



Annual report

**Scaling up community forestry for climate, biodiversity and social inclusion **

Annual Report 2020–2021

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Cover photo: Community forest members patrol their forest to prevent illegal logging in Romney Commune, Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia.

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Welcome to the 2020–2021 annual report



"It has never been so urgent that we implement solutions that approach health, social and environmental challenges in a holistic way. We are fortunate that we have a proven nature-based solution and ecosystem-based approach that does just that: community forestry."

Nur Masripatin
Chair, RECOFTC Board of Trustees

It is my pleasure to share with you highlights of RECOFTC's work from October 2020 to September 2021. In the Asia–Pacific region, we continue to struggle with the global pandemic and its devastating economic fallout, especially for the most vulnerable households. At the same time, we are battling climate change, the greatest challenge of our lifetimes.

It has never been so urgent that we implement solutions that approach health, social and environmental challenges in a holistic way. Community forestry is a proven nature-based solution and ecosystem-based approach that does just that.

As statistics and narratives in this report show, through community forestry we are contributing to achieving the Global Goals and the Paris climate agreement. We are securing land tenure, fostering gender equality and social inclusion, nurturing food security and nutrition, protecting biodiversity, addressing climate change and more.

At RECOFTC, we know how to do it. Many of our government partners have strong commitments to expanding community forestry, backed by enabling policies and laws. In addition to having an enabling environment for community forestry, we have thousands of forest communities that want to contribute. What we need now is investment.

We are poised for investment and for success. I witnessed the global commitments made at the UN Climate Change Conference, COP26, in Glasgow in November 2021 to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and local communities receive a fair share of the benefits from carbon initiatives. I also see the energy, resources and commitment behind the movements to restore our landscapes. These are just two examples of changes in thinking that are positioning forest communities as equal partners, agents of change, and architects of their own development.

RECOFTC stands ready to support them. I hope you will too.

It is with immense gratitude that I thank our donors, sponsors, Board of Trustees, partners, communities and staff members for their steadfast support, especially through the pandemic. I look forward to working with you to achieve our collective vision of communities living equitably, securely and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests.

Community forestry: Let's scale it up



"As community forestry grows, our challenge is to unleash its potential to make forest communities strong and resilient centres of flourishing nature and circular economy."

David Ganz
Executive Director, RECOFTC

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020–2021 demonstrated the transformative power of community forestry and the wisdom of investing in this nature-based solution.

In the Asia–Pacific region, community forestry is expanding quickly. The amount of forest area managed by Southeast Asia alone doubled between 2010 and 2020. We could reach 30 million hectares of community forests by 2030—a fivefold increase in only 20 years. As the area under community forestry grows, our challenge is to unleash its potential for making forest communities strong and resilient centres of flourishing nature and circular economy.

This annual report features stories about communities, governments, civil society organizations and many others who are on this journey.

Khea Sokchea, a local leader in Beng Per Wildlife Sanctuary, tells us how community forestry moved from a fringe idea to a pillar of policy in Cambodia.

We read about how a Nepalese municipality applies principles of community forestry to pioneer adaptations to climate change, prevent disasters and overcome poverty.

Women and men explain how they are increasing gender equality in forestry through RECOFTC's WAVES initiative.

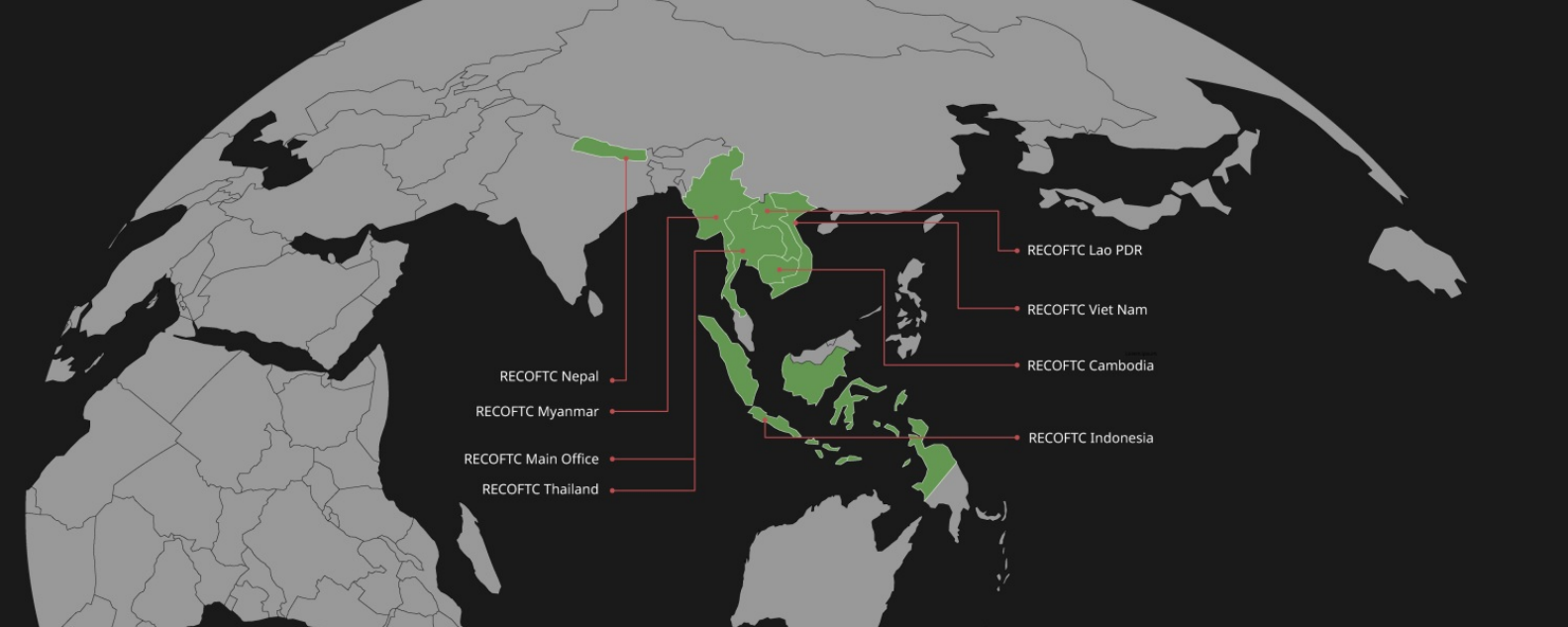
We discover how civil society organizations can be effective advocates for good forest governance.

