



Stories of change

The Grassroots
Capacity Building
for REDD+
in Asia project
2009 - 2016

RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests



Norad



THE CENTER FOR
PEOPLE AND FORESTS

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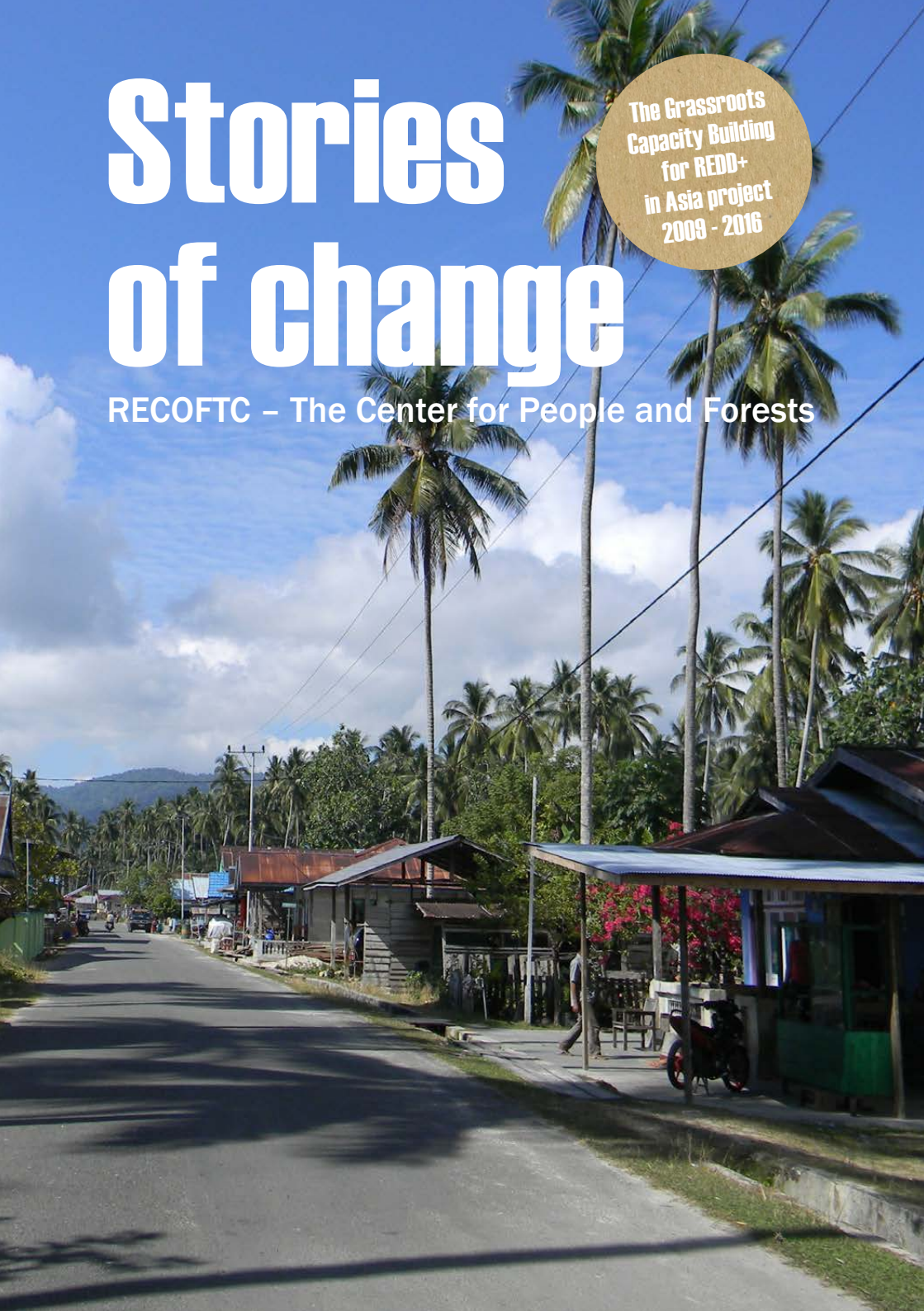
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Introduction

The global discourse of climate change and REDD+ has progressed rapidly over the last few years; however, not all of this discourse has been synthesized and shared with grassroots stakeholders to allow them an opportunity to voice concerns for REDD+. To bridge this gap, RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests is working to empower these stakeholders and to enhance their capacities to contribute as key actors in REDD+.

The aim of RECOFTC's Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ in Asia project, or REDD+ Grassroots project, is "Grassroots stakeholders in Asia are enabled to effectively contribute to the REDD+ planning and policy process, communicate their perspective to policy makers, and thus are well positioned to potentially benefit from REDD+ for local socio-economic development". With financial support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the project has been implemented in five focal countries: Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal and Viet Nam.

The "cascade approach" is at the core of the project, which develops the capacity of grassroots stakeholders and promotes networking of trained facilitators at different levels. The approach starts with a capacity development needs assessment to find out capacity and knowledge gaps, followed by development of simplified training materials and the delivery of participatory trainings programs, using a training of trainers approach. The cascade down approach has proven effective to establishing a cadre of trained resource persons at national, sub-national and grassroots levels, and thus a flow of REDD+ knowledge sharing from the national level down to the grassroots level, and cascading up of grassroots voices to the policy makers at sub-national and national levels.

From 2009 to 2016, the project was implemented through a network of nearly 20 partner organizations, including government, nongovernment and civil society organizations, universities and community based organizations in five countries. Developing their knowledge on climate change, REDD+ and related safeguards policies, along with building their facilitation skills were the basic steps of the cascade approach. Capacitated partner organizations then took the lead to roll out the training programs in their respective countries at different levels.

Using this approach, the project has organized around 900 capacity development events in five countries and built a cadre of more than 5,000 REDD+ trainers and facilitators at different levels. Through awareness-raising events, the project also reached out to 36,000 local people in grassroots communities. More than 40 per cent are women stakeholders. Subsequent to REDD+ capacity development, grassroots communities have taken a number of initiatives to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. Some examples include revision of forest management plans, introducing alternate energy devices, plantation activities, advocating women's participation in decision making, and more.

To further advocate this critical aspect of REDD+ implementation and the importance of empowering and including grassroots stakeholders in the discussion and planning, RECOFTC has documented the impacts and transformation resulting from the project's activities. The following stories illustrate the efforts, commitment and achievements of individuals, communities and institutions who work tirelessly within their communities and workplaces to find solutions to the impacts and challenges of climate change.

For more information on the Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ project, see www.recoftc.org/project/grassroots-capacity-building-redd.

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Ibu Ida sparks conversations in Indonesia

From conventional lecturing to participatory facilitation

Dr. Kusdamayanti, a senior government trainer for Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry concludes her latest lecture. She has been a government trainer throughout her career, and has stayed faithful to traditional training methods used by the government: presenting a series of PowerPoint presentations on the theory of forest management.



That changed, however, in 2009 when she took part in a Conflict Management training by RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests. In the training, she first began to realize that training could be done interactively and that involving participants actually helps their learning process.

As soon as the training concluded, she revisited her training materials and methods. Using the new techniques and approaches from the RECOFTC training, she revised her curriculum on forest and conflict management. She simplified technical terms, and integrated teaching social inclusion as part of her work, along with approaches to transform conflict management in practical ways.

