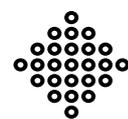




Report

# Gender inclusion in forest landscape governance research and education in Southeast Asia



**Explore**



RECOFTC



## **Gender inclusion in forest landscape governance research and education in Southeast Asia: Challenges and opportunities**

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## **Challenges and opportunities**

Report

October 2022

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# Acknowledgements

This assessment was designed and implemented under the technical oversight of Kalpana Giri, who at the time was the Senior Program Officer for Gender Equity at RECOFTC. Basundhara Bhattarai of the Institute for Study and Development Worldwide in Sydney, Australia, collected and analysed the data and wrote the first draft of the report. Kalpana Giri provided technical inputs, strengthened the analysis of the data and contributed to the report writing. David Gritten, Vanessa Hongsathivij and Julian Atkinson of RECOFTC provided technical inputs. The team worked with a consultant to finalize the report. The team would like to express gratitude to all survey respondents and expert interviewees for sharing their time and providing valuable information.

# Summary

The Explore initiative, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, works to strengthen the capacities of universities and researchers in Southeast Asia to conduct quality, impact-oriented research on forest landscape governance.

One of Explore's focal areas is gender inclusion. Gender inequities pose significant challenges to forest landscape governance in Southeast Asia but are often overlooked. Effective research could help to confront these inequities. However, there are barriers preventing this kind of research from taking place and driving change.

To understand these barriers and identify ways to overcome them, the Explore team produced this assessment. The study examined three interrelated components that are crucial to strengthening gender-based inclusion in forest governance research and related higher education: representation, capacities and the enabling environment. The analysis is based on a literature review, interviews with 19 experts and 88 responses to a survey. The findings are as follows:

- 1 Female representation is improving among students but remains limited among university faculty, especially among senior leadership. Institutional policies on gender-inclusive representation and leadership are lacking, and students lack female mentors and role models.
- 2 Female students and faculty are often discriminated against and subjected to sexual harassment. These issues limit women's learning opportunities and career prospects. Institutional policies to deter discrimination and harassment are uncommon.
- 3 There is limited appreciation within universities of how gender relates to forest landscape governance. This contributes to the near-absence of gender topics in forestry-related curricula and research agendas. University lecturers and researchers lack the knowledge and other capacities to integrate gender-inclusiveness into their work.
- 4 Outdated attitudes and exclusionary norms permeate forestry education and research institutions and their practices. Faculty members perpetuate stereotypes and entrench gender gaps, limiting the scope for identifying and addressing gender inequalities in workplaces and for developing gender-inclusive research.
- 5 Universities lack policies, strategies and budgets for addressing gender issues, promoting inclusion and generating research on gender in the context of forest landscape governance.
- 6 Despite the many gaps and challenges, there are also emerging good practices and opportunities for improving gender-inclusiveness in teaching and research.

This research affirms the need for the Explore initiative and network. The findings will guide the network as it develops and implements a gender action plan with three broad categories of activities:

- Actions to remove barriers for women and early-stage professionals to develop their careers
- Actions to increase capacities for gender-inclusive teaching and research
- Actions to develop an enabling environment by addressing systemic power inequities and gendered assumptions prevalent in forestry education institutions

# Introduction

This report is an output of the Explore initiative, which is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).<sup>1</sup> Explore is a research network and community of practice dedicated to expanding and applying knowledge on forest landscape governance in Southeast Asia. Explore works to strengthen the capacities of universities and researchers to conduct high-quality, impact-oriented research on forest landscape governance.

Gender inclusion is a focal area of Explore because prevalent gaps in gender equality and equity are posing fundamental challenges to sustainable forest governance in Southeast Asia. These gaps usually manifest in the ways women and men are represented and participate in decision-making as well as how they hold knowledge of, receive rights over and gain benefits from forest landscape resources. Gender gaps also exist within institutional structures, norms and power relations.

Research and higher education in the forestry sector can help to overcome these gaps. But these fields, like forestry itself, have historically been dominated by men (Larasatie, Barnett and Hansen, 2020; RECOFTC and AWG-SF 2020; Rudebjer and Siregar, 2004). Women have been underrepresented (Christie and Giri, 2011; Otero and Brown, 1996) in what has largely been considered professions for men (Lidestav and Sjölander, 2007). A study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2020) of forestry institutions in 15 countries in the Asia–Pacific region found that, on average, only 15 percent of workers are female. FAO concluded that “neither the number nor the proportion of females has changed significantly during the last decade”.