We learn about the shortcomings of forestry education in the Asia–Pacific region and how RECOFTC's e-learning program is reaching thousands of learners.

Lastly, we meet the new Explore research network that is building a cadre of skilled researchers, 50 percent of them women, who are devoted to improving forest landscape governance in the Asia–Pacific region.

I am inspired by these highlights. But we must do more, and we must move fast. The transformation we seek is urgent and intimately linked to the security and well-being of millions of people who live not only in and near forests but also in urban settings.

Over the past 35 years, we have developed models of community forestry that deliver multiple benefits. Let's scale them up!



RECOFTC by numbers

RECOFTC's 144 team members based in seven focal countries in the Asia–Pacific region worked with 196 organizations and 83,048 community forest households in 2020–2021. Through 33 initiatives, they contributed to the growth of community forest areas, which is a foundation for achieving the Paris Agreement on climate change and many of the Global Goals, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs.

RECOFTC's entry point to sustainable development and climate change solutions is community forestry. With the overarching aim of helping to achieve the Global Goals, RECOFTC's innovations, knowledge and initiatives enable countries to foster good forest governance and to mitigate and adapt to climate change.



1 Landscape collaboration in a changing climate



2 Governance, institutions and conflict transformation



3 Private sector engagement and enterprising communities



4 Social inclusion, gender equity and public action

The four goals of RECOFTC’s Strategic Plan 2018–2023 work together to promote sustainable development across the region and are based on secure rights and equitable participation. These goals put people at the centre of development to create the conditions for communities to transform their landscapes and for countries to achieve their commitments to the Global Goals.

RECOFTC’s work to achieve its four Strategic Plan goals links with all 17 Global Goals because they are all ultimately about poverty reduction and increased well-being of humans and the planet. RECOFTC’s work in fiscal year 2020–2021 most closely aligned with seven of the Global Goals.

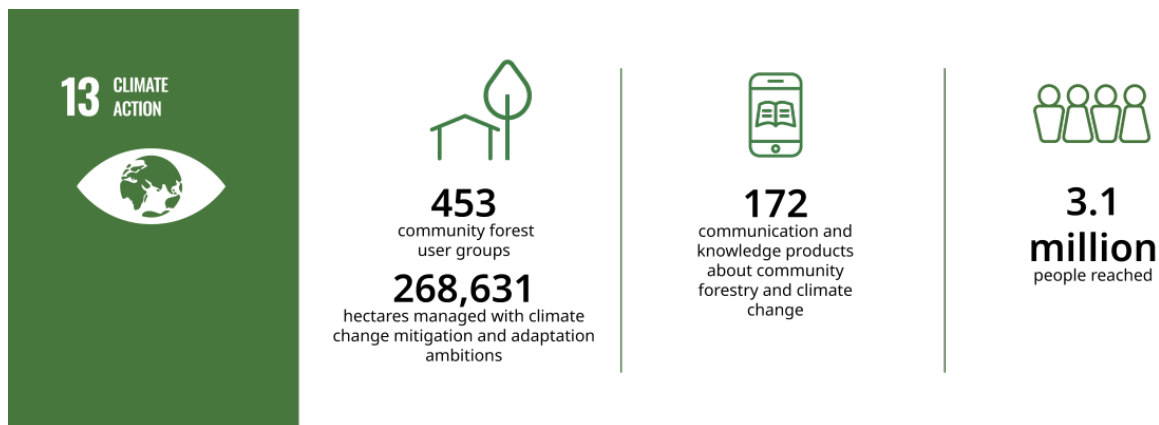


For example, RECOFTC helped 472 communities gain formal approval of their stewardship over their community forest, representing 60,906 households. A total of 451,302 hectares of community forest were under direct RECOFTC support.



RECOFTC supported community forest user groups in the Asia–Pacific region to build climate change responses into their community forestry management plans. Of the 472 approved community forests that RECOFTC worked directly with in 2020–2021, 453 community forestry user groups included climate change mitigation and adaptation interventions in their community forestry management plans. These user groups continue to manage a total of 268,631 hectares of forest with strategies that can respond to climate change threats.

