty reduction strategy, with gender mainstreaming identified as a crucial step in achieving the country's MDGs by 2015 and graduating Laos off the least developed countries list by 2020.

In addition to its own Constitution & laws which afford Lao citizens, men and women a variety of rights and privileges, crucial in raising awareness, helping to identify shortcomings as well opportunities, and develop strategies which pro-actively involve women in the process of socio-economic growth and subsequent poverty alleviation in the country, are the UN Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) - however significant disparity exists between policy and practical implementation, with embedded, bias social conditioning and legal awareness remaining low, in part due to majority of the population living in rural areas where access to information is poor as are the literacy rates, especially for women.

Equality?



Gender equality does not mean equal numbers of men and women in development activities, nor does it necessarily mean treating men and women exactly the same. It is not the aim that men and women become the same, but it signifies the commitment to work towards a society in which neither men nor women suffer from poverty, and in which men and women are able to live equally fulfilling lives.

To achieve this different considerations and tools are applicable:

- **Gender roles & relations**

Unlike the biology of sex and with it its biologically determined functions (e.g. child bearing), **gender roles** and norms can change because they are socially-constructed and not "natural".

However, often men and women cannot play the roles they want or access the resources they need. In particular women face difficulties accessing and controlling resources and their social and economic contributions are undervalued.

When considering gender relations we look at the attribution and organisation of roles, responsibilities, resources and values attached to women and men. Gender relations are power relations and attempts to change them to improve gender equality are often perceived as threats to "traditional roles".

To address these challenges, activities need to be **engendered** and **practical gender needs** are integrated into the planning.

This refers to the access to resources and opportunities to perform existing gender roles better, whereas **strategic gender needs** arise from the wish to change the customary gender roles including the division of labour as well as power relations and are strongly linked to decision-making and empowerment.

Inclusiveness?

- By definition 'Inclusiveness' refers to treating all groups or all members of a group equally and without exception. In practicing social inclusiveness we create an environment where we engage with people as individuals, where people feel valued, respected, & supported to reach their full potential.



- **Inclusiveness in Laos?**

Lao PDR is one of the world's most ethnically diverse countries.

With approximately 80% of the total population residing in rural & remote areas, where also the majority of Lao PDR's disadvantaged & poor live, practicing inclusive approaches in development interventions is crucial.

Key considerations for inclusiveness mainstreaming in our offices, our partnerships and in our field activities:

- **Start with Self** - we need to become and set the example in how we behave and interact with people.
- **Capacity**—we need to take responsibility to acquire necessary information; knowledge & skills and then extend.
- Need to work with **appropriate partners** and/or build capacity of partners
- Need **authority**; senior and management **support**
- Need to understand **local & existing systems**, find similarities first to then work on differences
- We need to analyze **priorities** of our partners and target groups to better showcase local relevance of inclusiveness mainstreaming **benefits**
- Need **support from family** for more inclusive participation & engagement in role & responsibility designation among staff, partners and target groups
- Need to understand **different roles & responsibilities**
- **Diversity** - we need to consider different options, be flexible and adapt to make activities appropriate
- **Time** - mainstreaming takes time for & by all included
- **Access** to, for and by participants
- Unintentional adverse **risks** & impacts

Diversity?



Diversity emphasizes the individuality of people, and the importance of valuing each person for his/her unique combination of skills, competences, attributes, knowledge, personality. In acknowledging & respecting one another's diversity, we can recognize the different value added by each individual or group.

With this approach we promote fair & respectful treatment, rather than 'same' treatment which can neglect key considerations which can significantly affect the success of our collaborations.

These include a broad range of characteristics & criteria:

- **Visible**
 - Race
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Ethnicity
 - Abled/disabled
 - Physical appearance 'classification' (Height; weight; attractiveness etc.)
- **Identity**
 - Nationality
 - Religion
 - Culture & tradition
 - Language
 - Status (Married/single/ civil partnership - children)
 - Sexual orientation
- **Social**
 - Education & literacy
 - Economics (poor / rich)
 - Employment status & level
 - Access/ location (Urban; rural; remote)

& Inclusiveness

Lao PDR



but **Different**

Diversity?

In action in HELVETAS Laos

• In our Vision

HELVETAS Laos will contribute to the achievement of the development goals set in the National Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy of the Lao PDR and support rural communities in Lao PDR to overcome poverty and acquire the capacity to define and manage their own development in a manner that is socially just, environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

• In our Mission

HELVETAS Laos is committed to productive & sustainable partnerships by building respectful, mutually accountable collaborations with multiple types of organizations, whether they are governmental, non-governmental, local or international to promote sustainable livelihoods for rural people within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and the government's national social and economic development plan (NSEDIP). Helvetas will seek opportunities for working at the grassroots level in a manner that is effective, efficient, inclusive and participatory, bringing immediate benefits to rural women and men and generating innovations and experience that can be the basis for improved policy making.

• In our Values

The values that underpin our inclusive and participatory approaches in our offices and in the field:

- **Everyone** matters.
- **Everyone** has a say, and there isn't only one way.
- **Everyone** is a student and teacher.
- **Everyone** can communicate – not using the same or any words doesn't mean a person has nothing to say.
- **Everyone** can contribute – we need to recognise, encourage and value each person's experiences – personal & professional.
- **Everyone** is not the same – our differences afford us learning opportunities which in turn strengthen our collective impact.

• In our Working Principles

HELVETAS Laos promotes Gender & inclusiveness where all people are valued, differences are respected, and basic needs are met promoting dignity, irrespective of age, sex, ethnicity, physical and/or educational capacity, socio-economic status or area of residence (poor; urban/rural; remote)

How this translates into our work:

- **Comprehension:** the willingness to learn about & from different social groups
- **Composition:** the willingness to target and include different social groups
- **Acceptance:** the willingness to work with different social groups
- Where and *when there is a will – there is a way*

• In our Actions

1) Policies

HELVETAS Laos has developed and integrated into our policies, human resource procedures and code of conduct Gender & Inclusiveness criteria & standards.

2) Leadership

HELVETAS Laos leadership & management is mandated to promote and uphold our Gender & Inclusiveness policies and standards in the management of project teams and activities.

3) Planning

HELVETAS Laos program and projects have embedded into their yearly planning mechanism, including budget Gender & Inclusiveness action planning.

4) Human Resources

Helvetas Laos has assessed internal expertise & developed a capacity development action plan which includes:

- Assigned Gender Focal Person to provide support
- Training for staff & partners on Gender & Inclusiveness
- Internal Thematic exchange groups with assigned project focal persons to streamline cross-project implementation and coordination of Gender & Inclusiveness cross-cutting issues & key actions.
- Identification and development of appropriate partnerships with Gender expertise and mandate (within Government (Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry Committee for the Advancement of Women; Lao Women's Union) & Civil Society (the Gender & Development Association)
- Development of information materials and tools in English and Lao

5) Accountability

HELVETAS Laos has set up a monitoring and evaluation mechanism with key indicators and reporting timeframes.



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Gender

In HELVETAS



SAME, SAME

Equality?