Studies also show how masculine norms that permeate forestry organizations are perpetuated from within, creating an unwelcoming environment for women and making it particularly difficult for them to have fair opportunities for learning and career development (Wagle et al., 2020; Christie and Giri, 2011). Forestry fieldwork is strongly associated with being “dangerous”, a masculine field and “dirty” work for women. These associations discourage women from enrolling in forestry courses and doing field-based work (Larastie, Barnett and Hansen, 2020). However, forestry work and practice has greatly expanded from heavy logging jobs to broader social and community forest management roles.

Forest education and knowledge are often narrowly framed around “technical” aspects and rooted in the assumption that forestry work is not relevant to gender and social issues (Lidestav and Sjölander, 2007). This framing greatly limits the inclusion of gender and social issues in forestry curricula of universities, reducing opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning and practice.

In this context, graduates are ill-equipped to identify and address gender issues across forestry work when they are employed. These gaps also lead to limited research on gender issues in the sector and limited representation of women in decision-making bodies (Nhem and Lee, 2019). When women are represented, their voices are often sidelined (Agarwal, 2010). This lack of gender-inclusive forest education reinforces the continued marginalization of vulnerable groups in the forestry sector, such as women, Indigenous groups and people living in poverty.

Most research on gender and forest educational institutions has focused on Europe, North America and Australia (McGown, 2015; Lidestav and Sjölander, 2007; Reed, 2003; Otero and Brown, 1996). With a notable exception of a study in Nepal (Christie and Giri, 2011), little research has examined women's experiences and the barriers they face to participate in inclusive learning and career opportunities in Asia. While the FAO (2020) report offers some useful information, it contains little analysis of the underlying reasons for the trends and gender-differentiated impacts in education and research. The dearth of gender analysis and knowledge in educational institutions in Asia calls for a more nuanced analysis of gender gaps and barriers to promote inclusive education.

This assessment report helps to fill the knowledge gap. It presents the findings of a study undertaken by Explore to better understand gender-related challenges in forest landscape governance research and higher education across Southeast Asia and to identify opportunities for reducing these challenges. The study examined three interrelated components:

- Representation: Are men and women represented equitably in learning, research, work and leadership? What are the emerging trends and their underlying drivers?
- Capacities: What are the capacities and capacity gaps of organizations undertaking gender- and social-inclusion research, training and education? Do women and men have appropriate opportunities to gain the capacities to undertake research and work effectively in the forest landscape sector?
- Enabling environment: What formal and informal policies, norms, cultures, power structures and decision-making processes affect gender-inclusive research, education and professional practices—and how?

The researchers interviewed 19 experts (13 women, six men) from seven countries. Nine interviewees worked at universities, six at non-governmental organizations and two at private companies; one was a student; and one worked for a government agency. The academics were lecturers and researchers with a background in forestry, agriculture, environmental science or social sciences. The team used content analysis of the interviews to design an online survey to gather additional quantitative data. The interviewed experts and other targeted contacts were invited to complete the survey and share it within their networks. Of the 88 respondents, 53 were women, 33 were men and two were non-binary.

The study identified prevalent gaps in women's representation and inclusion in forest governance education and research. It mapped the capacity gaps that contribute to the inadequate inclusion and that limit gender-inclusive research. And it illustrated the underlying power relations that cause and perpetuate gender gaps. The findings will guide the Explore team as they develop and implement an action plan to strengthen the quality of forest landscape research within higher education to achieve more gender-inclusive forest landscape governance.

# Findings

**1** Female representation is improving among students but remains limited among university faculty, especially among senior leadership. Institutional policies on gender-inclusive representation and leadership are lacking, and students lack female mentors and role models.

In most countries covered by this study, the proportion of female students is increasing. In some, it has approached or exceeded 50 percent. An exception is Myanmar. It is the only country with a quota for female students. However, that quota is just 20 percent, and it serves also as an apparent limit. Myanmar is also the only country with stringent physical fitness requirements for enrolment in forestry degrees, which some female students view as a barrier.