To enhance public knowledge and raise awareness, RECOFTC published 172 communication and knowledge products about community forestry and climate change on its website and in other public forums. These reached more than 3 million people.



In 2020–2021, about 25 percent of the members of community forestry management committees in RECOFTC’s program areas were women. Those community forestry management committees also included people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples.



Around 9,141 community members participated in social inclusion- and gender equity-related events organized by RECOFTC and partners. These programs aimed to reduce discrimination, marginalization and the exclusion of people living in fragile contexts in RECOFTC’s seven focal countries.



3,270 women and **5,871** men participated in social inclusion- and gender equity-related events organized by RECOFTC and partners

RECOFTC supported 66 individual community-based enterprises that involved 40 women and 50 men and 35 group enterprises. Of the 22 community business partnership agreements developed by local entrepreneurs and investors, 13 were formal and nine were informal. They covered partnerships for such enterprises as teak wood production and processing and non-timber forest products.



565 women and 483 men of the 1,048 members in group enterprises



22 community business partnership agreements developed by local entrepreneurs and investors

In 2020–2021, RECOFTC trained 2,229 women and men on community forestry and sustainable development topics related to tenure security, climate change, social inclusion and more. And 2,151 women and men accessed RECOFTC’s e-learning course Community Forestry 101. This e-course centres on community-led forest management for sustainable development and inclusive climate change solutions.



2,229 women and men trained



2,151 women and men accessed e-course Community Forestry 101

Community forestry is a safeguard for the sustainable use of natural resources. In 2020–2021, RECOFTC trained 2,059 women and men in the sustainable and efficient use of natural resources. Of them, 12 were also trained on sustainable investment and community-based enterprise development.



2,059 women and men trained in sustainable and efficient use of natural resources

12 women and men trained on sustainable investment and community enterprise development

Read the detailed report [📄](#) on the links between RECOFTC’s work in 2020–2021 and the Global Goals.



Community forestry: From fringe idea to pillar of policy

RECOFTC chronicles the evolution of community forestry in Cambodia.

In a forest bordering Cambodia's Beng Per Wildlife Sanctuary, local leader Khea Sokchea points to a sign on a tree at the entrance to his community's ecotourism site.

"Killing me in the name of development," it reads. "How will you live without me?"

The sign offers a stark warning. More than 80 percent of Cambodians live in rural areas and rely on forests and other natural resources. But these communities are often left out of the country's political and economic discussions. As a result, people and forests are suffering.

A Special Report [☞](#) that RECOFTC published in 2021 illustrates how communities like Khea's are now bucking the trend of exclusion as pioneers of community-based forest management. The report tells how government officials, community members, researchers and others have driven the evolution of community management from a fringe interest to a pillar of Cambodia's forest policy.

Khea's experiences exemplify the broader history of community forestry. In 2008, his village of Chombok Hos in Preah Vihear Province was surrounded by economic land concessions, a development model the government introduced in the early 2000s.

"It was like a war zone," he says. "Companies would hire the military to patrol the area so no one could take or use the land."



Members of Romney Commune Community Forest patrol their forest to prevent illegal logging.

Much of the forest near the village disappeared, including in two protected areas. Plantations and military facilities replaced the community's customary lands. The villagers suspected that without support from the government, the forests would disappear. So Khea and others, with help from the World Vision humanitarian organization, applied for formal community forest status. In 2016, the government approved their request.

Documenting development

Communities like Khea's have managed local forests through customary practices for generations. But as a government policy, community-based forest management has been around for only three decades. RECOFTC's Special Report recounts how a small but persistent group of Cambodians embraced this new idea and advocated for its widespread adoption.

The report looks at the development of two models of community-based forest management: community forests on land administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and community-protected areas on land administered by the Ministry of Environment.

The report highlights moments in Cambodia's story of community forestry, from developing the legal framework to creating guidelines for implementing it. It illustrates how community forests were formalized and how communities can benefit economically from protecting them. It also underscores the many challenges that community forestry practitioners have overcome and those that remain.

Evidence and experience show that giving communities the rights to manage and benefit from their forest is a viable alternative to the kind of development that has devastated Cambodia's forests. According to the United Nations Development Programme, as community forests and community-protected areas began to flourish from 2010 to 2018, forest cover shrank, from 57 percent to 47 percent. But while the country's forests were declining, the health of community forests and community-protected areas stayed steady or improved.



Khea Sokchea is head of the Romney Commune Community Forest. He has witnessed how community forestry has improved the livelihoods of his community and the quality of the forest.

Khea has seen this first-hand. He says that once the land near his village was formally designated as a community forest, the military departed and tree cover began to increase. His community can now gather greater quantities of forest resources, such as resin, bamboo, honey and vegetables. Community members believe the ecotourism site they have developed will save the area's forests.

“When tourists visit regularly, the forest can be protected through the income generated,” Khea says. “When I imagine this, it makes me appreciate what I have done.”

Challenges remain

Despite many success stories like Khea’s, there are still fewer than 1,000 community forests or community-protected areas in Cambodia. Their total area of about 700,000 hectares is just 35 percent of the target that the government aims to achieve by 2029.