She soon had her first chance to apply her new ideas. Along with three other government trainers from the Center for Forestry Education and Training (CFET, the training arm of Indonesia’s Ministry of Environment and Forestry), she co-facilitated a RECOFTC-CFET joint training on forest management for national forestry officers.

In 2010, when RECOFTC began implementing the Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ in Asia project in Indonesia, Dr. Kusdamayanti – now known more affectionately as Ibu Ida – was a natural choice to get involved as a representative of Indonesia’s Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

“One of the first activities we conducted was a training of trainers workshop with 16 national trainers. Because they were so used to the conventional training methods, it took us time to encourage the trainers to be confident to develop their own course contents and identify their own methods to deliver the trainings. They were not used to being encouraged

“I now know the importance of using local knowledge and building upon a community’s experiences to explain climate change and the concept of REDD+.”



“In Meru Betiri national park, we needed to train a group of women preachers. So we tailored our curriculum to their context, so that the women preachers can relate and are interested.”

to take part in the discussion or decision making. On top of that, we also suggested that they simplify the language and terms to accommodate their audience’s needs and level of understanding,” says Ibu Ida.

Understanding the struggles of the trainers, she shared methods, tricks and approaches she learned from RECOFTC or developed herself. “The topics of climate change and REDD+ can be very intimidating and complicated, especially with all the technical terms and jargon,” she explains.

“But your methods of explaining the effects of climate change to both trainers and local communities are being used by many others now. Many are using your idea of wrapping participants in plastic so they can personally know the effects of climate change – hot and suffocating. Through your exercise, participants get the point!” says Kanchana Wiset, RECOFTC program officer.

Ida's role did not stop there. As CFET has a mandate to train forestry officials and extension workers throughout the country, she was assigned to provide sub-national trainings in several provinces in Indonesia. Although she was confident in her skills to facilitate, she found that conducting trainings with local communities have their own challenges.

"Local communities at first often don't care about the concept of climate change or REDD+, even though they face climate impacts daily," she says. "For example, in Meru Betiri national park, we needed to train a group of women preachers. So we tailored our curriculum to their context, so that the women preachers can relate and are interested."

"When we started the workshop with the women preachers, we did not even mention climate change or REDD+. We just discussed the situation in their villages and their daily lives. We then asked them to draw two pictures: one is a drawing about the condition of their villages and forests when they were young and the other is about the current conditions. Once they saw and compared their own drawings we could bring in the topic of climate change and REDD+. We used the method where we know the women could feel, experience and recall their personal stories," Ida recalled. For her to teach is to touch the heart, a philosophy she uses in training or facilitating.

To date Ida's methods and approaches are still used by other forestry trainers and facilitators. Not only are they being used by trainers in workshops with local communities, but local communities who became grassroots facilitators are also drawing on Ida's approaches when they conduct awareness raising in their communities. Ida still receives phone calls

and emails from trainers and extension workers from other provinces requesting her guidance.

"I now know the importance of using local knowledge and building upon a community's experiences to explain climate change and the concept of REDD+. I've integrated much of my newly gained knowledge, facilitation skills and techniques in my own curriculum within CFET. This will help CFET improve my organization's capacities and reputation as the government's national capacity development institution. CFET has a mission to be an international REDD+ training center and I believe with our enhanced skills and capacity, we can realize this dream," she says with confidence.

Using innovative approaches to raise awareness on climate change in Indonesia

In a moment of struggle to explain climate change terms to villagers, a group of young trainers resorted to wrapping them in plastic tarp. The resourceful tactic gave the villagers an instant grasp of the greenhouse effect. It also taught Gilang Ramadhan clarity on communicating the human contribution to climate change. "It was definitely much better than if we were to present using PowerPoint with all the technical terms!" he laughs.

Born in a family of local home enterprenuer, Gilang grew up exploring the old city of Berau and Segah River and hiking the mountains of Berau District in Indonesia's East Kalimantan Province. While conducting a research assignment in a remote village, Gilang trembled when he saw how lack of information and comprehension of climate change issues left local communities vulnerable to external pressure - specifically, conceding their lands to palm oil plantations.

To help educate villagers across the district, Gilang and a few friends started Yayasan Komunitas Belajar Indonesia (Foundation of Learning Community of Indonesia), or Yakobi. Their intent was to help the villagers understand changing

"Our dream is to foster local facilitators at the grassroots level, particularly in remote areas, as much as possible and support their capacity development so they could respond to the need for knowledge and technical capacity in the community by themselves."



climate conditions and develop confidence to speak up for their own interests so that over time they could manage their challenges without too much dependence on external support.

Based in Berau and led by the now 26-year-old Gilang with a team of college graduates, Yakobi focused on educating villagers with a simple but uncommon approach. As a new organization, however, Gilang and his team soon realized that they lacked skills to implement their missions.

This quickly changed after Gilang attended RECOFTC's facilitation trainings for climate change where he learned how to more effectively discuss climate change issues using participatory approaches. Soon after, Yakobi became the local partner for RECOFTC's Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ Project in Asia. Subsequently, other Yakobi team members also took part in capacity development opportunities that helped them in implementing the project activities.

First, they targeted four atypical types of leaders as education facilitators: tribal leaders, a government-supported women's group members, religious leaders and school teachers. "These were groups of people who were rarely considered in project activities, but in fact, they could be very influential and likely more effective in spreading key messages to people at the grassroots level than us or other project staff," Gilang explains.

Second, they stuck to formality and visited the necessary structural authorities repeatedly for authorization. "In the beginning, we had to regularly come to see the head of the offices or institutions at the regency or district levels to explain our project's objectives and activities. Without their approval, we would not be able to hold any single activity. We had to


constantly adjust our event dates to the leaders' schedules," he adds.

Third, when they met with targeted villagers to seek their approval for the proposed climate change education training, they had no arranged agenda. "When they first approached us in their earlier visits, they would come only to chat and get to know us - not bring up anything about the project," explains Rosdiana, the member of the subdistrict women's group who became a Yakobi facilitator in Biduk-Biduk village.

When they were finally ready to bring up climate change issues, they were perplexed. "The materials about climate change were usually very technical and packed with scientific jargon, which could not be easily understood by our grassroots audience," recalls Gilang. RECOFTC guided the Yakobi team in simplifying materials and lesson plans and translating them into the local language.

The trainings involved countless visits by the committed team over six hours of travel on rugged terrain and carefully orchestrated phone calls. With electricity only available from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., they needed to make appointments for phone calls. "I had to make sure that my cell phone was fully charged the night before and get on my motorcycle to go to a hotspot where I could call or receive calls at agreed times," recalls Rosdiana. "They were always available to answer my questions and willing to support me."

Rosdiana admits that before the training she was not aware of climate change nor had the confidence to talk in a meeting. "The methods used in Yakobi's training were very simple and inclusive. As participants, we were always encouraged to actively take part in discussions and do presentations. This built not only my

A photograph of a paved path lined with tall palm trees under a clear blue sky. The path leads into the distance, flanked by dense rows of palm trees. In the background, there are some buildings and a red umbrella on the right side. The sky is bright blue with a few wispy clouds.

“The materials about climate change were usually very technical and packed with scientific jargon, which could not be easily understood by our grassroots audience.”