Among university lecturers and researchers, a disparity in gender representation increases up the hierarchy of seniority: Women are perceived to occupy 30–40 percent of third-tier roles, but only 5 percent of top-tier roles. This reflects cultural stereotypes that say leaders should be men. However, the lack of women in senior roles contributes to the persistence of harmful norms and undermines efforts to create gender-inclusive learning spaces (discussed further on). It also means female students lack inspiring role models. Only 20.8 percent of the university-based survey respondents said there were female mentors and role models in their institution.

Of the 19 experts interviewed, only two said their organization had a policy to boost women's representation. About half (52 percent) of the survey respondents said their organization had a policy to ensure gender balance, and 31 percent said there was a policy to ensure that women are in leadership positions. Experts in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) also highlighted national laws and policies that require all government agencies, including the forestry sector and universities, to adopt gender-inclusive strategies and practices.

**2** Female students and faculty are often discriminated against and subjected to sexual harassment. These issues limit women's learning opportunities and career prospects. Institutional policies to deter discrimination and harassment are uncommon.

The study revealed that female students often lack exposure to fieldwork because their supervisors consider them to be too weak or have concerns about their safety. This leads to situations in which female students must analyse data that their male counterparts have collected in the field but cannot collect data themselves.

When female students do go into the field, they face further discrimination, such as being tasked with preparing food while male students discuss work with their professors. There is a lack of female-only toilets, changing rooms and bedrooms. And, whether in the field or in their universities, female students are often exposed to sexual harassment by male students and faculty. The expert interviewees indicated that such harassment is so common that it is taken as the norm. Some said that women who experience harassment do not even recognize it as such. Others described students feeling deterred after rejecting unwanted propositions from powerful male faculty members or from voicing concerns about them—out of fear of being punished with low marks. Only 16.7 percent of university staff and

students said their institution had policies to address gender-based harassment.

Expert interviewees said that male-dominated power structures rarely acknowledge sexual harassment and workplace discrimination. These issues tend to remain invisible, but they reduce women's learning opportunities, confidence in their abilities and career prospects. Every one of the interviewed experts said that female graduates in particular lacked employment readiness. This is mainly related to female students having limited experience of field work. Some of the experts also said that female students tend to leave the forestry sector to avoid being sexually harassed.

**3** There is limited appreciation within universities of how gender relates to forest landscape governance. This contributes to the near absence of gender inclusion from forestry-related curricula and research agendas. University lecturers and researchers lack the knowledge and other capacities they need to integrate gender-inclusiveness into their work.

The study revealed a significant conceptual gap. "Gender" is widely perceived to be about little more than the presence of women, for example, in terms of the number of female students or the inclusion of women in surveys. This narrow view is reflected in a widespread lack of awareness of how gender-responsiveness relates to forestry, governance of forest landscapes and research in these fields.

Expert interviewees said that forestry tends to be viewed as a "hard" science focused on "technical" subjects, such as forest mensuration, silviculture and carbon rather than on social issues. Gender and other social topics are often perceived as irrelevant and/or of lesser importance. As a result, these topics are almost entirely absent from curricula, teaching approaches, learning spaces and research agendas within the forestry education system.

Among university staff and even those who are gender focal points, there is a widespread lack of knowledge and skills needed to teach students about the gender dimensions of forestry or to do gender-inclusive research. These capacity gaps relate to the entire research cycle, from conceptualization and identification of gender issues, through data collection and analysis to research communication.

Opportunities for students, lecturers and researchers to learn about gender and equity in relation to forest landscape governance are rare. Platforms for networking and conversation are also weak in general.

In the survey, 71 percent of university staff said they had done some gender-inclusive work or research. But according to the expert interviews, when gender



As a student of forestry, I always wanted to go inside the forest and take part in the field measurements and other related work, but my male colleagues and teachers never encouraged me to do so. They said that female bodies are too soft to carry out fieldwork. Because of this, I did not have the skill set that a forestry graduate is supposed to have. As a result of this, I was not confident to look for a job related to forestry and natural resources management after I graduated from the university.