As Cambodia scales up adoption of community-led approaches to forest management, many challenges remain. They include weak implementation of laws, the poor quality of forest land allocated to communities and unequal access to opportunities to benefit from forests.

RECOFTC’s Special Report offers clarity on how communities, practitioners and government officials can continue to bridge policy and practice to ensure that community forestry and community-protected areas rise to their potential.



RECOFTC-supported gender leaders drive inclusion in forestry

Forests are crucial to millions of women across Asia, but their views are often marginalized or excluded from decisions about forests. RECOFTC's WAVES initiative works to change this.

When forester Vong Sophana began working for Cambodia's Forestry Administration in the early 1990s, she expected to be spending time in forests. But her male colleagues thought that would be too dangerous for a woman, so she was stuck for years in the office.

"I liked nature, and I wanted to work outdoors where I could meet different people and learn from them," Vong says about her desire to work in forestry. "But at the time, there was fighting still going on, and my male colleagues thought it was too dangerous. There were land mines in there, too."

Today, Vong is the Forestry Administration's Deputy Director-General, and she is working to prevent such biases from holding other women back. She is one of 30 professionals from seven countries that RECOFTC has supported since 2019 through its Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality (WAVES) initiative [\[1\]](#), which the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency has funded. In February 2021, these leaders met to reflect on their achievements, share lessons and chart ways forward. Their discussions revealed an array of strategies they are using to promote gender equality in the forestry sector of their countries.

Forests are crucial to millions of women across Asia. They harvest forest products, and they manage forest resources, including the planting, patrolling and protecting of local forests. Yet, their views regarding the forests are often not heard. This is partly because of a misconception that forestry is a male domain and because many women lack confidence to speak up in discussions that men tend to dominate.

"We want women to be able to share their experiences without fear and to increase their capacity to encourage other women to lead," says RECOFTC Cambodia Director Hou Kalyan. "We also want to shift the mindset of their male counterparts so they accept the important role women can play in forest management."

WAVES does this by supporting a network of gender equality champions in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam. These women and men include government officials, politicians, academics, directors of civil society organizations and business managers. WAVES offers training, technical assistance and funding for projects that these leaders want to develop to ensure women can participate more equally with men in making decisions about forests.



WAVES leader and Deputy Director-General of Cambodia's Ministry of Environment Ly Sophorn (in white blouse) listens to community forest members during a workshop in Siem Reap in January 2021.

Empowering gender champions in Indonesia

WAVES-supported leaders in Indonesia include Kusdamayanti, who heads the Ministry of Environment and Forestry's Center of Environment and Forestry Human Resources Education and Training in Bogor District. She has developed a training curriculum on gender mainstreaming and has inspired other units in the Ministry to become gender-sensitive.

Another WAVES leader, Mardha Tillah, encouraged her colleagues at the RMI-Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment to formalize a long-neglected gender policy. They audited their programs and their monitoring and evaluation tools for gender-sensitivity. Among other things, this resulted in new guidelines specifying that field teams have one male and one female facilitator and that female facilitators lead women-only group discussions.



“ Although I am the director of my organization, I was constantly worried about other people's opinions about my decisions and felt unsure and afraid to take action. Now I recognize these shortcomings and am able to better manage them, question the status quo and take calculated risks.

Mardha Tillah

WAVES has also helped Novaty Dunga, a lecturer at the University of Hasanuddin, to encourage administration officials to make courses more inclusive of all faculty members.

“In the future, there will be more academics who understand the importance of providing opportunities for everyone to contribute to development regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion,” she says.

Mainstreaming gender equality in Cambodia

In Cambodia, Vong Sophana has convinced colleagues in the Forestry Administration that gender mainstreaming is as important as reforestation and illegal logging. They have developed a forthcoming strategy that will help ensure that women have greater roles in the management of the country's forests.

The strategy is the result of two years of training, workshops and consultations with scores of women, as well as men, from communities, civil society groups and the government. It calls for more training to strengthen women's confidence to contribute to policymaking processes and forest management, such as through community forest credit schemes and the indirect monitoring of illegal logging.

The strategy also requires wider efforts to strengthen the capacities of Forestry Administration staff so they can include gender dimensions in forest extension and monitoring work. And it calls for reforms of legislation and governance structures that disadvantage women.

Policy and institutional reforms in Lao PDR

In Lao PDR, the WAVES initiative is helping women and men working in government departments or civil society groups to lead on gender mainstreaming. Among other things, this is improving implementation of existing gender policies and creating new opportunities for women in the forest sector.



WAVES leader Nilapha Vorachith (left) from the department of Forest Inspection points to gender survey results collected by the central and provincial offices of her Department. She discussed the results with colleagues at a training that RECOFTC organized in 2021.

For example, training provided by WAVES has supported decision-makers in the Department of Forestry and the Department of Forest Inspection to enhance the gender equality provisions within the country's Forest Strategy to 2035. As gender equality gains prominence in the sector, more women feel encouraged to participate in the technical work of forestry agencies.

"I am very proud of my capacity and self-confidence to speak out about the needs for gender equity," says Yommala Phaengsouvan, a WAVES leader in the Department of Forestry. "I am applying my skills to integrate gender equity in a new flagship project for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry."

