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The Grassroots Equity Newsletter

Working with local people in the Mekong region to promote effective initiatives on equity in climate change mitigation

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About the GREEN Mekong Program

This newsletter is produced by the USAID-funded Grassroots Equity and Enhanced Networks in the Mekong Program (GREEN Mekong), which aims to improve capacities of policymakers and grassroots stakeholders in the Lower Mekong region to promote equity in forest-based climate change mitigation policy and practice.

The program is based on the fact that local people's needs, aspirations, knowledge and participation are critical during decision-making processes concerning forest governance and management. In the Lower Mekong region, where millions of people remain highly dependent on forest resources, policies and strategies developed to protect forests, reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change will only succeed if actively involving local communities.

The GREEN Mekong Program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) and implemented by RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests.

Welcome to the Grassroots Equity Newsletter.

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Regional Learning Group (RLG): an approach with an impact

"I can't imagine Lao without forests. On a daily basis, I see how forest communities depend on them to feed their families and support their livelihoods. The whole country – even the region – benefits from and relies on their long-term health." This is how Mr. Bounchanh Lattanavongkot, Deputy Director, Luang Prabang Provincial Forestry Section, Lao PDR, describes the importance of protecting forests in the Greater Mekong, and he is correct. Without forests, millions would lose access to food and the natural chain would break down.



A resource person presents local equity issues to the RLG members in Siem Reap, Cambodia

Key to maintaining these forests are the communities who live in and near them. These people know them best, but more than often they are not involved in the decision-making processes, leaving them vulnerable to unfair and inequitable forest management policies and practices, putting them at risk. Knowing this alone is not enough to protect the forests and the people that

depend on them. The government needs to engage with the forest communities.

Through a series of four workshops with the same participants, the RLG is making sure to respond to real problems identified by the RLG members through training. Mr. Lattanavongkot has experienced the hands-on learning personally: "From participating in these workshops, we learned how to talk to communities; we then returned home, met with the people and actually collected information about the issues important to them. But we did not only meet with the people, we understood how to be equitable in our approach, reaching out to women and other community members with less of a voice."

The goal of the RLG is to highlight the importance of equity in decision-making processes, from start to finish, and the extended training is allowing that to happen. The result is an important shift in attitude towards forestry governance and policy-making at the provincial level. Forestry officials now understand better how to engage and interact with community members, making their participation more impactful and protecting the forests a shared objective important to everyone.

Mr. Lattanavongkot's comments reflect this deepened understanding of equity's importance and how committed the RLG members have become to advancing it: "To foster participation is to guarantee their rights of access to natural resources. And, as we guarantee their rights, it brings about equity. And with equity and rights the people benefit and the resources are protected."

A look up close with the RLG



Recently, GREEN Mekong put together a compilation covering the Regional Learning Group (RLG) activities in the Mekong region. This video captures our approach to prioritize the development of provincial and local forestry officials' capacities with an aim to strategically improve social equity in forest governance.

With an attempt to close the gap between communities and the government, provincial and local forest officials of the Lower Mekong countries have been trained and supported to improve and implement more equitable approaches in forest governance policies and practice.

The video is available here: <http://www.recoftc.org/project/green-mekong/videos/green-mekong-regional-learning-group>



The Regional Learning Group on Equitable Forest Governance continued in Siem Reap, Cambodia on March 2-7, 2015. 19 senior provincial forestry officials from around the region met again for the 3rd RLG event. The officials, all also participants of the two previous Regional Learning Group events, further developed their capacity to assess and promote grassroots equity and local engagement with the communities they work with. With information collected from these communities between workshops, participants developed an action plan to improve equity in their respective work context. This 6-day event also included visits to field sites where participants were able to witness how community forestry worked with multiple stakeholders cooperating to secure forest areas against threats. With their own understanding of equity, participants also provided feedback to the communities to encourage improvement of their forestry management processes.

The upcoming final Regional Learning Group event will take place in Lao PDR in late July. That workshop will give RLG members a chance to present to their peers their own knowledge products that showcase the equity context and issues they identified. Participants will also develop a communication plan to share the key learning from their RLG journey before returning home.

Representatives from CSOs meet to hone their facilitation skills

As part of GREEN Mekong's 2-year engagement and capacity development plan for local civil society organizations (CSOs) throughout the Lower Mekong region, USAID and RECOFTC brought representatives from 20 organizations to Bangkok for the third training workshop on March 23-27, 2015.

The representatives of GREEN Mekong's CSO partners, who work with forest communities in the Lower Mekong region, are going through a series of training workshops to enhance their roles as grassroots facilitators themselves. As a result, they are fostering more meaningful and equitable engagement with various interest groups as well as creating better conditions for local stakeholders to express opinions and make decisions for themselves on forests and climate change initiatives affecting them.



Civil society organization participants use technology to improve their facilitation skills at a workshop in Bangkok, Thailand

During the meeting, CSO participants also had an opportunity to use innovative training methods, including recording their own facilitation presentations and, along with the rest of the group, getting immediate feedback to improve their skills.

The CSOs, some of whom are recipients of small grants from the GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund,

also reported on how they put their new skills to use, both through their grants and their regular operations.

