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SUSTAINABLE EXPANSION OF FORESTRY AND WOOD PROCESSING IN LAOS AND AUSTRALIA

Report:
Training of Trainer (TOT) on Gender Action Learning System (GALS)



Development Partners

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Training participants with some completed tools. The lead trainer, Ms Vansy Senyavong, is in the centre of the photo.

1. Progress Summary

The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) training was successfully conducted over four days from the 10-13th March 2026, comprising two days of theoretical foundation, one day of practical field application at a village near Dong Dok and one day of review. The primary goal was to equip NUoL staffs with participatory tools to promote gender balance and vision planning within community development projects. Post-training evaluations showed a significant jump in competency: while 0% had prior GALS experience, 66% of participants now demonstrate high-level understanding and ability to apply the tools independently.

Location: National University of Laos & Field Practice (Dong Khouay Village)

Participants: 12 Persons (10 Females, 2 Males) from Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Forestry Sciences, National University of Laos (NUoL). See details in the Annex.



2. Training Methodology & Process

The training followed a "Learning-by-Doing" approach:

- **Theory & Tool Mastery (Days 1–2):** Participants practiced drawing and facilitating 5 core GALS tools (Section 3). Participants were largely newcomers to the methodology, with 100% of respondents indicating they had never attended GALS training before. Despite being their first exposure, the initial engagement was high, with participants noting that the training environment was enthusiastic and that everyone was motivated to participate in the activities.
- **Field Practice (Day 3):** Participants were divided into three teams to facilitate GALS sessions with local farming families in Dong Khouay Village.
- **Reflection & Planning (Day 4):** The discussion was taken place in village office. The discussion cover evaluation of the GALS training especially lesson learn, challenges of applying and potential of used on GALS tools. Also, teams discussed about the planning on GALS.





3. Analysis of GALS Tools & Results

3.1 Vision Journey

- **Outcome:** Participants and villagers visualized long-term life goals. Three female participants noted that drawing their dreams in notebooks made their goals feel attainable and served as a concrete reference for future action.
- **Observation:** Younger participants and children engaged quickly, while some elderly participants struggled with the concept of "future" planning and required more encouragement.

3.2 The Gender Balance Tree

- **Outcome:** This tool revealed clear labor divisions. In the analyzed groups, **Men performed 95% of "heavy work,"** while **Women performed the majority of "household chores" (74%) and "childcare" (56–80%).**
- **Insight:** Both men and women gained a visual understanding of "workload imbalance." It sparked healthy dialogue on how men can support women's nutrition and household management roles.

3.3 The Diamond Tool (Gender Empowerment)

- **Outcome:** Over 80% of participants understood how to use this to identify things they are proud of and things they wish to change.
- **Key Finding:** Issues identified for change included high female workloads, lack of freedom after marriage, and limited educational opportunities.
- **Challenge:** Facilitators found it difficult to "probe" deeply into sensitive issues. This tool requires high-level facilitation skills to turn "weaknesses into strengths."

3.4 Social Empowerment Map (Relationship Network)

- **Outcome:** Villagers mapped their support systems and power dynamics.
- **Observation:** Most participants used "smiley faces" for supporters but noted that family members often hold the most power—both positive and negative—over their financial decisions (e.g., income management).

3.5 Road Vision Journey

- **Outcome:** Participants mapped steps toward their goals, identifying opportunities and challenges (e.g., the need for AI/Digital skills or improved village infrastructure).
- **Insight:** Female presenters showed more detailed, step-by-step planning compared to male counterparts, though both groups successfully identified immediate actions for improvement.

4. Field Practice Observations (Dong Khouay Village)

The field application provided critical "real-world" insights:

- **Adaptability:** Facilitators successfully helped illiterate villagers by using symbols and drawing on their behalf while ensuring the villager's ideas remained the priority.
- **Community Interest:** Villagers expressed high interest, specifically in the **Life Vision Dream**, with many stating they would show their drawings to their children to plan their family's future.
- **Logistics:** Success in the field depends heavily on the "1-on-1" or "1-on-2" ratio (Facilitator to Villager) and a physical space that allows for large paper displays.