“I was even invited to attend a meeting at the regency level with government and other important representatives, but I did not feel intimidated when I wanted to share my opinion.”

knowledge on climate change but also my confidence,” she says.

“Recently I was even invited to attend a meeting at the regency level with government and other important representatives, but I did not feel intimidated when I wanted to share my opinion,” she boasts.

Fifth grade teacher Agus Uriansyah, who is a Yakobi facilitator in his school, found Yakobi’s approach a learning process transformation for both him and his students. Previously, he explains, climate change was only part of a module in the science lesson. That changed with Yakobi’s trainings. “I learned how to design lesson plans so the students would be interested and excited to learn. I even felt encouraged to create my own teaching aid materials and activities. It was amazing to see how quickly the students understood the concept of climate change and its impact on our environment,” he says.



Using the knowledge on climate change gained from Yakobi's training to facilitate decision-making in his community brought personal gratification to Zulfikri. As a teacher and religious leader, he constantly reminds the community of the consequences of not looking after the environment. "Our beloved God has warned us in the holy book of what we would reap from the actions of our hands. We should not be tempted by short-term gains while we have generations to come that need feeding," he tells them.

When several villages were invited to discuss palm oil concession plans, Zulfikri did not hesitate to voice his objections. "I shared my opinions to my community and, as a result, we decided to reject the offer to convert our forests to be a plantation, even though our village head was in favour of the scheme," he says.

As a result, he points out, "We still have our forests and have no problem with water and crops - unlike the other villages who agreed to the scheme."

Listening to the positive feedback and comments, Gilang feels proud but quickly assures that there are much more to be done. "Our dream is to foster local facilitators at the grassroots level, particularly in remote areas, as much as possible and support their capacity development so they could respond to the need for knowledge and technical capacity in the community by themselves. With that capacity and confidence, we are confident they could protect and manage their own resources instead of succumb to being the objects of research and shadowed by NGOs."

The future of forests

Developing the potential of youth to support local concerns on climate change in Lao PDR

A transformation is quietly gaining ground in Laos, and behind it is a calm and unassuming young mother of a two-month old baby. Viengphet is only 29 years old, but already she has influenced the lives of more than 60 youth volunteers in Lao PDR. It is these young people who have in turn branched out to connect with rural school children and community groups around the country to teach and explore what many believe is the major issue of our time: climate change.



As a child growing up in Nahai, a small village outside Vientiane, Viengphet recalls the day when a group of young volunteers came to her school and organized activities with her class. The young volunteers made an impression – Viengphet decided that day that she herself would one day be a volunteer like them.

Viengphet attained her childhood aspiration just a few years later. She became a regular volunteer at the Children’s Development Center in Vientiane. One day the Center had a very special guest – Mr Sombath Somphone, Lao PDR’s first and only winner of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership, an award that is so prestigious that it is referred to as Asia’s Nobel Prize. Viengphet was thrilled to have the opportunity to hear him speak, but never guessed that day would change her life.

The director of the Center approached Sombath, “You need to help Viengphet,” she said. “She has potential – but needs to further her education and get more work experience.” Sombath helped move the suggestion forward. Several months later Viengphet had both a scholarship to study social development at Laos National University and a spot as a volunteer at PADECT, the NGO founded by Sombath.

One good thing leads to another

Viengphet’s supervisor at PADECT (which has now branched out into a new organization called RDA, Rural Development Association), Chanthalangsy, soon recognized Viengphet’s ability to both mobilize grassroots communities and connect with young people. So she offered Viengphet a challenge - to work with communities and youth on the issue of climate change, equity and REDD+.

“Climate change is important, and there are two groups that need to understand it - youth and communities living in forested areas.”

Viengphet was apprehensive, “I know little about climate change, forestry and social safeguards. And managing a new project is a big responsibility.”

“I know it’s a challenge, but you can do it,” insisted Chanthalangsy. “Climate change is important, and there are two groups that need to understand it - youth and communities living in forested areas. You just need to be brave.”

Viengphet took up the challenge. The first thing she did was reach out to new youth volunteers on the channel they use most – Facebook.

Two students who spotted the post were Mong Souvannaphet and Artphasit Phommachanh, undergraduate students studying forestry at the Agriculture Technical College in Vientiane. “This is a good chance to learn something outside of the classroom,” said Artphasit.

“I want to learn more than what I can get out of our theoretical university lectures. And hopefully I’ll also improve my speaking skills,” added Mong.



“Learning about forest management through role playing – as government officials, local villagers and forest rangers, even as husbands and wives - made the issues understandable and practical.”

Artphasit and Mong responded to the Facebook post and were asked to come to the interview, along with dozens of other students. They were pleasantly surprised to be accepted.

Viengphet set to work. As the volunteers were all full-time students, she arranged a series of weekend trainings, where the students learned about the role of forests in climate change, the causes of climate change, REDD+, gender, social safeguards and facilitation skills on how to work with communities.

To help with the trainings, she invites special guests, including Dr Kinnalone, Deputy Director of REDD Office, Department of Forestry, and Kanchana Wiset from RECOFTC. The trainings used participatory approaches – role plays, music and songs, and team building games like ‘across the poison river’. But Viengphet’s favorite is the Wisdom Box, which she learned from Sombath. Using this tool, Viengphet ensures all the youth volunteers understand the four pillars of sustainable development - Nature, Economy, Society, Wellbeing - and how to use the Wisdom Box to support communities in identifying

their most pressing development issues to work on.

“This is so different than how we learn at the university,” said Artphasit. “No one-way lectures.”

“I like how all of the learning completely involves us,” said Mong. “Learning about forest management through role playing – as government officials, local villagers and forest rangers, even as husbands and wives - made the issues understandable and practical.”

Finally the day came for the youth volunteers to visit a local community and practice their new knowledge and training skills, first under the close guidance of Viengphet in a community on the outskirts of Vientiane and then farther afield in other provinces where REDD+ is set to be implemented.

The seeds of understanding take root

Artphasit and Mong found their community trainings eye-opening. As urban youth, visiting the far-flung rural communities posed many challenges. “It

was hard to communicate easily with many local people due to the language barriers. We needed to cooperate closely with locals who could understand us, including the village heads and local government officials,” remembers Artphasit.

“And I wasn’t quite prepared for the local conditions, like having no toilets,” added Mong as she covered her shy smile behind her hands.

Artphasit and Mong stuck with their plan and used all the training and skills of the previous months. First they visited a rural primary school, where they used games and songs to get the kids talking about their forest. The next day they took part in a community meeting where they used the participatory approaches they had learned to discuss community concerns about their forest and ideas on how to use forest resources more sustainably.

“My main concerns are food shortages – because there is drought and deforestation,” conveys Mrs Buakham from Houaykhot village in Luang Prabang province, “The students helped me understand I can do something about this. I can help my fellow villagers understand what climate change is, and that there are solutions like growing more drought-resistant crops or developing other livelihood options like textile production. We can also plant trees and find ways to encourage the forest to grow.”

Mr Norjiher, another local community member from Houaykhing village agrees, “There’s a decrease in my crop yields and it’s harder now to find food from the forest. If my community can make plans for land and forest use zones, we can improve our situation.”

