

# Large-scale land acquisitions in Northern Laos: Implications for local land use and food production

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## Introduction

Within the context of the phenomenon of “land grabbing”, Lao PDR has been identified as a hotspot for large-scale land acquisitions. The vast natural resources of the country have attracted the attention of investor’s, especially from its neighbouring countries China, Thailand and Vietnam.

Such large-scale land acquisitions have the potential to alter the land-cover and land-use in the localities of implementation with severe impacts on local people’s livelihood and food security.



Figure 1. Farmers harvesting lowland rice. Hills with rubber and teak in the background. (Photo: Cecilie Friis, Nov. 2012).

## Aim of research

The present study investigates local-level implications of large-scale land acquisitions for land-use and livelihoods in the Northern Uplands in Laos with the following objectives:

- How has the land acquisition changed local people’s access to land, forest and water resources?
- How has the land acquisition changed the land-use and livelihood systems in the village of implementation?
- How does the land acquisition affect food security?

### Box 1. Methods and study site in brief

An in-depth study in one case-village, Ban Na Nhang Neua in Nambak District, Luang Prabang Province based on fieldwork between Oct. and Dec. 2012.

- Key informant interviews: District and village authorities, Company Chairman
- Household survey: 36 households (out of 170 households)
- Group discussions, participatory mapping, village thematic walks