– **Expert interviewee from Thailand**

inclusion does feature in research, it tends to be only in a limited way; for example, being limited to superficial analysis of the gendered division of labour without explaining the underlying gender and power relations. Also, few of the interviewees were aware of the importance of pathways from research to policy change. They said research is usually done primarily to gather data for publication rather than to understand and address a problem related to policy or practice.

The survey asked university staff to identify which barriers prevented them from doing research related to gender in the context of forestry. From a list, half of these respondents selected “limited knowhow and capacity to use gender research tools and techniques”, while 35 percent said it was their “limited knowledge on relevant gender topics and issues”.

The survey also asked respondents to identify priorities for Explore from a list of options. The most common choice among university staff (71 percent of respondents) was for Explore to provide training to enable researchers to recognize their own personal biases and how these could affect their research.

University staff also prioritized budgetary and human resources for **disseminating gender research outcomes to influence policy (57 percent), training on how to include gender in research proposals and outcomes (57 percent) and research budgets for generating gender-disaggregated outcomes (57 percent)**. Half of the university staff said Explore should provide training on gender analysis methods and tools.

4

Outdated attitudes and exclusionary norms permeate forestry education and research institutions and their practices. Faculty members perpetuate stereotypes and entrench the gender gaps, thus limiting the scope for identifying and reducing gender inequalities in workplaces and for developing gender-inclusive research.

The interviews and survey showed that stereotypes and biases are prevalent. For example, forestry is widely perceived to be “men’s work” for which women lack the required strength. These attitudes contribute to gender gaps in the learning environment, such as when faculty members ask female students to do domestic chores.

“Gender”, meanwhile, is commonly perceived to be a topic only for women. If an organization has a gender focal point, is it likely a woman. And if gender research takes place, it tends to be women who do it. But in male-dominated, male-centric organizations, women have little power to effect change. Some of the expert



Gender subjects are not included in the curriculum, as the university is supposed to teach technical forestry. I am female, studied forestry, and my current job is to teach forestry subjects in the university. I do not have the capacity to teach gender subjects and guide student research on the topic because I was never taught and exposed to gender subjects and research methods in forestry. As a female teacher and researcher, I am keen to learn about gender concepts and research methods in relation to forestry.

– **Expert interviewee from Viet Nam**

interviewees spoke of the denial they faced when they tried to identify and discuss gender issues prevailing in forest education and practice. Others noted a general pattern of ignorance when specific gender gaps are tabled for discussion.

The study showed that both men and women have limited understanding of how gender constructs hinder opportunities and create organizational cultures that widen gender gaps. The expert interviewees said that some men are starting to recognize their limited gender research skills and want to learn more. But they are hesitant due to their lack of understanding and the negative connotations of gender-related work.



Some of my male colleagues are interested to expand their work in gender, but they fear being labelled as feminist.

– **University-based researcher in Indonesia**

5

Universities lack policies, strategies and budgets for addressing gender issues, promoting inclusion and generating research on gender in the context of forest landscape governance.

Universities lack policies to boost women's representation among students and staff and to tackle sexual harassment. The study also revealed other gaps related to institutional policies and resources.

This includes a lack of:

- Gender-inclusive research and training policies and strategies
- Programs to increase the knowledge and skill sets of university lecturers and students
- Access to policy guidance on gender-inclusive budgeting for research and training organizations
- Readily understandable resources and guidance notes on incorporating gender and social inclusion in organizational governance and research practices
- Institutional gender champions and a lack of support for those that exist
- Budgets for gender-related activities and research—all but one of the experts interviewed and 71 percent of the university staff who answered the survey said their organizations had no such budget
- Commitment by the institutional leadership to acknowledge and address the issues

6

Despite the many gaps and challenges, there are also emerging good practices and opportunities for improving gender-inclusiveness in teaching and research.

The study highlighted that some individuals have been taking the lead and trying to integrate gender-inclusiveness and other social issues into technical forestry courses and research agendas. Most of the good practices are led by female faculty members who have received external learning, networking and funding opportunities.

Their efforts, together with the work of international and non-governmental organizations, such as the Center for International Forestry Research and World

Agroforestry, FAO and RECOFTC, are increasing the recognition of the need for gender research in forestry and related sciences. This has led universities in Myanmar and the Philippines, for example, to plan changes to their curricula to include gender-related topics.