Manilay Thiphalansy, a former program officer at RECOFTC Lao PDR, supported the WAVES leaders to apply their new knowledge and overcome the challenges they face.

"They have made outstanding progress in just a few short years," she says. "I can only imagine where the next few years will take them."



Defining effectiveness crucial for success of forest sector networks

A special report helps guide civil society organizations, governments, donors and international development agencies.

For much of recent history, the fates of forests in Asia and Africa have been decided largely by governments and big business interests, with little input from civil society. But that has been changing over the past two decades due to the growth in opportunities for civil society organizations to influence decisions about forests.

Increasingly, these organizations have formed networks with shared objectives. Some are involved in independent forest monitoring or land tenure issues. Others focus on community forestry, REDD+ or forest policy processes. Their participation has had substantial impact, such as better recognition of communities' rights and increased transparency and accountability in the forest sector.

But what underpins a network's effectiveness? And what does "effectiveness" even mean?

"Understanding effectiveness is crucial not only for civil society networks but also for the governments, donors and international organizations that interact with them," says Robin aus der Beek, former coordinator of RECOFTC's Voices for the Mekong Forests project, which closed in December 2021.

"Having a shared understanding of what effectiveness means can inspire success and avoid unintended impacts of actions taken by all stakeholders, from network members to donors and international development agencies," he says.

To explore this topic, RECOFTC teamed up with the University of Wolverhampton's Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT) and the Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG). The three organizations surveyed 14 civil society networks working on forest governance issues in Africa and the Mekong region. They also interviewed dozens of network leaders and representatives of governments, donor agencies and international non-government organizations.

In 2021, RECOFTC published a Special Report to summarize the study's findings and guide civil society groups that want to evaluate their experiences and explore the effectiveness of the networks they have formed. The report provides an overview of why networks form and how their members benefit, how networks and external stakeholders define effectiveness and what factors influence it. The report ends with analysis of the findings and introduces a guide that networks can use to define and assess their effectiveness.

Effective findings

The research revealed six criteria for measuring the effectiveness of civil society networks and seven internal and four external factors that influence effectiveness. It showed that effectiveness is a complex, multifaceted concept that means different things to different people.

"This implies that there is potential for issues to arise when conceptions of 'effectiveness' differ between networks and external actors, such as donors or government agencies," says Aurelian Mbazibain, program manager at CIDT.

For example, while representatives of governments and donor agencies tend to consider effectiveness narrowly in terms of the achievement of goals, the leaders and members of civil society networks take a much broader view.

"From the perspectives of its members, an effective network has several characteristics," says Mbazibain. "It achieves its goals and has impacts, and it demonstrates cohesion and power of influence. It has functional communication and information-sharing systems as well as strong governance structures. It mobilizes and uses resources efficiently. And it operates with fair representation and inclusiveness."

Challenges of financing, communication, staff turnover and security

In the research, network leaders and members repeatedly mentioned sustainable financing of their networks as a criterion for assessing effectiveness and as a factor influencing effectiveness. Here, the mismatch in perspectives between networks and others was evident, with representatives of international NGOs, donors and government less concerned about finance.

Another finding of importance for donors is that network members in both regions consistently cited the imperative of communication, information-sharing and advocacy with the public and network members. This highlights the value of external support focused on strengthening communication capacities to enable networks to motivate their members and achieve their objectives.



Among other challenges, network members in both regions expressed concern about the turnover of personnel. The loss of staff leads to loss of institutional memory and capacity, which tends to weaken networks over time if there is no continuous reinvestment.

The survey respondents also said the environment in which networks operate is a significant factor affecting effectiveness. This highlights the need for networks to navigate and manage relations with the State. Failure to do so could lead to conflictual relationships, according to respondents. More than 40 percent of respondents also said an unsafe environment for civil society and activists hindered their work.

“The lack of security experienced by civil society networks, whether it is through a restrictive legal or political environment or other types of threats such as physical ones, may seriously challenge the quality of their participation in processes related to forest governance,” says Nathalie Faure, senior program officer for governance, institutions and conflict transformation at RECOFTC.

Security is one of 13 measures included in a guide [\[1\]](#) that the study team developed to help civil society networks assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

The guide also can help international NGOs and other institutions that are interested in collaborating with networks. It will also be of interest to governments, policymakers and practitioners as well as donors that have invested significantly to promote the emergence and development of civil society networks.



Linking community forestry with adaptation to climate change

RECOFTC brings together community members and development agencies to create a long-term development plan in Nepal.

When major floods hit Nepal in 2017, the municipality of Thakurbaba in the southwest of the country was among the worst affected areas. The destruction prompted much reflection.

“We wondered whether haphazard infrastructure development, deforestation and changing human behaviours contributed to the scale of damage,” says Thakurbaba Mayor Ghan Narayan Shrestha. “We thought that having a master plan would help us to cope better in the future.”

With support from RECOFTC and other partners, the local government now has a long-term development plan that respects the environment and builds social cohesion. The results have inspired municipalities across the country to adopt the same approach.

In 2021, RECOFTC asked those involved in the process in Thakurbaba to reflect on their experiences.