Coming back to Vientiane, Artphasit and Mong meet up with Viengphet and other

fellow youth volunteers working on the Grassroots project, who themselves have visited other local communities around the country. The volunteers discuss what they can do. They believe that youth and local communities alone cannot solve all the concerns. But they can play a role in reaching out to those who can help – including government, other NGOs and sharing the issues with their own networks.

Viengphet also acknowledges the many issues that need to be scaled up from local communities to government and policymakers. “One of the kopenhuang (Lao for ‘concern’ or ‘fear’) I hear often from local communities is that if REDD+ is implemented, they will no longer be able to access forest resources. I also hear from local communities that they are unclear about forest policies, including what benefits they can get from protecting the forest, or what alternative options are available for local communities such as technical or financial support for their livelihoods if they can’t use forests.”

Chanthalangsy, Viengphet’s supervisor, recognizes the potential of youth to bring about change, “Youth are good at talking openly with local communities, and then bringing the issues back to a wider group. Youth don’t lie, they’re fresh and have energy. This is their strength. They will also be our future leaders, and they give me hope.”

Indeed, Artphasit future plans confirm this, “I want to be a forest officer working to increase forests and create nurseries.” Mong has similar hopes, “I want to be a forest officer or ranger in the future, and I want to see local communities getting support for their livelihoods. Then in turn, I want to give the messages I’ve learned to the next generation of youth.”

Shifting perspectives in Myanmar

An empowered community takes charge of their forest

No baby bird. U Myint Aung is puzzled when he can't find baby birds in the usual spots in the forests of the Mahar Myaing Sanctuary. He knows right away something is not right, something has changed. Is something wrong with the mother birds? Is it the forest? Why can't he see young birds in the forest during their regular breeding season?

“The forests are changing due to human activities, and we have to address it.”

He looks around, realizing that the forest has indeed changed - it seems less dense. He can spot tree stumps, and concludes that people were cutting more trees. “The change in birds’ reproduction is an alarming sign,” he thinks. “The forests are changing due to human activities, and we have to address it.”

Aung spent many years working with the Myanmar Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MoECAF) and is now the President of the NGO Friends of Wildlife (FoW). He knows the problem is complex yet urgent. Deforestation, particularly from illegal logging, is widespread due to increased demand for forest products and services. The diminishing forests are contributing to Myanmar’s alarming rate of carbon emissions.

“In a recent project, I came across Thet Kae Chin village, near the Mahar Myaing Sanctuary. We found out that although a new regulation prohibits tree cutting in the area, the villagers continued to cut trees as they have been doing for decades. We observed that when the logging trucks pulled in each morning, the villagers were very happy to see them. Villagers would bring logs from the forests to the trucks,

and receive money in return. That was extra income for the villagers and their families. But villagers did not realize that by cutting the trees, they were destroying the forests and contributing to climate change.”

Aung and his colleagues at FoW realize that they need to approach the community to raise awareness about the threat of illegal logging to the forests, wildlife and the community itself. However, as FoW is a new organization staffed mostly by inexperienced recent graduates, Aung and his team realize that they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to facilitate a learning process with the community. Then, in 2012 some of the FoW staff are invited to a training with RECOFTC in Bangkok.

“We’re very happy to get this opportunity. I have heard about RECOFTC for the past 20 years, and while I know about the amazing quality of the organization and its learning materials, I am particularly impressed with its capacity building approach, making it one of the most important organizations in the region,” says Aung with a smile.

After the workshop, the recently trained staff are not only happy to share their newly gained knowledge and skills, but they also bring home a proposal for FoW to become a local partner for RECOFTC’s Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ in Asia project. They believe that by partnering with RECOFTC, not only would can they implement activities, but they will strengthen their capacities which will help them better meet their organization’s mission overall.

“In a previous project, we introduced the concept of community forestry (CF) to a community. We explained that CF could help them to sustainably

manage their forest resources and restore the surrounding ecosystem for wildlife habitats. But the response was discouraging; the community could not grasp the concept and, as a result, they were not interested in establishing a CF," he shrugs, "So we thought that partnering with RECOFTC could help us improve our approaches with communities."

One of the first activities Aung and his colleagues at FoW conducted at the start of the project were subnational Training of Trainers in two communities: Yetashae and Pauk Khang townships. Both FoW staff and local community members participated in the training. "Prior to working with RECOFTC, we always gave PowerPoint presentations. After the training, we understood different ways of facilitating learning in a participatory way, such as through group discussions," said Khine Khine Swe, an FoW staff member, "I realized that participatory training and empowering local communities are key to ensuring that awareness raising among communities contributes to real and lasting change."

"Since that first training with RECOFTC, we have developed a strong group of trainers and facilitators within our organization who not only can deliver trainings for the grassroots communities but also organize activities with the communities," Swe shares proudly. "We now have nearly 20 local community members from Pauk Khang and Yetashae townships who have become grassroots facilitators for the project."

Wai Phyo Zin, a local community member from the Pauk Khaung township, explains his role in addressing climate change. "In the past six months I have taken part in four REDD+ community level trainings. I have learned a lot, and now understand the importance of planting trees to reduce

the risks of climate change. I have shared the information with my father, my mother and brother. We are now growing 200 teak trees and they are 5 months old. They help combat climate change and have good commercial value as well."

With the successes in the two communities and having a group of trainees with improved facilitation skills and techniques, Aung and his team go back to Thet Kae Chin village to introduce the REDD+ concept, this time with very different results. "When we conducted our awareness raising meeting with the community, we brought with us a poster in Myanmar language that was developed by RECOFTC and partners. Around 120 households, or nearly 700 community members, came to the meeting and actively participated in the discussion on how to establish a community forestry management plan!" Aung recalls.

Recently the community has taken further steps. "Now a group of 30 households have joined force and discussed the Community Forestry Instruction issued by the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MOECAF). They have even submitted a CF application to the Forestry Department with a concept that integrates a carbon reduction scheme and climate change. For me this is a proof that awareness raising and enhancing capacity can influence people's perspective and attitudes as well as empower them to take charge of their community's resources and management," says Aung with conviction.

“Since that first training with RECOFTC, we have developed a strong group of trainers and facilitators within our organization who not only can deliver trainings for the grassroots communities but also organize activities with the communities.”



A portrait of Theya Chaw, a woman with long dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark blue jacket with red square patches on the shoulders and a white shirt underneath. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green trees and foliage.

Women and leadership

**Theya Chaw's journey to international spokesperson
of forest-dependent communities**

From a distance, Theya can already hear her pupils' voices as she approaches the Baptist Ministry's Mission School where she teaches English and conduct. The closer she gets to the school, the more she can hear her pupils running around their classroom. As soon as she enters the classroom, they all run toward her shouting, "Teacher! Teacher!" as if they haven't seen her in months. But this is how the children greet her every day – with wide smiles and big hugs.

Since college, Theya has been actively involved in voluntary work at the Baptist Ministry of Layshee. Most of the time, she is busy teaching children from her community, as well as mission work in nearby townships.

Theya is the daughter of a teacher and a housewife. Her family belongs to the Naga indigenous people. She grew up in Layshee, a town that only gets two hours of electricity daily, from 7pm to 9pm before the hydroelectric power plant went into operation recently. Straight forward, intelligent and compassionate, she has a degree in Theology and a master's in Divinity from India. She is in her last year in Philosophy for her second degree.