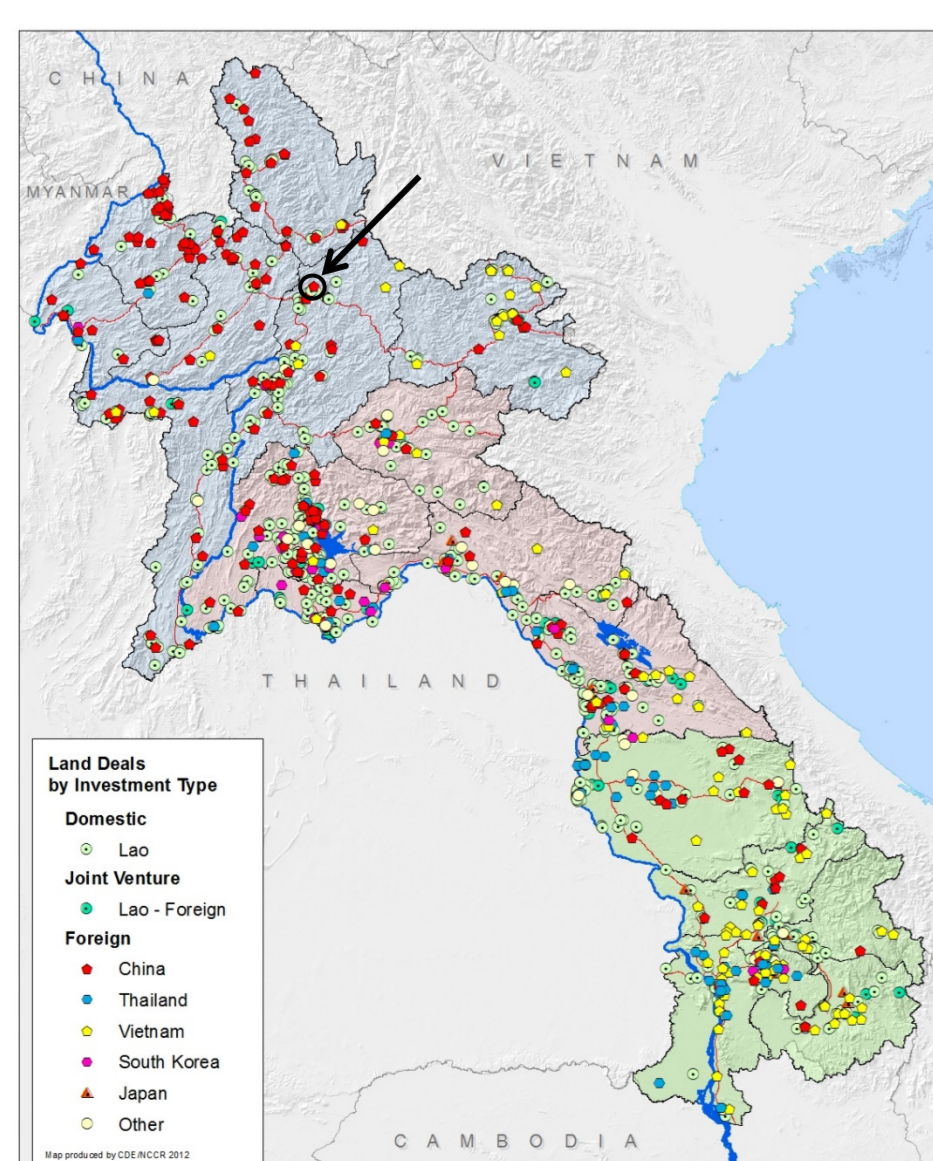


Figure 2. Location of concessions with foreign investments in Laos. Black arrow and circle indicates location of the study site and case-concession.

(Source: Schönweger et al. 2012, p. 24).

