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# Briefing Paper - Area Physical Framework

## Introduction

The Areal Physical Framework (APF) is a Land Governance Tool for local authorities. It provides an overview and guide for the use and allocation of land resources based on policy determined by the area landscape characteristics. It serves as a foundation and basis for all other development plans and strategies of government. It also specifies access, tenurial and ownership rights to land.

APF as a tool provides a systematic, logical & participatory way of allocating and managing land by analyzing the landscape and determining its optimal use. It elicits participation & involvement of multiple stakeholders in formulating:

- A physical framework map that clearly delineates five zones
- A set of policies prescribing use and restrictions for each zone, including access, tenurial and ownership rights.
- An analysis of area strengths, potentials and suitability
- An analysis of land issues and problems in specified areas
- General recommendations for strategic use, development and conservation of areas to promote growth and sustainable development.

APF's single map concept helps local authorities and government planners do the following:

- Allocate land for production and conservation purposes
- Identify and delineate areas which have high potentials for future economic growth and development
- Identify & prioritize suitable areas for attracting private investments
- Identify areas which have problems and land conflicts that need solutions
- Provide a general framework or overview and strategic vision of the future landscape and development of the area.

By providing clarity and transparency in the manner of allocating land and clearly articulating policies on the use of specific types of lands, APF helps to enhance the protection of land tenure security and land rights of small landholders and farmers. This has to be supplemented with proper

Land Use Planning and Land Registration, both of which are components of the GIZ Land Program.

The APF provides a single map with five zones. The zones are sector-neutral and are different from the land categories specified in the Lao Land Law. This means they can be used and applied by any sector agency for their planning, monitoring and program activities. The zones are:

1. **Protected Core Zone** - AREA of MAXIMUM PROTECTION. This zone shall be fully & strictly protected, free of human disruption and exploitation. These are usually primary forests & natural habitats of wildlife.
2. **Restricted Use Zone** - BUFFER ZONE. Generally surrounding the core zone where limited and consumptive activities are allowed. Inside these zones are wildlife and critical watersheds.
3. **Controlled Use Zone** - This zone allows controlled forest extraction, like the collection of NTFPs. Logging & mining in this zone is discouraged but may be allowed with strict controls. Some form of agroforestry may be practiced.
4. **Traditional Use Zone** - This zone is where communal lands are usually located where land is used by communities for their upland agriculture and livestock raising. Some forms of commercial agriculture and plantation are done here.
5. **Multiple-Use Zone** - This zone is usually settled and used for different purposes such as farming, grazing and pastures, industry, settlement, commercial activities and infrastructure development.

The APF recognizes the *status quo ante* rights (customary tenure) of existing users and settled populations in all the zones. Indigenous and ethnic groups and villages are exempted from the APF zonal policies and their land rights shall be fully protected under the APF.

Buffer areas such as riverbanks and roads are also considered and their use shall be guided by policies pertaining to these types of areas. Special Economic Zones (SEZ) that were established prior to APF are also incorporated as well. Future SEZs shall be established based on the APF Policy Framework.

## Participatory Process of APF

The APF requires various stakeholders to participate actively in the process. Below are the general steps involved.

**Step 1: Organization & Preparation** – this entails the creation or designation and training of an APF Team at the district level that is supervised by provincial planning officers. Activities are planned and logistics are prepared at this stage.

**Step 2: Production of GIS-based APF Maps** – GIS experts from national and provincial units create computer generated APF maps based on agreed GIS data, parameters and algorithm.

**Step 3: Participatory Area-Based Workshops** – participants from remote villages come together to discuss the various aspects of APF, recommend policies and delineation of zones.

**Step 4: Documentation & Field Validation** – results of consultations are collated and data are verified from multiple sources.

**Step 5: Analyses & Revision** – further analyses of data is conducted with sector experts, which are used to modify the draft APF document and maps.

**Step 6: Stakeholder Consultations** – the draft APF Policy Document is presented and inputs, comments and suggestions are gathered from various state and non-state stakeholders to be used in finalizing the APF document.

**Step 7: Finalization, Approval & Rollout** – The APF Policy Document is finalized and approved by appropriate authorities. It is presented to the district cabinet and the various sector departments for their notification and use in their sector planning and management.

## Experiences and Implementation

APF is still in its pilot implementation stage. It has been introduced and implemented in 9 districts with various degrees of success. One of the key outputs of the APF process is the identification of a number of land issues and land conflicts. This led to the designation of areas as “Hotspot” areas where

the myriad of issues and conflicts significantly disrupt and impact people’s livelihood, environment and overall socio-economic development.

A Lessons Learned Workshop indicated the following as key success factors for implementing APF:

1. Strong leadership and ownership by local authorities at district and provincial levels who understand and agree with the APF concept & methodology as essential to good land governance and land management.
2. Highly committed, trained and capable local technical staff, with clear tasks and responsibilities.
3. Active participation and effective cooperation of villagers and village authority

| APF Zone                | Description  | Attributes  |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| CORE ZONE               | AREA of MAXIMUM PROTECTION<br>This zone shall be fully & strictly protected, free of human disruption and exploitation. These are usually primary forests & natural habitats of wildlife.  | Highest Elevation: 1,000 meters & above.<br>Very Steep Slope: greater than 35 degrees<br>High Density Vegetation/Forest Cover |
| RESTRICTED ZONE         | BUFFER ZONE - Generally surrounding the core zone where limited and consumptive activities are allowed. Inside these zones are wildlife and critical watersheds.   | High Elevation: 700m - 1,000m<br>Steep Slope: 30 - 35 degree<br>High Density Vegetation/Forest Coverage                       |
| CONTROLLED USE ZONE     | This zone allows controlled forest extraction, like the collection of NTFP. Logging & mining in this zone is discouraged but may be allowed with strict controls. Some form of agroforestry may be practiced.  | Moderate Elevation: 500m - 700m<br>Moderate Slope: 15 - 30 degree<br>Medium Density Vegetation/Forest Cover                   |
| TRADITIONAL USE ZONE    | This zone is where communal lands are usually located where land is used by communities for their upland agriculture and livestock raising. Some forms of commercial agriculture and plantation are done here.   | Low to Moderate Elevation: 350 - 500m<br>Moderate Slope: 5 - 15 degree<br>Low Vegetation/Forest Coverage                      |
| MULTIPLE USE ZONE       | This zone is usually settled and used for different purposes such as farming, grazing and pastures, industry, settlement, commercial activities and infrastructure development.  | Low Elevation: less than 350m<br>Flat Slope: 0 - 5 Degree<br>Zero to Very Low Vegetation/Forest Coverage                      |
| EXCEPTIONS & EXEMPTIONS | <p>The APF recognizes the status quo rights of existing users and settled populations in all the zones. Indigenous and ethnic groups and villages are exempted from the APF zonal policies and their land rights shall be fully protected under the APF.</p> <p>Buffer areas of riverbanks and roads are also considered and their use shall be guided by policies pertaining to these types of areas.</p> <p>Special Economic Zones that were established prior to APF are also exempt. Future SEZs shall be established based on the APF Policy Framework.</p> <p>Other exemptions may be allowed by government as needed subject to Lao laws.</p> |   |

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