New partnership

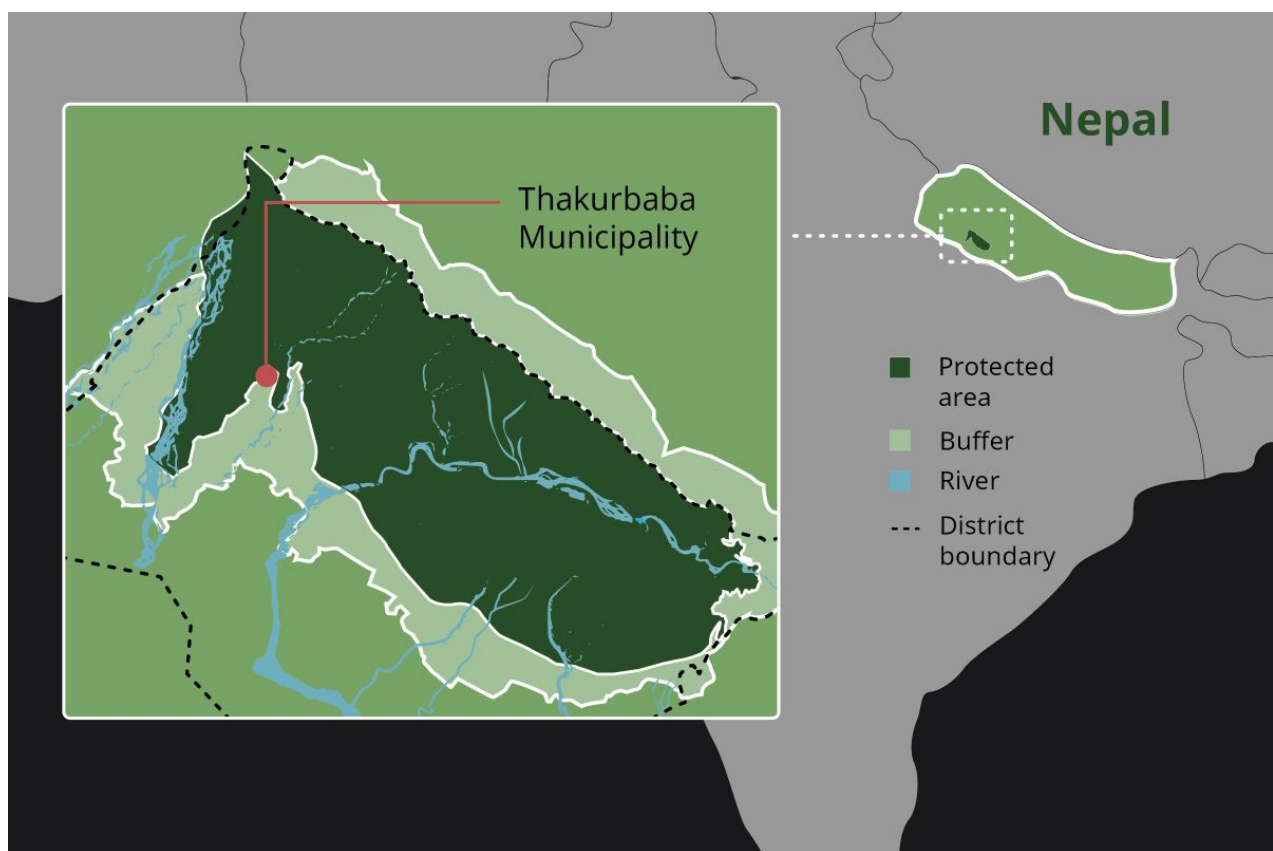
After the floods, Shrestha’s municipal team had contacted Care Nepal, a non-profit organization working with a conservation program called Hariyo Ban, which was building ecological and community resilience to climate change.

“The municipality wanted a 20- to 25-year plan,” says Jagannath Joshi from Care Nepal. “We needed a partner that had a track record in forming long-term strategic plans.”

Care Nepal approached RECOFTC because of its experience in lobbying for municipal plans to include forests and community forestry. RECOFTC had already identified a key challenge: There was often conflict between the priorities of communities and local governments due to limited coordination and collaboration.

“We realized that if we just talked about forests, the local governments would not listen to us,” says Shambhu Dungal, director of RECOFTC Nepal. “We needed to talk about local development while focusing on forests.”

The municipality team, RECOFTC and the Hariyo Ban Program set to work in 2018.



Thakurbaba is bordered on three sides by Bardiya National Park, which has 968 square kilometres of dense forest. The park is home to many endangered animals, including Royal Bengal tigers, greater one-horned rhinos and wild elephants. The Karnali and the Babai rivers run through the municipality. In addition to the swelling rivers, the local people have been under constant threat from wild animals that sometimes attack them and damage homes, fields and crops.

Defining development

Developing the master plan involved collecting published data, conducting household surveys and consulting widely. Locally elected representatives, social workers, health workers, teachers, farm representatives, hotel representatives and community members all took part. The first hurdle to overcome was to define the concept of “development”.

“We only saw development in terms of infrastructure,” says Shyam Lal Tharu, an elected representative. “Like the rest of the community, the only thing that we wanted was a tarmac road.”

Stakeholders from all nine of the municipality’s electoral subunits worked for two weeks on a new definition of development: basic needs are fulfilled and people can live with self-respect and freedom.