## Traditional land system complex

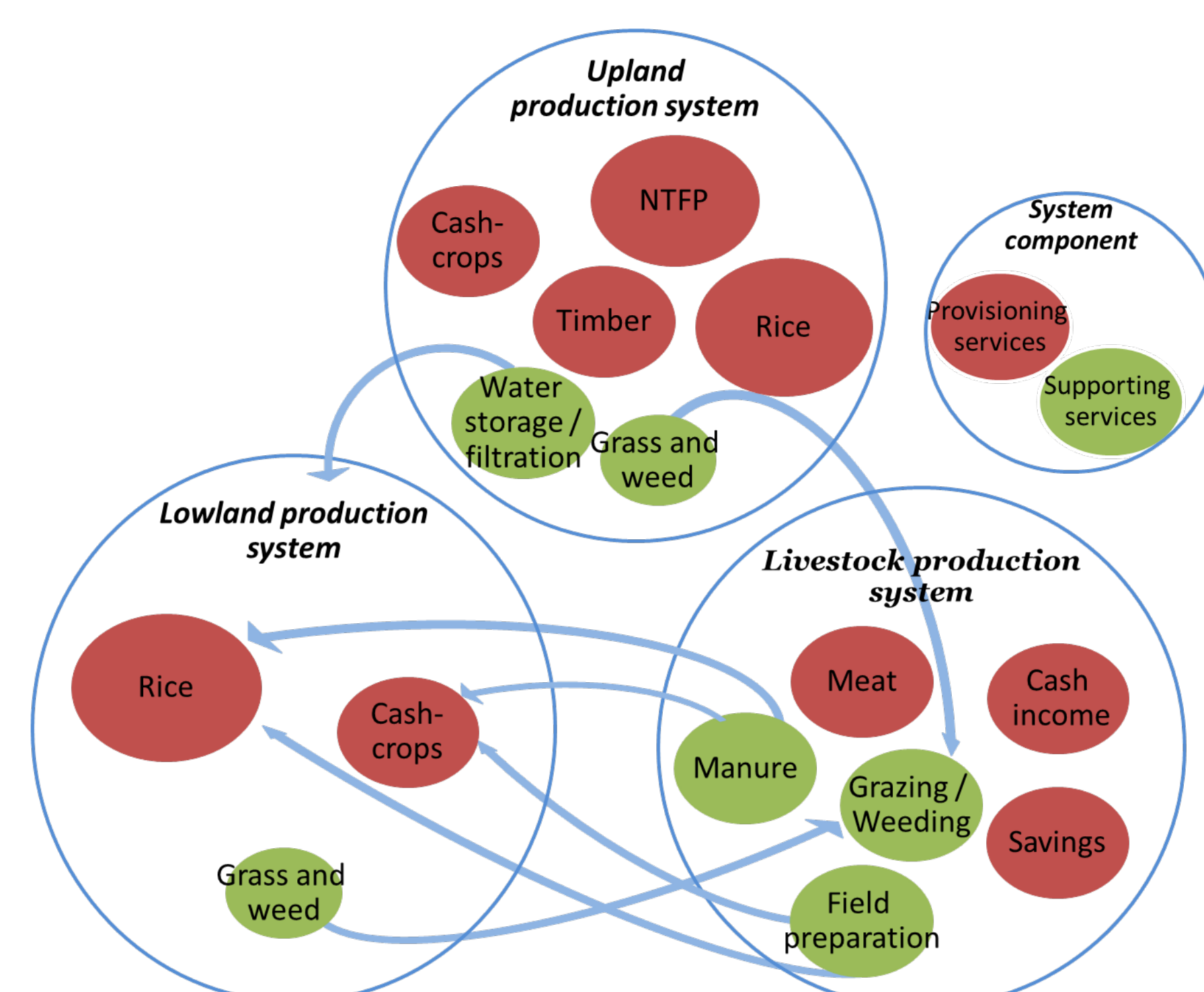


Figure 3. The traditional land-crop-livestock complex consists of; a) an upland subsystem with swidden rice fields, fruit and vegetable gardens, b) a lowland subsystem with paddy rice and tobacco as main cash-crop and c) a livestock production system with buffalos and cattle. Arrows indicate significant links between the subsystems.

## Land system change

- Rubber plantation established in the territory of the upland production system affecting swidden, forest and grazing land
- Significant land-use conversion from extensive shifting cultivation to intensive rubber production
- Implementation of a strict penalty scheme for livestock damage to rubber trees → a complete abandonment of livestock production
- Loss of manure → declining soil fertility in the lowlands