The study revealed that some high-quality gender-related research is taking place. In some cases, when students select gender-related topics for their research, their universities arrange external supervisors, mostly from international and non-governmental organizations.

In Indonesia, university-based researchers have used gender-disaggregated data to negotiate for using gender-inclusive extension approaches that benefit women. This has led to their universities collaborating with government departments, increasing the impact of research on policy.

Some respondents said that WAVES, a RECOFTC-initiated regional network also funded by Sida, had boosted their knowledge on gender. WAVES has supported the efforts of staff at universities in Indonesia, Nepal and Viet Nam to serve as gender leaders. These individuals have increased the understanding of gender concepts among faculty and students, developed guiding materials to integrate gender topics into subjects and courses, supervised students to include gender-specific topics and research questions and developed institutional policies to deter harassment in learning spaces.



Until recently, many of the technically trained people working in forestry and other technical sciences used to think that gender subjects come under the social sciences department, so we have nothing to do with gender. But lately, with some initial gender training [from the WAVES program], myself and my university colleagues started to realize that gender should be part of forestry and other natural resources management study and research, irrespective of how technical the subject matter is.

– **Expert interviewee from Viet Nam**

# Priority actions

The research findings suggest the following priorities for Explore to implement, including in collaboration with other organizations and projects.<sup>2</sup>

1. Increase understanding of the scale, causes and impacts of underrepresentation of women in the forest landscape sector, including in higher education and research

Explore will share this report with its network members and with leaders of universities and research institutes, as well as with other programs working to strengthen the capacities of universities and research institutions immersed in the field of forest landscape governance. Explore will use the report as the basis for discussing gender gaps and how to create a safe and enabling learning and research environment.

2. Ensure diversity and inclusion in Explore-funded research

Explore will use gender criteria to screen proposals to its research grant mechanism and will only allocate grants to projects that have a diverse team composition and engage women and early-career professionals.

3. Increase women's access to female mentors

Explore will scale up its mentorship program to engage with and strengthen the participation of female students and early-career research professionals, including using mentors from the private sector and civil society.

4. Establish a scholarship program for female students from Southeast Asia doing research on forest landscape governance in the region as part of their studies

Explore will provide scholarships for female PhD students. Explore will also support the scholars through its mentorship program and capacity-development events.

5. Develop memoranda of understanding between Explore and universities and research institutions, and provide grants to help them address gender issues

- Through these memoranda of understanding, Explore will help institutions to develop strategies and action plans for creating gender-inclusive learning environments and delivering gender-inclusive research. This will likely include a capacity-development program at the institutional level.
- Grants will support recipients to conduct gender analysis or develop a gender strategy, for example.

6. Implement a multiyear capacity-development program for leaders at universities, including Explore research network members, on gender sensitization in research and higher education

Topics will include conceptual gender knowledge in forest landscapes; methods for gender-inclusive participatory action research; gender-inclusive facilitation and engagement; and making education and research gender-inclusive.

7. Implement a multiyear capacity-development program for researchers on the necessary aspects of gender research in forest landscape governance
  - Topics will include gender concepts and gender links to participatory action research, covering all elements of the research cycle, from gender concept and methods to analysis and policy influence.
  - Explore will organize workshops on gender-inclusive research methods and tools for gender-inclusive participatory action research.
  - Explore will create a mentoring program to help researchers integrate gender-responsiveness into their research. It will also implement interventions to improve learning and career opportunities for female early-career researchers.
  
8. Establish partnerships to document and highlight women's experiences in forest landscape governance and to find ways to improve the forestry sector's fit with women professionals' needs and development
  - Explore will seek partnerships with the FAO, the International Forestry Students' Association, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations and other potential partners to achieve this priority action.
  - Explore will organize webinars and other events to document and share the experiences of women in the forest sector, from undergraduate students to early-career researchers and forest policymakers, highlighting ways that gender constructs create differentiated impacts for women.
  - Explore will liaise with RECOFTC's WAVES program to build on its gender leaders' approach and experiences of working with universities to address gender issues. It will engage with WAVES gender leaders as mentors and/or experts.
  - Explore will implement a communication campaign to promote positive narratives that illustrate and prove how the forestry sector, including education, can be a good fit for women. This work will highlight the work of female foresters as role models and show the range of possibilities for women in the forestry sector.
  
