

Key Statement of CSO Forum – ASFCC Closing Event

February 26, 2020

Civil Society Perspectives on ASEAN Social Forestry Trends and Impacts

(Ms. Pirawan Wongnithisathaporn, CSO Forum - Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact)

Nee Ler Ah Nge (Good morning), My name is Pirawan, I belong to the Karen indigenous group in Thailand.

I grew up where the place people called forest, for indigenous peoples forest is beyond the eco-service system and commodity, it is our root of our culture, belief and identity. Forest is part of our life and our life is part of the forest. Therefore, we have to take care of each other and make sure it will continue to the next generation. I have started to engage with the ASEAN social forestry network to bring the voice of our indigenous and local community to be heard. Our knowledge, practices, role and contribution are crucial in taking care of ASEAN natural resources and prosperity. We need each other and therefore we need to work together.

The CSO Forum on Social Forestry in ASEAN was established in 2012 and is participated in by civil society organizations and community-based organizations, indigenous peoples' networks and membership organizations in ASEAN. These organizations are implementing capacity building, awareness raising, advocacy and networking and technical support programs on forest and NTFP livelihood and marketing, forest tenure and access rights, traditional and indigenous knowledge systems on natural resources, and a few projects in REDD+.

From the CSO Forum space as an invited speaker, we have evolved into a platform participated in by over 8 organizations to distil, consolidate and communicate key messages from CSOs and communities to ASEAN member states through the ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry (AWG-SF).

In the last nine years, Social forestry provided significant contributions to global targets for life on land, climate change mitigation and adaptation and biodiversity and it is one of the proven mechanisms to achieve sustainable forest management. Indigenous peoples and local communities are already leading several restoration initiatives in forested landscapes. When we look at social forestry, we don't look at it as just as community forestry policy, or CBFM program. We look at social forestry as a broad concept of meaningful engagement and involvement of local and indigenous communities on matters related to forest management, which includes tenure and access rights. For us as indigenous peoples – it is our customary rights to our land, territory and natural resources.

Following the identified targets until 2020 by the Forum, progress has been made in contributing to policy reforms, improving social forestry practice, and establishment of multistakeholder platforms.

It is groundbreaking that the rights of the indigenous peoples and customary forests, spirit forests, *hutan adat* or *tagal hutan* have been included and are prominent provisions in the new or amended forestry laws in Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia. Positive policy and practice in forest governance, such as the establishment of the national working group on CBFM in the Philippines and the national and sub-national multi-stakeholder CF program coordination groups in Cambodia are meaningful platforms of joint action. Government, Civil Society and local communities, we have improved cooperation, and are able to discuss community safeguards and appropriate mechanisms; we congratulate ASEAN on the completion of the ASEAN guidelines on responsible investment in food, agriculture and forestry. Further, communities are gradually being recognized as forest stewards and there have been successful innovative platforms, such as the *Panen Raya Nusantara* (PARARA) in Indonesia, that promotes the ecological and cultural value of sustainably developed products.

Last February 5-7, 2020, the CSO Forum conducted a reflection and assessment meeting and plan the succeeding steps/action of the CSO Forum beyond 2020. It was an opportunity to revisit and refine our vision for the next 5 years 2021 – 2025, which is to see:

“Empowered and resilient indigenous and local communities in forest landscape in ASEAN with secured equal rights and well-being through an institutionalized CSO platform working towards recognition and promotion of indigenous knowledge and local wisdom, tenure and access rights, community economy and livelihood, international and regional standards and safeguards, and inclusive governance mechanisms.”

Within the next 5 years, the Forum hopes to achieve the following changes:

For Markets in ASEAN and beyond to be ethical, fair, responsible, tolerant and understanding to local producers and for the government to have supporting policies toward forest landscape products enterprise

That ASEAN member states will formulate or amend or implement legal frameworks that favor indigenous peoples and local communities land territory resources (LTR) in reference to International standards.

That governments and private sector adopt and practice the International and Regional Standards including safeguards at the ASEAN country level, and;

That State legislative and executive actors adapt and execute policies that are conducive to effective and meaningful community participation in the governance of forest and natural resources in the ASEAN Region.

If the last nine years of engaging together productively and constructively is an indication, we are optimistic that we will be able to hurdle some challenges that remain. We know that structural and institutional challenges take time and they require working together rather than alone,

Some of these challenges that we hope we can take on together:

On Community Economy and Livelihoods, some Community Forestry Enterprises (CFEs) are still operating in isolation. There is a market but lack the links and capacity between producer and market still remain. Capacity building and follow-up post training is limited. Permitting process is often a disincentive, and equitable partnership between CFEs and larger enterprises is still weak.

Governance Mechanisms, although there is improvement in forestry policy and governance, it is still lacking in capacity to engage effectively by CSOs and community. In addition, there is Limited capacity in operationalization of governance mechanisms.

International and Regional Standards and Safeguards, the inconsistency of interpretations and understanding of the standard leads to a lack of clear guidance from various stakeholders on the implementation and practice on the FPIC reporting system including the grievance mechanisms. Apart from that, the lack of capacity and awareness by the local communities on the international and regional mechanisms especially to their rights and safeguards

Tenure and Access Rights, Forest access rights remain constrained in many communities and can also be an expensive and tedious process. Ownership rights are still conditional and restricted in a number of cases. Apart from that, there are still overlapping between the customary territories and other management areas such as forest reserve, parks and forest concession. The rapid and unsustainable development in community and Indigenous forest encroachment will threaten the customary forest thus the customary rights.

In line with the Strategic Plan on Food, Agriculture and Forestry and the Strategic Plan of Action on Social Forestry, and the refined CSO Forum Vision and Domains of changes/thematic areas of work, the platform would like to emphasize the following points to take into account in the Strategic Plan of Action.

For **Community Economy and Livelihoods**

- **We need a Program on NTFPs and CFEs** which include the development and adoption of a regional guidelines on sustainable harvesting and management of NTFPs; Facilitating the one stop processing center for CFEs registration and support; Sharing technical expertise on NTFPs across ASEAN; Intellectual Property Right (IPR) support for community products; and acceptance of alternative certification.

- **Capacity Building and Promotions** thru sustained and appropriate capacity building program and assistance in meeting standards, value addition, regional and national marketing and branding; and the
- **Connectivity and Continuity** to facilitate equitable partnership between CFEs and larger enterprises, activating the ASEAN Trust Fund for CFEs, exploration of diverse national funding mechanisms

For **Governance Mechanisms**, we recommend to continue to build trust, transparency, relationship between community and government, recognize and promote the indigenous and traditional knowledge in forest management, and to strengthen the role of women and youth in forest governance.

For **International and Regional Standards and Safeguards** We need to develop an FPIC policy at all levels, provide resource, protection and grievance mechanisms for the environmental defenders.

Finally, on Tenure and Access Rights: land control and ownership was mentioned as the key to achieving poverty eradication, zero hunger and gender equality. Therefore, it is very important to recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on their customary land and forest tenure. We need to promote local conservation initiatives. Reform of law and policy is needed.

We extend our appreciation to the ASEAN-Swiss Partnership on Social Forestry and Climate Change (ASFCC), Swiss Development Cooperation, ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry and the ASEAN Secretariat for all the support and collaborative work in engaging the CSOs.

The CSO Forum affirms to continue to do more, discuss more, and collaborate with governments and key stakeholders in keeping the productive interface to advance social forestry in order to contribute to the achievement of national climate and sustainable development goals. We are accountable to our future generation in our decision and action today. Let be the change, continue to work together for the well- being of all. Terima kasih Banyak. Ta Blut