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# The Grassroots Equity Newsletter

Working with local  
people in the Mekong  
region to promote  
effective initiatives on  
equity in climate  
change mitigation

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## About the GREEN Mekong Program

This newsletter is produced by the USAID-funded Grassroots Equity and Enhanced Networks in the Mekong Program (GREEN Mekong), which aims to improve capacities of policymakers and grassroots stakeholders in the Lower Mekong region to promote equity in forest-based climate change mitigation policy and practice.

The program is based on the fact that local people's needs, aspirations, knowledge and participation are critical during decision-making processes concerning forest governance and management. In the Lower Mekong region, where millions of people remain highly dependent on forest resources, policies and strategies developed to protect forests, reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change will only succeed if actively involving local communities.

The GREEN Mekong Program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) and implemented by RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests.

## Welcome to the Grassroots Equity Newsletter.

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## Grassroots equity tops the agenda at ASEAN Conference on Social Forestry

The USAID-funded Grassroots Equity and Enhanced Networks in the Mekong Program (GREEN Mekong) led a half-day session on social equity and local engagement. After a series of presentations from grassroots representatives followed by a multi-stakeholder exchange, the session resulted in a series of policy recommendations promoting a shift in attitude towards more equitable forest governance and a call to strengthen community involvement in forest co-management. The recommendations adopted at the conference were submitted to the annual meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials on Forestry (ASOF)

*"In the conference I learned a lot of lessons and experiences from other delegates, other countries, which is applicable to the work I do and also in implementing our GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund. All the contents in the conference are very important for my job, because social forestry is a problem concerning a lot of people, organizations and countries." - Dang Duc Nghia, Center for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Areas, Vietnam*

The program supported 14 forestry officials and civil society representatives from the lower Mekong countries to join over 200 participants from governments, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders at the ASEAN Social Forestry Network (ASFN) annual conference in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia on 24-26 May.

*"In the session I learned that the community and CSO representatives in REDD+ national structure and forestry mechanisms have limited capacity in providing inputs and comments in policies and practices. There needs to be funding support for capacity building and exchange visit or study involving communities and experts from ASEAN and other countries to share expertise on social forestry and climate change" – Teng Rithiny, the NGO Forum, Cambodia*



The conference aimed to share experiences and lessons on the roles and contributions of community forestry (CF) in addressing climate change, food security and green economy developments, as well as to promote related social forestry policies and practices.

## Program partners engage in the third CSO Forum in Malaysia

The Role of the ASFN CSO Forum is to serve as a mechanism to distill, consolidate and relay messages from ASEAN CSOs and communities to ASEAN in constructively working together to promote and advance community forestry in ASEAN. This year's CSO Forum was hosted by the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP), Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (JOAS), and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), with support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The program sponsored and facilitated the participation of seven CSO representatives from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam in the 3rd Annual Civil Society Forum. The forum - Paving Future Actions to Engage ASEAN on Social Forestry & Climate Change, was held on 22-23 May 2014, in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, back-to-back with the 5th ASFN conference held between 24-26 May.

*"The working paper from the Forum [safeguards in social forestry and/in REDD+] will help us to identify the priority activities that we need to consider in the implementation of our work as well as GREEN Mekong challenge fund." – Palikone Thalongsengchanh, Love Natural Resource Association, Lao PDR*

For the first time social equity was recognized as critical aspect of natural resource management, social forestry and indigenous peoples' rights. In addition, the participants reviewed implementation of country-level roadmaps, shared support strategies, and developed working papers on community economies and livelihoods, forest tenure and access rights, safeguards, and governance mechanisms in preparation for CSO engagement in the 5th ASEAN Social Forestry Network conference that followed on 24-25 May.

*"The country group discussion allows us to understand each other and how we can work together to address the issues in our countries. We have to raise some commitment and actions such as develop policies, guidelines on safeguards; promote SF representative in national and sub-national level; develop Central Farmland Management Body (CFMB); land tenure; develop safeguards information system and standard. So, this allows us to focus what activities we should consider in individual organisation." – Teng Rithiny, National CSO Forum, Cambodia*



**Figure 1:** Cambodia NGO forum representative and GREEN Mekong partner, Teng Rithiny, at the CSO Forum in Malaysia



## Innovative Regional Learning Group on Equity in Forest Governance established

The program launched its landmark Regional Learning Group (RLG) on Equity in Forest Governance. The learning group will foster joint learning on approaches and rationales for strengthening community engagement in forest governance and related climate change policies.

