I have lived in the forest all my life. It is not only my home. It is my identity.
I AM THE
KHANTEE
FOREST
#IAMTHEFOREST

- Theya Chaw from Myanmar -
I am very glad to have this opportunity to be at the World Forestry Congress.

My name is Theya Chaw from Layshi township, Khantee district, Sagaing region of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. I am from the Naga ethnic group, and come from a remote area near the tri-junction of India, China and Myanmar.
Where I come from, land is divided and ruled according to our local ancestral customs, and traditionally managed without the main purpose of forest conservation. In the past, local communities made their living through Taung-ya or shifting cultivation.
However, starting from 1993, through the endeavours of our local traditional ancestors, the Taung-ya cultivation system was gradually reduced and now settled farm lands are more prevalent.
This conversion was for the sake of easing labour intensive work and time, however local people did not always look after these practices in a careful way.
13th December 2013, a day I remember clearly, was the day I first went to a training on climate change and REDD+. It took place in Layshi township, and was a sub-national level training.
From that training, the most important thing I learned was that every tree is valuable, and that human beings cannot survive without trees. I learned that if deforestation becomes massive, the climate will change and also diseases will overwhelm us. So, the consequences of not having trees are not only for individual people, but for the entire world.
After that first training, I decided to help teach others what I had learned and began training to become a trainer myself.
I took part in a “REDD+ and Climate Change Awareness Raising” training in Satpyar village, and then helped stage a play on forests in Pein-Nae-Kone and Lan-Hlaing Hla villages.
Since then I have joined further trainings, and began leading trainings on climate change myself.
After awareness-raising in villages, people began realizing how important the forest is for climate change, and people began sharing their concerns about climate change with me.
From local peoples’ perspectives, we see that climate change is already impacting our livelihoods.
But despite knowing the importance of conserving the forest, local communities must still struggle for our livelihoods.

The concerns and solutions that local people tell me are that they need to develop commercially sustainable forest enterprises that will contribute to their household incomes.
They also voice the need to get enough electricity in the township, which will help reduce deforestation around the district significantly.

These are examples of the kinds of concerns I hear from local communities.
Hence, only if our necessities are fulfilled and we have effective ways of making a living beyond the subsistence level, will forests and wildlife be conserved effectively.
Understanding these concerns, together with my training on REDD+ and climate change issues, helps give me the ability to bridge the gap between grassroots communities and policymakers.
Now, not only do I help to cascade climate and forest issues down to local communities, but I am also bringing community concerns up to policymakers, and bridging this knowledge gap.
I now have more chances to meet with the forest department and local authorities, and build trust, through activities of the REDD+ project I am involved in with RECOFTC and its partners. I can express our communities’ challenges
Local authorities seem to be better informed now about what sorts of measures are necessary for more effective policies that meet our needs.
Local people in my area now have more opportunities to share our concerns and aspirations to local government, and our concerns have even reached members of parliament.
I know that local people can and want to protect the forest because it’s our home where we grew up and where we will live for our entire lives.

When we in our community are better informed and better able to voice our concerns, we are more committed to manage the forests sustainably.
I believe that our experiences can help improve policies, and can contribute to create insightful policies which will help us to protect our forest and also responds to villagers’ needs.
Local people are basic resources for forest conservation and management. So, if local people are invested in and guided in ways for our livelihoods, we can save the world including Myanmar. Local people are the world and the world is also local people.
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THANK YOU
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- Krick Meemungkit from Thailand -
My name is Krirk Meemungkit.

I am an agriculturist from Srakaew province, Thailand. I chose to afforest in order to return “life” to the community.
In the past, I was a teacher. However, I realized that teaching only the text from books didn’t create critical thinking or often couldn’t be applied to use.

Therefore, I started to look to do something to develop as my real career, and not only just working for salary which is a social norm.
After I deliberated on how to release myself from this social norm, I realized that the career that suits me best is an agriculturist.

I was inspired to do this by following the self-sufficiency economic views of His Majesty the King Bhumibol.
He always encourages us to never get frustrated or move in other directions. So I began a community training center that provides capacity building and vocational education for villagers, and also joined the Tree Bank project, where I am now the Branch Manager for Srakaew province.
Back then, the Tree Bank project only operated in a few provinces.

Tree Bank is an independent civil society organization that aims to motivate farmers to grow trees in various agricultural land as well as on farmers’ own land to stimulate adding valuable assets to the land.
More importantly the Tree Bank promotes tree ownership and rights to harvest them despite unclear land tenure in Thailand. Tree Bank members operate around the objective of managing trees on their lands and harvesting them when they are mature to obtain the highest benefit from its timber.
The TreeBank believes that growing trees should obtain a similar treatment as when money is deposited in the bank and should benefit from an increase in value.
The TreeBank manages a database documenting and valuing living trees from farmer groups and eventually aims to act as a financial institution from which advance cash or loans can be obtained.