“Some of us face difficulties with wildlife, some with floods and others with education,” says Bina Bhattarai, a community organizer and elected representative. “In the process of discussion, we ended up with a common understanding.”



Mayor Ghan Narayan Shrestha and Deputy Mayor Krishna Kusma Tharu endorsed the inception workshop. The process to develop the Thakurbaba Municipality Master Plan took nine months.

The process enabled the community to take stock of its situation and plan accordingly. It included an assessment of the benefits that the forests provide, from watershed protection and disaster risk reduction to the products of forestry and community forestry. This allowed the community to embed their forests into the plan's long-term goals and objectives.

Ongoing impacts

With the plan in place, Thakurbaba has since been working on both infrastructure and social development while ensuring respect for the natural environment. In recognition of the municipality's achievements, the provincial government has allocated extra funding to Thakurbaba to implement its plans.

"We have endorsed 40 new policies," says Mayor Shrestha. "I'm very pleased with the process."

RECOFTC has long looked at climate change adaptation through the lens of community forestry.

Through ongoing activities, RECOFTC is encouraging more municipalities in Nepal to institutionalize broad participation in periodic development planning and to better integrate forests into their plans as climate change solutions.

In 2020, for example, RECOFTC produced guidelines [for](#) preparing development plans, based on the process undertaken in Thakurbaba. Today, the guidelines are being used by other municipalities across the country that face similar issues, such as how to increase the contribution of forestry to poverty reduction. This is helping to build a future in which people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy and resilient forests in Nepal.

Women-led community forest builds climate resilience in Nepal

In 2021, the PANORAMA [platform](#) created by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the German development agency GIZ invited RECOFTC to share a case study on community forestry as a nature-based solution to climate change.

The case study [focused](#) on Bishnupur, Nepal. In 2014, RECOFTC established a project there to show how community forestry empowers women and supports adaptation to climate change. The project was developed with Bishnupur's women-led community forest user group.

RECOFTC, the local government and sectoral agencies supported the group to apply participatory approaches in assessing climate vulnerability and identifying and implementing priority actions. They protected farmland from floods by planting trees and installed bio-embankments to stabilize collapsing river banks. They also invested in wells to improve water supplies and introduced agroforestry and beekeeping to diversify livelihoods.

The project empowered women as leaders, decision-makers and financial beneficiaries. They have improved their community's resilience and reduced its vulnerability to climate change and other shocks. The transformative impact has led women in neighbouring communities to adopt similar practices.



Shaping the future of forest education for empowered youth

A RECOFTC-led survey to strengthen forest education, capacity development and knowledge-sharing in the Asia–Pacific region, leads to responses on youths' needs.

A 2021 report shows that significant gaps in education about forests across the Asia–Pacific region threaten to undermine efforts to limit climate change, conserve biodiversity and achieve sustainable development.

The research was conducted by RECOFTC for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Timber Trade Organization.

RECOFTC surveyed 435 people in the region from July to October 2020 as part of FAO's Global Assessment of Forest Education [\[1\]](#). The survey covered all levels of education, from primary schools to PhD programs. FAO published the findings in a report [\[2\]](#) that RECOFTC summarized [\[3\]](#) online.

The study highlighted widespread challenges with curricula, the exposure of students to forests, the level of resources dedicated to forestry education, the amount of practical experience and the pathways to forest-related jobs.

“Many respondents painted a picture of forest education that is underresourced, outdated and disconnected from the changing needs of the job market,” says Sirichai Saengcharnchai of RECOFTC, who coordinated the survey.

For example, many respondents said that graduates are ill-equipped to enter the workforce because they are unfamiliar with modern approaches and lack relevant knowledge and skills.

Digital tools are valued more than they are used



Youth perspectives

The university students who took part in the survey represent the next generation of forest sector workers. But many of them are unsatisfied with their experiences and prospects.

“My university has extremely few subscriptions to forest-related journals and studies, therefore is out of touch with recent developments, research and discoveries,” said one student.

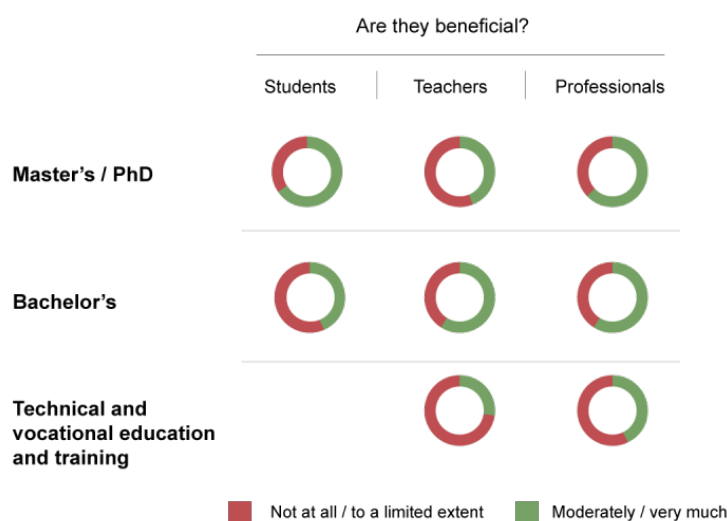
According to another student, “Most of the forestry graduates are unemployed even after getting a PhD degree. I am not sure about my career after graduating from my forest degree program.”