*"The participants here are the right group, because the sub-national officials are the ones who communicate directly with the grassroots communities"* – **Mr. Try Sopheap, Deputy Chief Forest Administration Cantonment, Kratie Province, Cambodia**

This stakeholder group is especially critical given that sub-national officials are often offered fewer regional learning opportunities than national-level officials even though they often have the greatest direct interaction with local communities.

Twenty-two sub-national government forestry officials from Lower Mekong countries, including Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, participated in the five-day event. Simultaneous language interpretation for all native languages enabled the participants share their experience and knowledge with the group.

*"Before I came here, social equity in forest governance, to me, was not new; but when I come here I know that I didn't understand fully the meaning of these topics and for last few days we discussed, we shared views, and we visited the field. Now I have a much much better view on these terms"* – **Mr. Nguyễn Khắc Lâm, Vice Director, Sub Department of Forestry, Nghe An province, Vietnam**



**Figure 2:** Sub-national officials at the RLG event share their experiences

*"In terms of the stakeholder group [here] and the process, we are piloting a high impact process with the RLG. We have seen unexpected and exciting levels of enthusiasm, support and engagement from the government officials during this event."* – **Ms. Regan Suzuki Pairojmahakij, RECOFTC-The Center for People and Forests**

A second RLG event is scheduled for the latter part of this year. Read more or watch the video from the event at <http://bit.ly/RLG-launch>

## Lower Mekong CSOs gain further skills to promote grassroots equity

Earlier this year, the GREEN Mekong team met with partner CSOs to discuss capacity development needs. Based on this assessment a second regional workshop was organized in May this year. Representatives from 20 CSOs came together to participate in the workshop, which focused on enhancing skills in monitoring and evaluation, proposal writing and communication



**Figure 3:** Lower Mekong CSO representative discuss equity at the second capacity development workshop

The three-day workshop is part of the program's goal to support and develop capacities of the CSOs in the Mekong countries and Myanmar. These CSOs have been partners of the program since October 2013 when they participated in a training on effective engagement processes to improve equity among grassroots communities.

The participants developed their own action plans for the next six months, which outline key activities addressing equity issues. The action plans will also help the GREEN Mekong team provide timely support and backstopping for the CSOs when they submit proposals for the 2nd round of the GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund and begin using the Equity Portal.

Read more at <http://bit.ly/capacity-development-workshop>

*"[Now] I understand how to develop good proposals, which starts from the dimensions of equity as a basis, and I will share this with my colleagues in my organization."* – **Patricia Hlaing, Karuna Myanmar Social Services- Caritas, Myanmar**

*"I will integrate the monitoring and evaluation knowledge into the CDRT livelihoods project affiliated to forest conservation."* – **Meas Vipou, Cambodian Rural Development Team, Cambodia**



**Figure 4:** CSO representatives working together at the second capacity development workshop

## Updates from GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund

The program established a small challenge fund – the GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund (GMCF) – to support CSO participants in implementing the action plans produced during the regional workshop. Five CSOs won the fund this year – Network Activities Group (Myanmar), Center for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Areas (Vietnam), People and Nature Reconciliation (Vietnam), Sustainable Development Foundation (Thailand) and NGO Forum (Cambodia).

The GMCF project plans include conducting community level surveys to investigate and develop rules and regulations for resource management and administration, and conducting awareness-raising activities with ethnic minority journalists so that they have better understanding and new knowledge of equity in forest land and can integrate these issues into their work.

The projects will conclude in December this year. A second round of awards will begin next year.

## Twenty CSOs join the Grassroots Equity Portal as contributors

The online portal for the CSOs involved in the program on the RECOFTC website is now ready; contributions are solicited from all partners involved with the program to date. The portal, which is also open to climate change and CF practitioners, will feature updates from CSOs implementing the GMCF and showcase equity resources from across the globe. The aim of the portal is to facilitate learning and to contribute to the discussions on equity in forest management, governance and climate change programs in the Lower Mekong region.



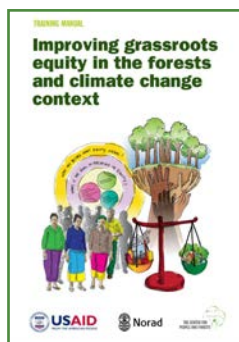
**Figure 5:**  
GREEN Mekong staff assisting CSO representatives to access the Grassroots Equity Portal

The portal will be available in five regional languages. The official launch of the portal will coincide with the launch of the new and revamped RECOFTC website in August 2014.

