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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 Grassroots Equity and Enhanced Networks in the Mekong Program (GREEN Mekong), which aims to improve capacities of policy-makers 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 many failures in forest protection have occurred because local people's needs, aspirations, knowledge and participation were not considered during decision-making processes. 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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Grassroots stakeholders in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam share their views on improving equity

Between March and December 2013, the program held seven consultations in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, with almost 200 participants ranging from CSOs, community forestry network members and other grassroots stakeholders. The consultations included national-level consultations and local-level focus group discussions; both aimed to identify and prioritize key equity-related issues in the context of regional forest management, assess existing pertinent mechanisms and strengths in national systems, and gather recommendations on ways to address equity issues in forest management with implications for climate change mitigation.



"Local people need to be placed at the center of the process. We must be involved in decision-making from the beginning stages through implementation," said one grassroots community member in Hanoi, Vietnam.

In Preah Vihear, Cambodia, following a group exercise that examined the community's socio-economic dynamics, the community members shared their understanding of equity – "Equity in benefit sharing depends on the contribution that each individual offers to community forestry activities that create a benefit. This requires that all people who receive the benefits discuss amongst themselves and agree upon a way of sharing benefits."

In all three countries, participants highlighted similar areas of concern although the priority concerns varied. These include benefit sharing, tenure, policies, regulations, access to information, good governance, participation and consultative processes, grievance mechanisms, gender, drivers of deforestation and livelihood issues.

Recommendations from the participants to address these concerns included the need for effective grassroots consultations that engage local people in decision-making processes. The issues raised through consultation processes must be documented, then be addressed, monitored and evaluated.

Participants in a grassroots consultation in Preah Vihear, Cambodia, take part in an exercise to build a common understanding of equity. In the exercise, men and women were separated into two groups then asked to consider the distribution of resources in the context of differing capacities and wealth. The groups then came together to discuss their varying benefit distribution strategies and rationales. Photo by Regan Suzuki.

Developing the capacity of CSOs to effectively promote equity in forest-based climate change mitigation initiatives

Twenty-one grassroots facilitators from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam came together for a training in Bangkok in October on 'Improving grassroots equity in forests and climate change'. The training aimed to develop the capacity of grassroots facilitators to identify equity issues and opportunities, and learn new methods to address issues of equity in stakeholder engagement processes.



Grassroots facilitators from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam gathered in Bangkok to learn innovative new engagement approaches to promote grassroots equity in forests and climate change.

Participants learned participatory and innovative facilitation methods and engagement approaches, designed to bring about paradigm shifts in their own trainings. For many, the hands-on methods for addressing equity through creative engagement processes on the ground were new, especially in context of traditional capacity development approaches in the forest sector. A participant shared that, "the training is unique in that it concentrates on the 'how' of improving equity on the ground – how to design creative engagement processes and set up facilitation processes that enable equity."

The non-traditional methods used for this training of trainers (ToT) course included the use of asset based thinking exercises, music, visualization and story-telling as integral parts of its approach. At the end of the training a participant shared that now they "understood key roles of grassroots facilitator in addressing equity, and the link between equity and [community] participation."

Additional trainings and a training manual will be available in 2014.



Participants explored dynamics among grassroots stakeholders in terms of equity in the 'Power Game exercise'.



Resources on equity

The 'Resources on equity' section highlights key resources on equity in forest management and climate change contexts.

Is equitable REDD+ possible? The role of social safeguards, standards, and impact assessment in reducing risks and enhancing outcome.

This brief by Forest Trends assesses social equity effects of REDD+. The brief describes the main international response to the social risks of REDD+ in the form of safeguards and standards and argued that equitable REDD+ is vital for effective REDD+. The paper is available at <http://ow.ly/rYyo1>

Readiness to engage: Stakeholder engagement experiences for REDD+

This report produced by the Forest Carbon, Markets and Communities program funded by USAID. The study covers national, sub-national and nested stakeholder engagement experiences, good practices and lessons learned. The study is especially pertinent now that the complete REDD+ package has been agreed upon at the nineteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 19). It is available at <http://ow.ly/ryym8>

What is equity?

Equity is the fairness of treatment for all concerned stakeholders, in procedures to form and implement policies and in the distribution of resources and costs, according to an agreed set of principles.

For more information, see Issue 1 of this newsletter, available at <http://ow.ly/t66Xg>

W+: women's empowerment and participation in carbon mitigation projects.

In April 2013, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) launched the W+ standard, which offers a set of project design and implementation requirements that complements existing compliance or voluntary carbon standards. The W+ specifically includes ways to integrate and measure women's empowerment and participation in carbon mitigation projects. To learn more visit www.wplus.org

The Gender Box

The 'Gender Box' method developed by Carol J. Pierce Colfer of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) is designed to aid foresters and other natural resource managers to effectively integrate gender in (primarily tropical) forest management. The paper describing the method is available at <http://ow.ly/rYxRT>

The gender lens

The gender lens features stakeholder perspectives on gender equity.

Bhawana Upadhyay, Gender and Rights Program Officer, RECOFTC, shares her perspectives on equity as a fundamental approach for achieving sustainable outcomes in community forestry:

"It is of critical importance to realize that forestry planning and policies will not achieve their objectives if the needs, priorities and constraints of both women and men are not explicitly taken into consideration.

Gender equity concerns should be addressed during the design and implementation stages of forest related policies and interventions, without which there remains the danger of pushing women further into poverty, insecurity, conflicts and despair.

Efforts to promote gender inclusive forest policies, investment frameworks and programs will help maximize the synergies between the forestry sector and food security, and make forest dependent communities more resilient to negative impacts of climate change. Empowering women can have important spill over benefits for their families, communities and national economy."

Upcoming activities

CSOs apply for small grants to implement grassroots projects that promote equity in forests and climate change

The CSOs that took part in the training of trainers course held in October 2013 have submitted proposals for small grants to implement projects that promote equity in forests and climate change. The GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund provides an opportunity for the selected CSOs to promote and enhance equity at the local level and to use knowledge and skills developed during the training. The small grants projects are set to begin by April 2014; details about the selected projects will be available on the program website.

CSOs to take part in national forums on community forestry in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam

GREEN Mekong program partners will take part in National Forums for People and Forests in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam to take place from February to April. The national forums, organized by RECOFTC and partners, aim for wider engagement and fostering ownership of local stakeholders in developing and implementing community forestry priorities and action plans. The forums also provide important platforms for stakeholders to assess the progress of community forestry (CF), develop strategies and enhance commitments to improve CF management and livelihoods in the region.

Upcoming publication: Improving Grassroots Equity in Forests and Climate Change Contexts: A Training Manual

A new training manual is aimed at improving the grassroots stakeholders' engagement in forest-based climate change mitigation processes. The manual will help grassroots facilitators to design and implement effective engagement processes based on the principles of equity in forests and climate change contexts, particularly for REDD+. It provides practical tools and methods and helps develop the skills of local-level trainers to promote equity through effective engagement processes in climate change mitigation programs/projects. The manual will be available online in April 2014.

New interactive web portal to foster knowledge-sharing on equity among civil society organizations in the Mekong region

A new online portal for the CSOs involved in the program will be launched on the RECOFTC website; it is also open to climate change and CF practitioners. The portal will feature updates from CSOs implementing the GMCF and showcase equity resources from across the globe. The aim of the portal is to facilitate learning and to contribute to the discussions on equity in forest management and climate change projects/programs in the Lower Mekong region. The portal will be available in five regional languages.

"What do you see?"

Send us a caption for this image. Selected captions will be showcased in our next newsletter (June 2014). Email green.mekong@recoftc.org with your answers.



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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