9. Implement a capacity-development program to improve the enabling environment in universities and research institutions for female researchers
  - Explore will organize a webinar to share the findings of the gender analysis with senior representatives of government departments, universities and research institutions as well as staff members from international organizations, such as FAO, the International Forestry Students' Association, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
  - Explore will prepare guidance notes on integrating gender and social inclusion in forestry research, covering the whole research cycle, and make them available to researchers.
  - Explore will work with organizations, such as FAO, Sida-supported research networks and universities to develop a guide on creating an enabling environment for overcoming gender inequities in forestry education and research.

10. Engage with policymakers and institutions to develop policies that will improve the enabling environment in universities and research institutions for female researchers and for gender-inclusive research
  - Explore will develop an executive leadership program for decision-makers, gender focal points, researchers undertaking gender research, female faculty and other change-makers at selected educational institutions who are keen to strengthen policies and practices.
  - Explore will support the development of gender-inclusive research and training strategies at universities through participatory processes.
  - Explore will organize a workshop with FAO, the International Forestry Students' Association, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations and Sida-supported research networks, inviting government representatives to design national and regional programs to improve the enabling environment.

# Endnotes

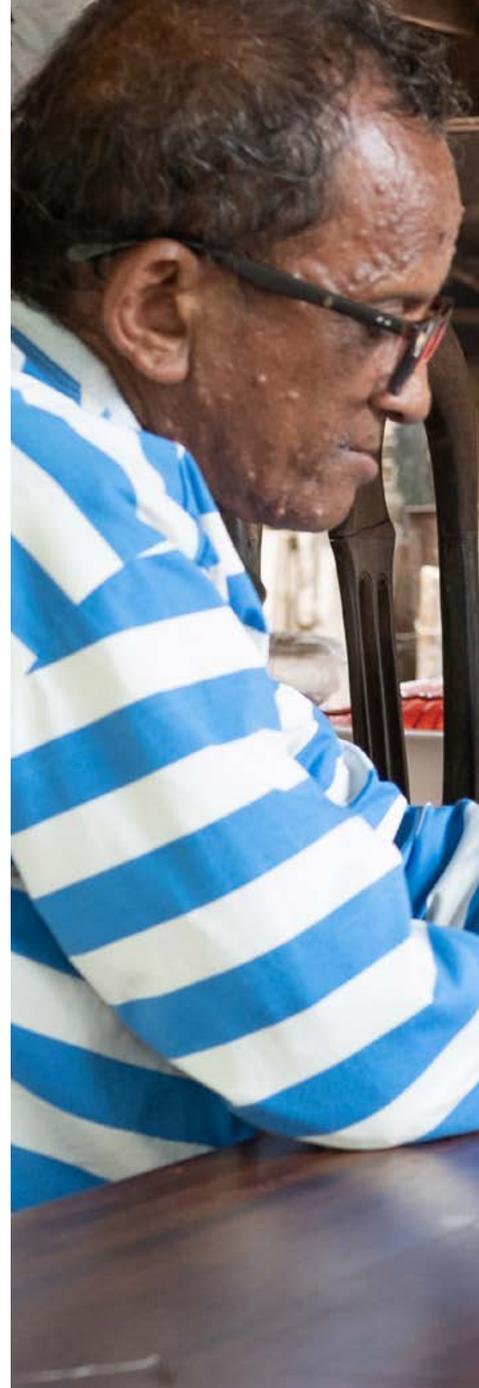
- 1 A secretariat based at RECOFTC manages Explore. The Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry is a partner in the program.
- 2 More detailed plans are available on request from the Explore Secretariat, [explore.secretariat@recoftc.org](mailto:explore.secretariat@recoftc.org).

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At RECOFTC, we believe in a future where people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. We take a long-term, landscape-based and inclusive approach to supporting local communities to secure their land and resource rights, stop deforestation, find alternative livelihoods and foster gender equity. We are the only non-profit organization of our kind in Asia and the Pacific. We have more than 30 years of experience working with people and forests, and have built trusting relationships with partners at all levels. Our influence and partnerships extend from multilateral institutions to governments, private sector and local communities. Our innovations, knowledge and initiatives enable countries to foster good forest governance, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.



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