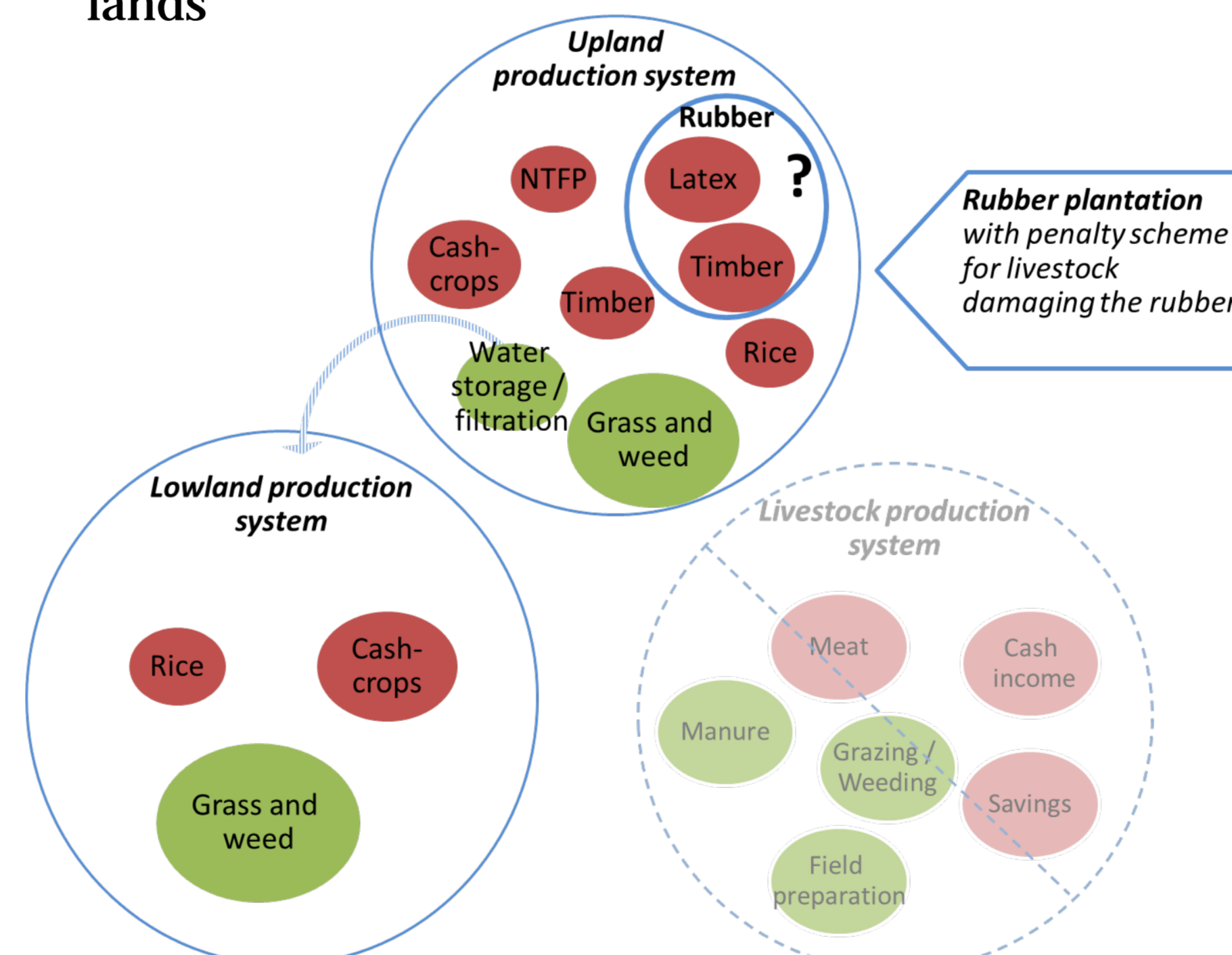


Figure 4. The land-crop-livestock complex after establishment of the rubber plantation. Size of the bubbles indicates the changing relative importance of the components most affected by the plantation.



Figure 5. The Sino-Lao Company Rubber plantation in the case-village. The rubber trees are not yet mature for tapping the latex. (Photo: Cecilie Friis, Oct. 2012).

## Impact on livelihood and food security

- Abandonment of upland rice cultivation
- Decline in availability of non-timber forest products
- Decline in lowland rice yields
- Increase in the amount of food purchased to make up for decline in rice and forest product availability

Table 1. Change in food acquisitions among ‘average’ households as a result of the land acquisition (Source: Household survey)

Change	Rice production	Collection of food in forest	Purchase of food in market
Decrease	11	10	1
Same	10	16	14
Increase	0	0	8*
Not related	5	0	1
n/a	4	4	6

\* Includes two who purchase more, but do not relate the change to the concession

## Conclusions

- This study reveals significant negative indirect and cascading effects on land use efficiency in existing land system as a result of the land acquisition
- Loss of buffering capacity for food provision between upland and lowland rice production
- The potential benefit from latex production that could mitigate loss of natural resources has not yet materialised
- Research on the consequences of large-scale land acquisitions requires complete analytical attention to the complexities of the existing land systems
- It is essential to look beyond the direct implications of large-scale land acquisition for land access and land use. It is crucial to consider the cascading and second order impacts as well

### Box 2. The Chilan acquisition in brief

In 2004, the Chilan Sino-Lao Rubber Company Ltd. was granted a concession by the provincial government in Luang Prabang of 7000ha for rubber development in Nambak District.

Currently, the Company has established 1300-3000ha of rubber plantation in twelve villages in the District, as well as contract farming in four villages and support for smallholders in eight.

In the case-village the Company had established a 100ha plantation plot in 2006 with additional 56ha planted by smallholders and contract farmers.

### Acknowledgements

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### References

Schönweger et al. (2012): Concessions and Leases in the Lao PDR: Taking Stock of Land Investments. Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, Bern and Vientiane: Geographica Bernensia



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