**Through the valuation trees can be treated as collateral, to overcome many farmers lack of land tenure certificates normally accepted by banks.**
In my training center, community members have learned and are hoping to benefit from this system. As a result, they can have their own livelihood as well as make a sustainable and balanced living with nature.
In my community, we found that the promotion of afforestation to the villagers and expanding this to other areas, amounts to afforestation at the national level.

If only one person plants trees, it cannot be called a “forest.”
A real “forest” is a network of people helping to take care of the forest. The government should provide more support to people on afforestation in agriculture plots and to support their rights to get the maximum benefit from afforestation.
However, one thing that I worry about is the collaboration among government, government officers and capitalists against communities’ rights to have an opportunity to be independent.
In Thailand, there is a law which is not in line with or giving an opportunity for people to benefit from afforestation.
The issues many farmers face however, is that trees grown on much government owned agricultural land are legally owned by the state Forest Law and complex procedures control their management thereby not motivating people to grow trees in the first place.
Moreover, Tree Bank members have to deal with official procedures that are complicated and take time.

At the early stage, there weren’t any signs of obstacles or problems - but when the trees grew and reached maturity and it was time to cut them down, there were objections by government officers and laws which led to a denial for us to cut down the community’s trees.
This process creates difficulties for the community to be independent or to make a better living.

It implies that laws and orders are created for centralization of forest management.
Last but not least, I would like to call for action from the government to change their perspective on forest management towards supporting afforestation and land-use of agriculturalists – to give us opportunities to make a living.
Please think about this, if we can plant trees mixed in our farms, we can harvest them in our farms and help releases us from the poverty cycle or debt, and live with hope.
For the future, we can use trees as our savings in order to sustain our livelihood if only the government adjusts some obstructive laws or acts and guarantees those trees are our property according on Tree Bank regulations.
This will be an opportunity for the nation to have more forests and people in Thailand will live with these trees.
Kirk Meemungkit
Thailand

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THANK YOU

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I AM THE
BA KHE
FOREST
#IAMTHEFOREST

- Hoang Thi Chuyen from Vietnam -
My name is Hoang Thi Chuyen, a Tay ethnic woman from Vietnam, living in Ba Khe 3 village, Cat Thinh commune, Van Chan district, Yen Bai province.

I am the Chairwoman of Ba Khe 3 Women’s Union.
My family has always lived near the forest.

One of my strongest memories is from 1993, when my family was very poor. Actually not only my family but others in my village as well lacked food. We only had cassava and sweet potatoes to eat. We did not have enough clothes to wear or food to eat.
We were hungry.

One day it was raining, but I decided to go to the forest to find bamboo and wild vegetables to sell so I could get some rice and meat for my children. I was successful that day, and my children were fully fed.

I was so happy I cried.
During that time, when people in my village were very poor and many of them lived in hunger, we all often went to the forest and cut trees for selling wood. We exploited everything that we could for food and for money, without taking any action to help the forest to recover.

As a result, the forest was degraded and seriously deforested.
I was worried that if me and other villagers kept doing this, then one day there would be no resources any more, or even no forest any more. I thought about how I had benefited from the forest, and I thought that only the forest could help my family escape from poverty.

I discussed this with my husband, and we started planting some short-term plants like cassava or sweet potatoes to meet our food needs.
I sold my forest products and saved 100,000 Vietnam dong (USD4.5).

I used that money to buy star anise seedlings. The first time I grew this tree, it was not 100% successful. I gradually learned from my practices and then I knew the right way to plant the tree.
A couple of years later, I began growing different kinds of trees such as cinnamon, acacia, and magnolia. I gradually cut those trees for sale and grew their seedlings at the same time so that I could both earn money and maintain the forest and manage it in a sustainable way.
Back then, however, the forest was used freely by families that traditionally owned it. People used the forest without any form of protection and management.
Forest land was not allocated for villagers, and they exploited the forest for livelihoods where and whenever they wanted or needed. When their forest ran out of resources, they came to my forest to take trees and other non-timber products.

The number of trees being cut down increased a lot, and I was angry and started to worry.
If this kept happening, I might lose my entire forest one day.

Even when I knew exactly who cut my trees, I could not do anything about it. I went to the head of the village and then to the communal police. Even policemen could not help me because I did not have legal rights over the forest.

No one could help me. I then raised my problem in a village meeting.
Since then, through village and women’s meetings, other villagers and I requested to have a Red Book for our forest so that we could use and manage it without being trespassed by others.
In 1995, the Government gave us the Red Book.