"Children please sit down so we can start our class. Would you like to sing first?" asks Theya. The children respond joyfully with "Yes teacher!" After a song or two, Theya begins their lessons. "Today we are going to talk about what you would like to be when you grow up. Is that okay?" Theya asks with a pleasant smile. Her pupils respond with another loud but cheerful "Yes teacher!" The children's dreams and aspirations are varied: from farmer to teacher, nurse to doctor. As a child, Theya herself once dreamed of becoming a nurse, but her destiny led her to a different path.

After two hours of going about their daily routine – lessons, storytelling, and singing, the children bid their goodbyes with their customary, "Goodbye teacher! Goodbye classmates!" After the children left, a group of people from Yangon along with the township elders arrive to visit the school. A man from the group instantly recognizes Theya and starts exchanging pleasantries with her. Theya smiles back and returns his greetings, but tries to hide that she cannot remember who the man is. Seeing her expression, the man reminds Theya of where they first met.

"We worked together in Yangon in 2008 during your church mission there. I work at the Wildlife Conservation Society in Yangon. Do you remember?" Theya starts to remember. She asks what brings him to Layshee – a township that takes two days to reach from Yangon. The man explains that WCS in partnership with RECOFTC will conduct a training in December on community forestry, REDD+ and climate change in Layshee. He adds that they are looking for potential participants and local partners in the area to join the project's inception meeting in November 2013.

Soon after, the school receives an invitation for the meeting. The ministry's pastor sends Theya to represent the Naga group.

On the day of the meeting, Theya enters the room and sits in one of the chairs. She scans the room for anyone she might know. When she sees a familiar face, she nods or waves to acknowledge them.

The meeting starts and Theya listens to the myriad of issues in their community and what the project aims to do to address them. After the meeting, she and many others understand the issues better. She feels compelled to participate in the upcoming sub-national training because of her interest in environmental conservation and community affairs.

“Local people can and want to protect forests, especially because climate change is already making our lives more difficult.”

On the day of the training, a cool morning greets Theya and 30 other participants while waiting for the sub-national training to start. She sips hot tea to keep warm. After a few more sips, the WCS Technical Coordinator for Education & Outreach, Myint Myint Oo, opens the training with a warm welcome. Khin Moe, Training Coordinator of RECOFTC leads the facilitation of sessions in community forestry, REDD+ and climate change.

As each training day passes by, Theya becomes more and more well-known among her peers for her witty, meaningful and sensible questions. Each day she shares her experiences and opinions on how their forests and environment can be better managed. Team members from RECOFTC and WCS witness firsthand her natural skills in facilitation as she actively participates in all her group work and assignments.

The issues discussed are all new to her, and Theya realizes that their community is facing problems in governance, uncontrolled timber cutting for fuelwood and agriculture, and forestland and village boundary conflicts. She clearly understands now the importance of forests in mitigating climate change, in improving the quality of their environment, and in addressing the problems in her community.

But it's also these realizations that divide her conscience. She agonizes at the thought of restricting her fellow villagers from cutting timber for fuelwood because she knows too well that each household needs it for cooking, lighting and keeping their families warm at night. How will she convince the farmers to refrain from practicing slash and burn farming – a practice handed down to them for generations?



At the end of the training, WCS's Myint Myint Oo asks, "Theya, would you like to join our community-level training and awareness activities? You impressed us and we believe you will be a good member of the team." Theya is in two minds. However, in the end her desire for the greater good of the community wins and she decides to join the next events.

In 2013, Theya takes part in a series of WCS-led community-level trainings and her schedule has never been busier. Her church duties and teaching responsibilities at the school are piling up. Most of the time, she has to beg off in joining the WCS community trainings because her pupils and her church duties weigh heavier in her heart. WCS understands her other commitments and sees the silver lining in the situation. The project team recognizes her potential to share her knowledge to a wider community at religious and social affairs where she regularly participates. They decide to invite her to a refresher course the following year – a training of trainers that will prepare ex-trainees in conducting community-level awareness activities, the real battle ground so to speak.

The following year, the scorching heat of summer 2015 welcomes the WCS and RECOFTC team in Layshee. The trainers for the refresher course are all set. Several ex-trainees including Theya have all taken their seats. After the opening ceremonies, the trainers start to unpack the topics on REDD+, climate change and community forestry, and how these topics should be facilitated during village-level awareness activities.

The refresher course training goes by without a hitch.

Right after the training, participants form into five groups to conduct awareness

raising activities. Theya leads one group with two other members, a man and a woman, to conduct awareness-raising events in three villages in Layshee.

Her group proceeds to the first village – Benego, where they run into some difficult moments. "We appreciate what you are teaching us, but climate change or REDD+ is not our issue. We need practical livelihood skills," says one villager. "If you stop us from cutting trees for fuelwood and agriculture, what alternatives can you give us?" follows up another villager.

The moment that Theya dreads is finally staring her in the eye. The villagers await her answer. It throws her off but she composes her thoughts and gives a calm reply. "Thank you for bringing up those issues, as I share your concerns too. We have no specific answer right now, but we can assure you that your issues and concerns will reach the leadership of WCS and RECOFTC." Her quick but calm response saves her group.

The two other villages raise the same issues. However, this time they handle the concerns with relative ease.

Upon completing the village-level awareness activities, Myint Myint Oo meets with the group leaders. In the meeting, Theya shares the issues and concerns of the villagers they visited. It turns out that the rest of the villages raised the same problems. Myint Myint Oo summarizes and ends the meeting with an invitation to join the sub-national and national consultation meetings to further discuss the concerns they gathered from the villages.

At the sub-national consultation meeting in Khantee, Theya once again shines as she passionately shares her group's experiences during the village-level awareness

activities. Then, she again proves herself worthy to represent the Naga people during the national consultation meeting in Nay Pyi Taw displaying her improved knowledge of climate change, REDD+ and community forestry, and actively sharing her experiences.

Theya feels fulfilled, making true her promise to bring her villagers' issues and concerns to the appropriate authorities. She returns to Layshee eager to reunite with her pupils and resume her church duties. But her reunion is short-lived.

As the season changes from hot to rainy, Theya receives an invitation from WCS and RECOFTC to participate in the regional pre-World Forestry Congress (WFC) meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. The project team chose her because of her sincere desire to contribute to local forest conservation and her eagerness to share their local condition to policy makers and development organizations to get support for forest-dependent communities.

She feels excited but at the same time burdened with a huge responsibility to represent her country and people well. After attending preparatory meetings, she leaves Layshee on a rainy day, marking the start of her three-day journey to Bangkok, Thailand.

After a long trip, Theya finally arrives in Bangkok. The meeting discusses forest issues that local communities prioritize, to prepare for the upcoming XIV World Forestry Congress, the largest and most significant gathering of the world's forestry sector set to take place in Durban, South Africa in September 2015.

On opening day, she joins the Myanmar group where she again demonstrates her confidence in sharing her experiences during the awareness activities that she led in Layshee.

In plenary, Theya shares the reasons why global warming and climate change are happening and its impacts in her community. Her passionate call on all the participants to work together to find a market for local products made by local communities draws applause.