*"I will use the Grassroots Equity Portal to share my work with communities and also to connect and access the RECOFTC and other GREEN Mekong CSO partner organisations for information, resources and tools."* - **Phanmaly Kingmala, Agro-Forestry Development Consultant Co. Ltd, Lao PDR**

*"I will use the Grassroots Equity Portal to share ideas, experience, process and situation of equity at the action level , i.e. grassroots level."* - **Olarn Ongla, Sustainable Development Foundation, Thailand**

## A training manual to improve grassroots equity



*Improving grassroots equity in forests and climate change contexts: A training manual* is now ready and available online. The manual was developed by RECOFTC and sponsored by USAID-funded GREEN Mekong program and the NORAD funded Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ project.

The manual will help grassroots facilitators to design and implement effective engagement processes based on the principles of equity in forests and climate change contexts, particularly for REDD+. Read more and download the manual at <http://bit.ly/improving-grassroots-equity>

## Resources on Equity

### The Open Working Group discusses Oceans, forests, biodiversity and social equity

Keep up-to-date with the progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for forests. The eighth session of the Open Working Group (OWG8) on SDGs was held from 3-7 February 2014 at UN head quarters. For the details from the sessions on social equity and other matters, click here: <http://bit.ly/SDG-social-equity>

### At Forest Asia summit, experts urge expanding equity as pillar of green economy

The Forests Asia Summit, held in Jakarta, saw ministers from across Southeast Asia join CEOs, civil society leaders, development experts and the world's top scientists to share knowledge on moving towards a green economy by better managing its forests and landscapes. Throughout the two-day Forests Asia Summit, participants called for making development and research efforts inclusive of local communities and smallholders who depend on forest resources for their livelihoods — and who are most vulnerable to the drastic changes taking place across the landscape. Read more about the summit at <http://bit.ly/Forest-Asia-Summit>

For CIFOR's blog about the importance of equity, click here - <http://bit.ly/equity-pillar-of-economy>

### Designing REDD+ to promote sustainable development and reduce poverty

A study conducted by the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) assessed the preferences of forest communities for REDD+ compensation packages in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam. Report available at <http://bit.ly/REDD-compensation-Vietnam>

A complimentary study from International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) outlines the cost implications for pro-poor REDD+ in Lam Dong. The report examines some of the costs of implementing pro-poor benefit distribution systems. The report is available at <http://bit.ly/REDD-cost-implications-Vietnam>



# The gender lens

## Training video on gender equity launched

USAID-funded programs GREEN Mekong and USAID LEAF Asia have produced a training video to compliment capacity development programs on gender in the context of forests in the Lower Mekong. The video - A Fair climate: Gender equity in forestry and REDD+, explains the concept of gender equity and shares three best practices based on the USAID LEAF, WOCAN and UNREDD Scoping study. The video showcases the perspectives of forestry officials from Lao and lessons from the grassroots stakeholders in Thailand. Watch the video at <http://bit.ly/gender-equity-video>



**Figure 7:** The video crew following Ms. Rawiwan and youth from Baan Thung Yao during their daily walk through the community forest



**Figure 6:** A still from the video. The video explains gender equity in context of community forests through animation.

## USAID and IUCN organize Gender and REDD+ exchange

Earlier this year, a technical learning exchange workshop on Gender and REDD+ was organized by IUCN and USAID, together with the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), the Global UN-REDD Programme, and the REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards (SES), in May in Washington, DC. The workshop brought together 52 policymakers and practitioners from more than 20 countries to engage in dynamic discussions identifying the lessons learned, best practices, challenges, gaps and needs among the different countries where gender and REDD+ initiatives have been developed or are at nascent stages.

The workshop results included a prioritized list of actions necessary at multiple levels to strengthen the integration of gender considerations for moving forward with REDD+ implementation. These included developing strategies for negotiating land tenure complexities, pursuing benefit-sharing mechanisms based on gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities, and designing specific gender indicators in safeguard information systems. Pursuing REDD+ as an opportunity for reform was also a key theme that emerged in complement to, and synergy with, other sustainable development goals and principles. A workshop summary report will be finalized later this year.

## Find the Gender Equity Index for your country

The Gender Equity Index (GEI) measures the gap between women and men in education, the economy and political empowerment. The index is available at <http://bit.ly/Gender-equity-index>

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### The GREEN Mekong program

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We invite you to share your feedback on the newsletter or contribute to the newsletter about your achievements or work on equity. Email us at [green.mekong@recoftc.org](mailto:green.mekong@recoftc.org)