The Red Book gives individuals legal rights to their land and gives local communities the legal tools to protect our forest.
Villagers then came up with village regulations in which there were rules on forest protection as well as forms of punishment for whomever breaks the rules. I’m happy about the new regulations that can help me protect the forest. My neighbors and other villagers no longer trespassed and cut my trees any more. They respect my rights over the forest.
Other villagers witnessed my family getting out of poverty and even our well-being from forest activities. They learned from me and started changing their forest.

As a very positive result, nowadays a lot of forest land is filled. Forest accounts for 70% of the total village area.
While the Red Book plays an important role in securing ownership, I know that sustainability requires appropriate knowledge, capacity, and a plan for the areas of protection, trading, planting, and more.
I’ve received training in climate change and gender equity supported by a REDD+ program. Moreover, I also am involved in trainings on afforestation and economic development, which were conducted by the Farmer’s Union and Women’s Union.
After the trainings I realized what to do, what to grow, and what to raise to promote long-term economic development.

In addition, RECOFTC is also helping to bridge the gap between policy makers and local communities through playing the role of ‘connector’ between policy makers and local communities.
As you may have known, in Vietnam particularly and in Asia in general, there were a lot of floods occurring in August 2015. That was the impact of climate change caused by deforestation. It created the polluted environment and destroyed the balance of the natural ecosystem.
You and I, let's spread the message “growing – taking care – protecting forests”.

Let's make the earth’s lung more and more green and healthy.

Thanks for listening. I wish the World Forestry Congress to be successful.
Hoang Thi Chuyen
Vietnam

CAM ON
THANK YOU
How Do You Do?

I am Em Sophoan, the Vice Chief of Chrous Svay Community Forest and the chief of a bamboo enterprise from Kampong Speu province in Cambodia.

I have been involved in forest protection since 2009, when I was elected as the Vice Chief of our community forest.
My life is well connected to the forest, as I was born, grew up, studied, married, and am raising a family with three children here. I will live in this village for the rest of my life.
My family, as well as other villagers here, have depended on the forest for our livelihoods since our ancestors. So, if we lose the forest, it means that we lose the resources for our livelihoods.
Chrous in Khmer means valley and Svay means mango tree. All the villagers in the five villages that are member villages of our community forest worship the giant mango tree in our forest, as they believe the tree is protected by a spirit.
Everything to me is about the nature and people in my community. I want the next generation to see, to hear and to feel the nature the same ways I do. That is why I have put all my effort to protect the forest and those things. When depend on something to live, we always want it to be protected.
Everything to me is about the nature and people in my community.

I want the next generation to see, to hear and to feel the nature the same ways I do.

That is why I have put all my effort to protect the forest and those things. When depend on something to live, we always want it to be protected.
From 1993 to 2009 I observed the great loss of forests through over-harvesting and a lack of participation from the community to manage the forest.
I was unhappy to see this degradation and worried that the forest would disappear, which would threaten our livelihoods. We used to rely on forests for firewood, traditional herbal grass, cattle grazing, as a source of water and especially for bamboo, which is a main source of our communities’ income.
So in response, other villagers and I requested to establish community forest in 2009, with the support of RECOFTC, Blup Baitong organization, local authorities and the Forestry Administration.
We then prepared a forest management plan and identified bamboo as a potential source for enterprise development.
I learnt about enterprise management, and market and product chain analysis, and then we established our bamboo enterprise group.
I am the chief of the bamboo enterprise committee, which has nine members, plus 150 families who are community forestry members who collect bamboo from our community forest.
As result, in 2014 our bamboo enterprise sold 8,479 bundles of bamboo to a bamboo collector, which brought a total income of USD 8,754 for our enterprise.
According to the regulations of our bamboo enterprise group, the profits from selling bamboo needs to be divided into four: 30% for the Community Forestry Development Fund, 40% as capital for the enterprise group, 20% for administration and 10% for emergencies.
We harvest our bamboo according to our plan so that we can ensure we are harvesting in a sustainable way.

Each member of our bamboo enterprise group earns about USD 56 per year on average. In general, USD56 is not that much, but it means many things to my poor family and me, especially during the planting rice season when we have not other income.
With this amount I can manage to buy a bicycle for my oldest son, who is now studying in grade 7 and who travels to school everyday about 7 kilometers from our home.
My family, like other families in my village, own small plots of land for rice cultivation, which has not yielded enough to support my family members year-round - so the income from bamboo sales also helps us buy food.
I remember, earlier this year, I bought a piglet to raise. So we are happy that we can earn this money from our forest, and protect the forest at the same time. Based on this experience, we want to expand our business.
Although the Chrous Svay community forest, as well as other community forests in Cambodia have made great achievements, we still face several challenges in managing our forest...
...So on behalf of community forests from Cambodia I would like to call for Government and development agencies to invest in effective and relevant capacity development programs, specifically on sustainable forest management, that are based on local communities’ needs.
SAUM ARKOUN
THANK YOU