On the last day, RECOFTC facilitators open the floor for nominations on who will represent the region at the World Forestry Congress in South Africa. Theya and 17 others are nominated. Theya is humbled and at the same time thrilled, but also nervous after the facilitator announced that the nominees need to deliver a short speech. When her turn came up, she calmly delivers a short but meaningful speech.

"Local people can and want to protect forests, especially because climate change is already making our lives more difficult," says Theya, "But to do this effectively, we need resources. Invest in us, invest in local communities!" The room bursts into applause.

At the end of the regional pre-WFC meeting, Theya is one of the four elected participants to represent the region at the World Forestry Congress in Durban, South Africa.

She returns home in Layshee to a warm welcome. "We are proud of you Theya," her pastor says. "You have come a long way. Continue to make the Naga people proud by making their voices heard on the international stage." Theya is overwhelmed by the support from her community and family.

After preparatory meetings, she leaves Layshee full of inspiration from her village leaders and starts her five-day journey to South Africa. It is long and tiring but she gets there.



On the second day, the moment she's been waiting finally arrives. As she waits for her turn on the podium, she feels nervous but confident of her knowledge she gained from her trainings. After a short introduction, the facilitator announces her name as the next presenter.

Nervous but well prepared, she shares with the audience on what it is like to raise awareness on climate change in remote areas of Myanmar, how she is bringing local concerns on climate change and forests to government, and why there is a need to invest in participatory processes in forest management.

She ends her presentation with an emphatic call, "Invest in me through funds and resources for community forest implementation, livelihoods and enterprise development. I am the Khantee forest!"

The experience is a battle won and Theya's defining moment as a female leader on the international stage, but to achieve her goals for her community, she would still need support and resources. Upon her return, the question of 'alternative livelihood' still lingers, and the call for more practical livelihoods skills continues to resonate from the villages.

"Invest in me through funds and resources for community forest implementation, livelihoods and enterprise development. I am the Khantee forest!"

Good fences

make good neighbors



The banks of the Manshahi River collapse gradually under the force of the sandy, murky water that surges downstream. As the rain falls, it becomes clear to Rita Khadka and her neighbors that the river banks won't hold the water back much longer.

Rita, a young mother, looks out over the fields of rice, paddy and maize that she tends to with her husband as the rain pelts from the sky. Not only will her home flood, but the sediment the water carries with it will likely destroy her crops as well.

Sandy, nutrient-less sediment from the Chure Mountains set loose as the hillside is deforested, washes into Rita and her neighbor's fields as the riverbank facing their farmland erodes. Unpredictable and more intense rainfall, likely the cause of climate change, causes the Kanyashori village in Banke, Nepal to spiral deeper and deeper into despair.

If the river keeps washing sediment from the mountains into Rita's fields, the soil she grows her crops in will deplete and crop yields will fall. Rita worries about the money she will have to spend to feed her family if she cannot self-subsist on what her and her husband grow.

When the rains cease, members from the local Community Forest User Group (CFUG) participate in a training with the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) - a partner organization who local resource people (LRPs) have been trained on climate change adaptation and the importance of forest management by RECOFTC. The CFUG represents 237 households, including Rita's, that live in or near the 147 hectares of forest land they manage.

"Climate change is likely to change precipitation patterns and we need to

prepare through forest conservation and develop adaptation measures," the FECOFUN trainer tells the Kanyashori CFUG members as he explains to them how greenhouse gases trapped in the earth's atmosphere cause temperatures to rise.

Immediately, the floods come to mind and the reality of the situation hits Jeet and Bal Krishna, the co-chair and chair of the CFUG. They realize that these floods are not going to stop any time soon. They must, for the sake of Rita and everyone else in the community, do something to mitigate its effects.

"What if we build a 'fence' using bushes and shrubs to prevent the water from flowing into the village and fields?" Jeet, the co-chair of the CFUG suggests at the next CFUG meeting. After a short discussion, the other members agree and began building what they call the 'living fence.'

Normally, the young men in Kanyashori would do most of the physical labor required to build the 'living fence,' but economic constraints have forced many of the young people to move abroad to the Middle East to work as laborers. So, Rita and many of her female neighbors work to bioengineer the fence.

Clouds of dust rise from the cracked earth as Rita and her neighbors work in the heat of the dry season. Using shovels, wheel barrels and hoes they build a meter high wall of dirt between the river and the village.

In 2011 and 2012, the first two years after the 'living fence' is completed, not much changes. Sediment in the water is carried into the fields, again harming their crops, and Rita begins to worry.



“I want my children to stay in the village and work for the community, and the forest needs to be healthy for that to happen.”

As she walks through the forest with her friend Sita, collecting leaves and grass to bring back to her livestock, Rita laments “Why can’t we let our cattle graze here? The CFUG is so restrictive!”

Sita agrees, for they are both skeptical about what the CFUG can do for them.

After a training in 2013 with FECOFUN, it becomes clear to the CFUG that more plants are needed to stabilize the bank and filter out the sediment in the water. Using local knowledge, the CFUG identifies plants seen on other river banks and comes to the conclusion that they should plant besharam - a hardy shrub plant with a stiff stalk - along the bank and in the riverbed before the rainy season comes.

In 2013, with help from Hariyo Ban USAID, the CFUG transports the plants from a nearby forest and plants them on the dirt wall and in diagonal rows along the sandy riverbed.

Then, they waited for the rains to come.

Rita, still not officially a member of the CFUG yet, is curious to see if these projects will protect her crops from the flooding. Her daughter, now four years old, is growing fast and Rita would soon need to pay school fees - something she fears she won't be able to do if she needs to buy food from the market.

When the rains of 2013 come, the effects are apparent. The violent rush of water slows as it passes through the village and although there is some flooding, major damage is avoided. Rita's crop yield springs back up and she is able to sustain her family with what she grows.

What's more, the plants in the river bed can be used to build houses and the leaves can be used for organic fertilizers in the field, providing the villagers with more than just one benefit.

Impressed with the impact that the CFUG project has on the community, Rita decides to officially join the CFUG. She is expecting her second child and sees the importance to maintaining a healthy forest and ecosystem for her children.

At the first CFUG meeting, Rita is shy and sits at the back of the room. "What do I know about community forestry?" she asks herself, justifying her lack of participation. But as Rita attends more meetings, she becomes more comfortable. She jumps when the opportunity arises to attend a FECOFUN training on developing leadership capacities.

But, at first, her husband is reluctant to let her go. "Who will take care of the children and cook the food while you are away?" he presses. "My mother can take care of the children, and you can cook dinner for yourself," Rita responds with a sense of determination.

Shortly after the first training, the general elections take place for the CFUG. Thirty-three per cent of the leadership positions must be held by women, and Rita's name immediately comes up for the position of secretary because of her reading and writing abilities. Surprised, but willing, Rita accepts the position. Rita attends two more FECOFUN trainings, one on climate change adaptation and other on social inclusion and gender equality - further solidifying her role in the CFUG.

Rita sits in a circle with seven men and one other woman discussing the 'living fence' and the potential challenge this year's rainfall will bring and the reforestation efforts on the riverbed. She hands around the attendance book, asking everyone to sign - part of her duty as secretary.

As she looks out over a field of rice the same color as the traditional scarf draped over her shoulders, she says, "I want my children to stay in the village and work for the community, and the forest needs to be healthy for that to happen."