Updates from GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund

The GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund (GMCF) has continued producing successful results across the Mekong region, including in Myanmar and Lao PDR, where two GMCF recipients, Metta Development Foundation (METTA) and Lao Biodiversity Association (LBA), respectively, are making strides at the grassroots level. The GMCF was originally conceptualized to support CSO participants in implementing the action plans produced during the launching training workshop; it has since shown its full capability, both allowing creativity and innovation among recipient organizations and providing opportunities for the CSOs to put their equity training to use.

While METTA's project will continue until August 2015, over the first three months, April to June 2015, their capacity building on equity for community based organizations (CBOs) has already produced results, covering 10 villages and benefiting 1,826 households. The workshops are designed to strengthen the capacities of CBOs and Mangrove Resource Management Committees (MRMCs) to improve leadership and organizing skills, knowledge about equity, good governance and management, to ensure meaningful engagement with mangrove forest based communities.



METTA staff visited 10 target villages and met with village leaders and MRMC members to share and promote the concept and process of equitable resource management for mangrove forests

In addition to building capacity on equitable governance, METTA's workshop organization process was equitable itself, cooperating closely with the villages to ensure inclusion of women and small fishermen who depend solely on the natural mangrove forest. Once the workshops were underway, participants were able to share their contributions to and relationships with natural resources. This led to a greater understanding between different stakeholder groups and an understanding of why each's participation is important. U Tin Kyay, Maung from Pa village, noted: "We need to conserve the natural mangrove forest systematically through community contributions. If we do not conserve the existing mangrove forests, farmers who are near the mangrove forests will be more seriously impacted than others."

Due to deforestation, farmers who are near the natural mangrove forest are directly harmed more than others, although in the current situation, they also cut the mangrove forest; they need to be engaged and also to contribute to the natural mangrove resource management mechanism.

-Daw Kyi Thaung, Kyaut Ngu village

In Lao PDR, LBA's work under the GMCF has centered on delivering Training of Trainers. Their main targets are local government officials who interact and work with communities in the management of forest resources around the Phoutaxan Conservation Area in

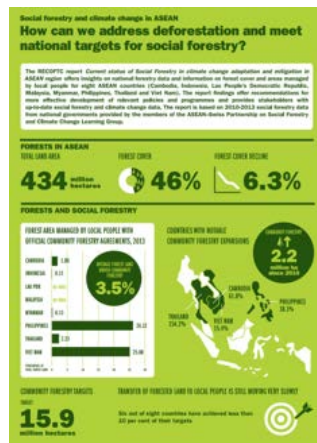


A provincial forestry female official participating in LBA's equity training

Phongsaly Province. Twenty officers from the District Office of Natural Resource and Environment (DONRE) and the District Justice Office (DJO) were introduced to the concept and principles of equity in forest governance and trained on how to improve engagement with local communities to increase awareness of relevant laws and strengthen dialogue and feedback on local forestry issues.

Resources on equity

Infographic: Social Forestry and Climate Change in ASEAN



RECOFTC's report *The current status of social forestry in climate change adaptation and mitigation in the ASEAN Region* offers insights on national forestry data and information on forest cover and areas managed by local people for eight ASEAN Countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam). This infographic provides a snapshot of what is presented in the report.

Available at <http://www.recoftc.org/project/asfcc/q-and/infographic-social-forestry-and-climate-change-asean>

Capacity development: Coming into the spotlight in a new climate era?



In June, at SBSTA 42 in Bonn, Germany, RECOFTC's Regan Suzuki Pairojmahakij delivered a talk on capacity building for equity in forest governance and implications for policy. Largely inspired by GREEN Mekong's findings and results to date, she began by explaining how equity is not "one-size-fits-all", but rather depends on national context,

language, priorities and needs. She went on to elaborate that for REDD+ to be sustainable, ensuring equity is critical, and that capacity building is a key strategy if to achieve equitable and effective climate change responses.

Regan's blog post covering the importance of capacity development for equitable responses to climate change is available at <http://bit.ly/1emgxdj>

Making the case for equity: Perceived justice versus social equity in benefit distribution systems under REDD+

Sharing new resources on equity is an important part of GREEN Mekong's mission, bringing attention to knowledge products that form the basis of GREEN Mekong's work. This paper reviews possible mechanisms within a national REDD+ program, and depending on whether deforestation is being carried out mainly by richer or by poorer communities and farmers, the different outcomes in terms of social equity in REDD+. It also shows that the mechanism mostly likely to be perceived by participants as being equitable is not necessarily the same as that which appears to optimize social equity.

Available at <http://www.revista.inecc.gob.mx/article/view/223/219#.VZMfGvmqBc>

The gender lens

Case studies from around the globe show that gender-responsive participatory research is the way to go

Bioersivity International's Gender Research Fellows discuss their successes in using participatory research tools and processes in different research projects in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, India and Malaysia.

Read more at <http://www.bioersivityinternational.org/news/detail/case-studies-from-around-the-globe-show-that-gender-responsive-participatory-research-is-the-way-to-go/>

Mainstreaming gender into forest policies in Asia and the Pacific

This report focuses on how gender perspectives are being integrated in the forest policies of eight countries in Asia-Pacific (Nepal, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam). It is accompanied by a series of policy briefs that highlight challenges for women and outline recommendations to promote gender mainstreaming in forestry.

Available at <http://www.recoftc.org/reports/mainstreaming-gender-forest-policies-asia-and-pacific>

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We invite you to share your feedback on the newsletter or contribute to the newsletter about your achievements or work on equity. Email us at green.mekong@recoftc.org