4.1 Understanding and Application of GALS Tools

The evaluation data shows a very high level of comprehension across all five core GALS tools. The Vision Journey (ເຄື່ອງມືເປົ້າໝາຍຊີວິດ) and the Empowerment Leadership Map (ເຄື່ອງມືສາຍພົບພັນອຳນາດທາງສັງຄົມ) were rated most consistently as "highest understanding". While the Gender Justice Diamond was also well-received, it showed a slightly more moderate comprehension level compared to the other tools. Notably, participants felt confident in their ability to apply these tools during field testing at Dong Khouay Village, specifically praising the tools' ability to extract information from target groups beyond traditional interviewing.

4.2 Trainer Performance and Instructional Quality

The facilitators received exceptional marks for their pedagogical approach. Participants highlighted the clarity of explanations, the trainers' extensive experience, and their ability to encourage active participation. The use of visual methods—including drawing, coloring, and planning—was cited as the most enjoyable aspect of the training, as it helped participants visualize their own life goals and gender roles more clearly. After the session, most attendees reported a significant increase in their understanding of GALS and a firm commitment to integrating these tools into their future professional work.





5. Challenges & Lessons Learned

5.1 Challenges

- **Time Constraints:** Some tools (like the *Problem Tree*) were not fully completed due to limited time.
- **Understanding tool contents**: During the field practice, Diamond Tool requests content on quick response techniques so facilitators can respond to issues raised by participants, encourage discussion, and support changes in attitudes toward gender norms. The facilitator may read more on concepts on gender norms, gender role, or related contents
- **Participant Engagement:** Some staff members were distracted by other work duties or arrived late, affecting the continuity of their learning.
- **Village Barriers:** Low literacy levels and age-related vision issues required facilitators to provide much more intensive support than anticipated.

5.2 Key Lessons

- **Standardization:** Symbols and color codes (e.g., arrow colors for power dynamics) must be agreed upon by the team *before* going to the village to ensure data can be analyzed accurately.
- **Off-site Training:** Future sessions should be held away from the participants' usual workplace to ensure 100% focus and attendance.
- **Facilitation Style:** Facilitators must avoid "doing the work" for the villagers. They should lead step-by-step and use examples without letting the villagers simply copy the trainer's drawing.





6. Conclusion & Way Forward

The training has successfully created a core group of "GALS Practitioners" within NUoL and the ACIAR project. The team is now confident (90% confidence level) in taking these tools to the next phase.

6.1 Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

The primary critique across all evaluations was the **insufficiency of time**, particularly for the practical field testing and certain complex tools like the Vision Journey. Some participants also noted that facilities and materials were occasionally inadequate for the size of the group. Key recommendations for future sessions include:

- **Extending the duration** of both the theoretical and field practice phases to ensure all tools are practiced thoroughly.
- **Integrating GALS into formal curricula** within the faculty of social science and faculty of forestry sciences.
- **Providing training agendas in advance** and ensuring a dedicated team is available during field visits to assist participants who may struggle with writing or detailed drawing.

6.2 Upcoming Action Plan:

1. **Implementation:** The discussion, the project will apply GALS tools in 4 target villages in Savannakhet province (target: 10 families per village; however, based on the FSS activity budget is insufficient, therefore the team will target 7 households or possibly to include 15 people).
2. **Monitoring:** Conduct one guided session with an expert (MHP) followed by three independent sessions by the project team.
3. **Behavioral Tracking:** Measure changes in gender roles and decision-making within the participating households.
4. **Sustainability:** Develop "GALS Champions" to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and eventually establish a "GALS Hub."

Reference: From note taking and MHP report and Evaluation GALS Training

Annex: List of participants

Name	Sex	Position
1. Maliphone Douangphachanh	F	FSS
2. Manivanh SENGPHACHANH	F	FSS
3. Phoyphaylin Onnouan	F	FFS
4. Keooudone Xayyalath	F	FSS
5. Khamvone Khonevixam	M	FSS
6. Kiphet SITTHIVONG	F	FSS
7. Thakinh INTHALASY	F	FSS
8. Aeksakoon SOUKHASERM	M	FSS
9. Souvanny LORVIXAY	F	FSS
10. Khamsavay PASANCHAY	F	FSS
11. Souphinh Vongphachanh	F	FSS