A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a yellow and pink shawl over a black and white striped cardigan, is seated and speaking. She is looking slightly to her right. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**Rural women in Nepal
raise their voices
on climate change
and REDD+**

In Nepal, the Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI) is known for their work to enhance rural women's participation in forest decision-making, although with little involvement in REDD+ and climate change programmes. Since partnering with RECOFTC, HIMAWANTI has become actively involved in these issues through their newly developed team of grassroots REDD+ trainers and becoming a key player in REDD+ national discussions. This story offers a glimpse of the evolution of just one of the team of HIMAWANTI trainers who is part of the institutional empowerment of HIMAWANTI as it evolved to become an influential organization working to ensure rural women's voices are heard in Nepal's REDD+ debate.

Fifteen year old Sharada Rai wrung her hands as she approached the gates of the District Forest Offices in Makwanpur district, Nepal. Two men with large guns stood at the entrance of the complex, looking at her as if to say "you don't belong here."

Taking a deep breath, Sharada stood up tall, walked into the building and approached the desk of the District Forest Officer.

"I would like to request approval to attend a training with the Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association," she said nervously.

After some delay, the officer eventually approved.

A few weeks earlier, Sharada went to a nearby village where she watched her neighbor, an older woman named Parbina, lead a community forestry training.

"Women are left behind socially, economically and politically. But, if we provide women with information on their rights, they will come forward and take leadership roles."

Sharada sat quietly in the back of the training, mostly comprised of men, and marveled at the way Prabina commanded the room. The year was 1998 and it was unusual to see a woman hold an authoritative leadership position. Immediately, Sharada was interested in community forestry and jumped at opportunity when HIMAWANTI invited her to a training.

When Sharada returned from the training, she approached the District Forest Officer's desk with a newfound confidence - determined to bring HIMAWANTI, an organization that had just been officially formed a year earlier, into her community.

"Now, you must support me," she said.

Stunned by the confidence of this young woman, the forest officer obliged.

Over the next few years, Sharada worked building a HIMAWANTI presence in her community. She attended training after training, building her knowledge and

becoming more and more well-known in forestry community. Soon, she became HIMAWANTI district chairperson and central committee member, a position she has held for 15 years.

Today, Sharada is 33 years old. A single woman, with a no nonsense attitude and large kind eyes. Her success and leadership position is somewhat unique in Nepal- in the past only one or two women held positions in Community Forest User Groups (CFUG). "Most women just sit in the corner during meetings and don't speak up," Sharada explains. "When they do speak, the men often interrupt them and quiet them."

For Nepalese women who often work 18 hours a day and are heavily dependent on forest resources, participation in CFUGs is critical. Particularly, educating rural women on the impacts that climate change can have on the forest resources they depend on is of the utmost importance. Yet, few women are present in discussions on climate change science, adaptation and mitigation.

"Women are left behind socially, economically and politically. But, if we provide women with information on their rights, they will come forward and take leadership roles," she says. "We don't need to force them to take their rights, if we give them information, they will access their rights on their own."

So when RECOFTC and HIMAWANTI began discussing a partnership with the goal of educating women on REDD+, an initiative to create financial value for the carbon stored in forests by offering incentives, and climate change the decision to join forces seemed natural.

In 2011, RECOFTC and HIMAWANTI began holding trainings of trainers, like

Sharada, with the intention of creating a cascading effect through which information on REDD+ and the impacts of climate change would spread among local people - particularly women. Sharada immediately took a central role in the partnership, advocating for the involvement of women in the REDD+ discussions, representing HIMAWANTI in district REDD+ working groups.

Sharada also helps facilitate national level discussions to inform stakeholders, community level discussions and exhibition fairs in rural areas to help inform local communities about the difficulties and key issues related to women in climate change and REDD+ development.

"Because women don't get the same educational opportunities as men do," Sharada says, "they are often left in the shadows." Lack of education combined with varying local language dialects challenged effective verbal and written communication between trainers like Sharada and local women.

Knowing this, HIMAWANTI, with RECOFTC support, developed a range of tools suitable for this context, including a REDD+ training manual, posters and calendars, together with support on facilitation skills and methods. For example, the Nepali calendar illustrates the science of climate change and the impacts it can have on the environment. Using simplified language, visuals depicting the science behind concepts like the greenhouse gas effect and tapping into cultural motifs, like the sun, helps break down complex topics and make them accessible and understandable to everyone. "Many women don't get sent to school so providing them with a tool that can educate them without using words is very critical," notes Sharada.

A few weeks ago, Sharada got a call from a district official, requesting that she conduct a training on climate change in a nearby community. With little time to prepare, Sharada grabbed a stack of the calendars and headed to the training. After speaking for two hours to the training participants using the calendar as an aid, the official who invited her to the training approached her.

“Can you get me more of these training calendars? They are perfect for a training like this!” said the official.

Smiling, Sharada agreed, hopeful that the local people would be able to learn from them. “The trainings and appropriate tools gets our messages across in a way that our trainees understand,” Sharada says, “every REDD+ working group member now uses the training methods and calendar to help with raising awareness on climate change.”

Local level leaders, local resource persons and district level forestry officials are also being trained with the knowledge HIMAWANTI gained while collaborating with RECOFTC. “If we didn’t have this project with RECOFTC,” Sharada explains, “we might not have information on climate change and REDD+. But, now through our trainings this information has made its way into the community and women can advocate and discuss their perspectives on climate change with confidence” she says.

Reflecting on the confidence she had gained in the pursuit of carving out a bigger role for women in forestry, Sharada laughs, “now I just pick up the phone and call the District Officers without a thought!” And, when she walks past the guards holding guns at the entrance to the office, she just smiles and nods.

Under the partnership with HIMAWANTI there are now more than 12 local women resource persons like Sharada working in four districts to raise awareness on climate change and REDD+. Each resource person is actively disseminating information on climate change and REDD+ in their own community and neighbouring villages. The experiences of this cadre of trainers are combined with HIMAWANTI’s national presence, allowing the organization to amplify the voices of rural women in national REDD+ debates. HIMAWANTI is now committed to continuing to sensitize rural women on climate change and REDD+ issues and voicing their concerns in national discussions. With their strengthened organizational capacity in the field of climate change and REDD+, HIMAWANTI is continuing to develop new REDD+ programmes.



Lasting livelihood change among forest dwellers and park officers in Viet Nam

This is a story about a change agent in Viet Nam who has helped transform unsustainable livelihood practices that were degrading forests. To succeed, Dinh undertook a learning journey to broaden his understanding, and through that he has enhanced the knowledge of others, ultimately putting local communities in a better position to make constructive changes and participate in forest decision-making.

Walking through a patch of forest a few years ago, Le Van Dinh smelled a fresh scent of burnt wood and grass. As he drew closer, he saw smoke rising from ashes. What happened, he wondered, “I want to help communities increase their income and get out of poverty. But what went wrong?”

The fire had started as a result of villagers using smoke to chase wild bees out of their hives so honey could be collected. Dinh, the Director of HCCD, a non-governmental organization in Ha Tinh Province aimed at reducing poverty and promoting community development, understood that villagers were aiming to increase their honey harvest, without understanding that the practice was unsustainable.

The sight of the burnt forest motivated Dinh to find new ways of working. He realized that villagers’ livelihoods should not only be about generating income and profit but also about how to sustainably use the resources available to them.

Yet he knew that the villagers would continue to be more concerned about the volume of harvest and getting higher incomes from honey hunting rather than protecting their resource base in a way that would



“Keeping honeybees in a sustainable way would not only help improve your income but also protect the forest and enhance the diversity of trees in the forest.”

sustain their livelihood. Even though he had been working with the villagers to shift to domesticated bee raising, they clearly were going back to the forest and the wild bees. According to villager reports, he knew they were also cutting down trees illegally.

Dinh continued to hand out information on sustainable beekeeping and organize community seminars. But he never felt confident of what he was trying to explain and realized that he could not change villagers’ practices if he himself was not confident of what he was trying to explain.

In 2012, he was invited to join a RECOFTC training. He agreed, thinking it would improve his knowledge and better equip him and others at HCCD to advise villagers on sustainable forest management. He went through several trainings, learning about climate change and effective training approaches, and then returned to the communities in which he had been struggling to change long-held practices. He began reaching out to the Youth Unions, teachers of primary and secondary schools, members of the women’s union and the farmers’ union.

“Keeping honeybees in a sustainable way would not only help improve your income but also protect the forest and enhance the diversity of trees in the forest,” he explained in one training.

“But our bees are now mostly domesticated. They don’t live in the forest anymore,” a villager replied.

“Even when you domesticate your bees within your lands, the bees still need to get nectar and pollen from the forest. If the forest is healthy and protected, there will be various kinds of trees and plants, creating more food for the bees. If the bees have more diverse sources of food,



like nectar from flowers and leaves, the quality of the honey will be extremely good, which in turn will satisfy your customers. You can also sell your honey at a higher price.”

The participants listened and began taking an interest.

Dinh continued, “If our forest is degraded or destroyed, there won’t be enough food from the forest for the bees, which can result in decreased honey production. If this happens, we would need to supply the bees with sugar to keep them healthy. On one hand, this is very costly. On the other hand, the quality of the honey would decrease, which isn’t good for increasing our customers. Consequently, the selling price of our honey would also decrease.”

He concluded, “If we protect our forest, we will not only benefit from beekeeping but will also be able to utilize many kinds of non-timber forest products for income generation.”

He never mentioned climate change, however, or how it relates to sustainable forest management and livelihoods because he did not yet have a firm grasp of the concepts. From 2013-15 he participated in further RECOFTC trainings on community forestry, REDD+, conflict management and livelihood and market development.

By then Dinh’s confidence had grown and he felt ready for his next training for Vu Quang National Park (VQNP) forest protection officers. But his first attempt was met with skepticism. No one from the national park office attended his training, with the excuse that they were all busy.

Knowing the critical role of forest protection officers in the process of integrating local people in forest management, Dinh didn’t

want to give up easily. So he decided to change his strategy and focus on two officers from the VNQP communication unit, who he eventually convinced to take part in his training on REDD+.

Following the training, Ms. Trần Thị Thùy Dương, a communication officer from VNQP said, “I had no idea of what REDD+ is and had only basic understanding of climate change. But now, I gained a clearer understanding of people, forests and climate change. I am impressed with your training methods.”

She then recommended to the VQNP director that all forest protection officers should take part in the same training. Not long after, 30 mostly young forest officers who work closely with the communities around the park showed up for Dinh’s training.

Over the years, Dinh’s trainings have helped to gradually transform a community – supporting local communities in developing sustainable livelihoods, and equipping forest protection officers with critical information on climate change, REDD+, and participatory approaches to more effectively work with villagers.

Three members of the women’s and farmer’s unions that he trained have now taken their new knowledge forward through sharing with their neighbors and villages. His confidence and new-found knowledge and skills have helped Mr. Dinh to be elected as a member of Viet Nam’s REDD+ network, UNREDD communication group and the government’s disaster reduction program. Ultimately, his work has placed local communities in a better position to sustain forests in Viet Nam.



A women's group in Hang Hai village are making a difference by encouraging community members not to participate in destructive forest activities. Hang Hai village (in Gung Re commune, Di Linh District, Lam Dong province) is the site of frequent illegal logging. Every day, local people witness loggers cutting and transporting timber. Every night, wood trucks drive past the village – including one truck that killed two villagers and badly injured eight people. Both villagers and Communal Forestry Officers tried to stop them but failed, and the powerful loggers and wood transporters continued.

Women's group

impacts illegal logging

in Viet Nam



In 2012, RECOFTC and the Lam Dong Center for Agriculture Extension conducted a training for local people in Gung Re commune. The training raised awareness of villagers so that they could better understand the role of forests in climate change, and what is REDD+, along with the important roles communities can play in forest management and development.

As a result of the training, local women's awareness changed as they realized that sustainably managing the forest would not only benefit themselves, but also the whole community. They also realized that by joining together and taking action, they could protect their forest. Thus, they started to think about what they could do to stop deforestation.

In March 2013 the 'Women take care, manage, and protect forest' group was officially established in Hang Hai village by the Gung Re Communal Women's Union. After its establishment, 37 members of the group developed operational regulations based on the spirit of volunteering for the benefit of the community. Group members learned about forest protection, and members have gained confidence from talking to each other openly, and sharing knowledge, information and experiences among themselves and with others.

The group decided to both disseminate information about forest protection in village meetings and, as group members lived in or near the forest, to report logging activity to forestry officers, the Commune Forestry Board, or the communal police.

According to Ms. Tran Thi Soi, Chairwoman of Hang Hai Women's Union, there were eight households who were often hired for transporting wood or coal, or cutting the forest for cultivation. These households were not members of the women's group

or the Women's Union. In addition, there were outsiders trespassing in Hang Hai forest.

Having identified the target households who needed support and advocacy, the women's group divided itself into sub-groups. Each sub-group consisted of one or more members who lived near the targeted households who were involved in destroying the forest for pay.

The sub-groups disseminated knowledge on forest protection and convinced the targeted households to stop deforestation and find alternative incomes. After continuous attempts, the sub-groups had successfully persuaded four households stop cutting/ transporting wood and burning the forest for charcoal, and to find ways to earn income from other activities. The women's group also went to every household to disseminate knowledge. After each dissemination activity, the women's group organized a meeting to self-assess and discuss lessons learned. Since 2014, conflicts with forestry officers have stopped, and loggers no longer openly destroy the forest as they know they will be reported to the police.

While all acknowledge that involving villagers in forest protection and addressing deforestation is complicated and time consuming, especially when no supporting funds are available, the women in Hang Hai village are doing their best to protect the forest, motivated by ensuring a better environment for all villagers and for future generations.



RECOFTC's mission is to enhance capacities for stronger rights, improved governance and fairer benefits for local people in sustainable forested landscapes in the Asia and the Pacific region.

RECOFTC holds a unique and important place in the world of forestry. It is the only international not-for-profit organization that specializes in capacity development for community forestry. RECOFTC engages in strategic networks and effective partnerships with governments, nongovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, local people and research and educational institutes throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. With over 25 years of international experience and a dynamic approach to capacity development – involving research and analysis, demonstration, communication and training services – RECOFTC delivers innovative solutions *for people and forests*.

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