Their views have been reflected in a call for action [✉](#) issued on behalf of youth at the XV World Forestry Congress in South Korea in 2022. It sets out a vision for “inclusive and equitable access to high-quality forest education as well as to decent work and career development opportunities”.

The Youth Call for Action also highlights the need to achieve gender equality and empower all young women in the forest sector. This echoes the findings of RECOFTC’s survey.

Many of the survey respondents said that a graduate’s gender is moderately or very much a factor in their ability to find a job and, more so, a factor in the types of jobs graduates are offered. More women cited this than men.

Gender affects job prospects



“Regarding gender in forestry, it is quite a problem since most companies only hire male workers,” said one university student. “And some of them even write it as the number one criterion.”

The bigger picture

The RECOFTC research on forest education forms part of its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals —particularly Goal 4 on quality education and Goal 15 on life on land.

The report includes 50 recommendations for national governments, international donors, regional bodies and organizations, companies and government agencies active in the forest sector.

Many of the recommendations focus on reviewing and updating curricula, training teachers, increasing students’ exposure to forests and forest careers and strengthening links between educational establishments and potential employers.

Other recommendations target increasing the availability of internships and part-time jobs, addressing gender and social inequalities, improving access to digital learning tools and boosting the image of careers in the forest sector.

“Without well-managed and protected forests, we cannot hope to address climate change and biodiversity loss and develop sustainable rural livelihoods,” says RECOFTC Executive Director David Ganz.

"For that, we need workers with the knowledge and skills required to manage, protect, use, study and restore forests. We also need greater societal understanding of the benefits that forests provide. Forest education can meet both of these needs."



RECOFTC embraces e-learning

The COVID-19 pandemic halted most in-person training by RECOFTC, but new e-learning courses have reached many learners throughout the Asia–Pacific region and beyond.

The COVID-19 pandemic turned the world upside down in many ways. With travel disrupted and social distancing a necessity, RECOFTC was able to reach learners through e-learning. RECOFTC launched the Community Forestry 101 [course](#) in October 2020. The free course on RECOFTC’s Learning Gateway [ran](#) for a second time in June 2021.

Community Forestry 101 introduces community forestry as a pathway to sustainable development and inclusive climate change solutions. It covers what community forestry is, what forms it takes, what makes it successful and what holds it back.

“I had a great time learning with this course,” says Carolyn A. Esmenda, chief of the Conservation and Development Section in the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources. “The readings are accessible and the concepts are easy to understand. The activities and assessments enhance and reinforce the ideas and learnings. I am grateful I took it, and I recommend it.”

Esmenda was one of more than 2,000 people who enrolled in the course. More than half of them were women.

While more than 80 percent of the learners were based in the Asia–Pacific region, they represented a total of 87 countries from around the world.

Satisfied users

The e-course has contributed to progress towards achieving several of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is particularly relevant to Goal 4, which is focused on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. In this respect, the e-course fills a significant gap due to lack of courses on community forests through universities in the Asia–Pacific region. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources in the Philippines in 2021 required its personnel overseeing community forestry to take the course as mandatory learning material.



I look forward to more RECOFTC courses like this one.

Hnin Phyu Sin, Myanmar

When asked to rate their experience with the course, 43 percent of the learners surveyed gave it a score of 4 out of 5, while 48 percent gave it a score of 5. In particular, they appreciated receiving personalized feedback on their work as they progressed through the course.

“It was satisfying to take this online course because I could reflect on my learning progress using a workbook and a guided assignment,” says Hnin Phyu Sin, an MSc student from Myanmar studying environmental risk and human security at the United Nations University in Germany. “I look forward to more RECOFTC courses like this one.”

Interactive approach to learning brings rewards

Qualitative assessments of learners’ assignments require time and resources. But RECOFTC considers it important to approach e-learning this way rather than through more passive models that are less engaging for users.

“One of my most important and exciting tasks was to review learners’ workbooks and offer them feedback,” says RECOFTC’s Marie Noel Ngoddo, who led the team that developed the course. “This provided me with an opportunity to have meaningful interactions with many learners. This one-on-one with participants is a unique opportunity for us to learn together.”

Since launching the course, RECOFTC has continued to innovate, refining the course content based on its monitoring and evaluation and developing an e-learning app for smartphones and tablets.

Although Community Forestry 101 was RECOFTC's first e-course, it was not the only one for long. In December 2020, RECOFTC teamed up with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to launch an e-course on land and forest tenure [↗](#). In addition, RECOFTC launched a third e-learning course in 2021, Policy Analysis and Forest Governance 101. [↗](#)

E-course on tenure security for better forestry

Clear and secure tenure is crucial to the well-being of forest communities and the forests they depend upon. But many foresters and others involved in the forestry sector are not yet aware of the reasons for strengthening tenure and the tools they can use to do so.

To close this gap, FAO and RECOFTC launched an online course that is available for free in English, French and Spanish [↗](#) at the FAO e-learning Academy.

The course is based on the principles of FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests [↗](#). It has a broad audience that includes foresters, policymakers, private sector companies, civil society groups, forest user groups, producer organizations, academics and students.

They learn how secure forest tenure is the foundation for achieving the Global Goals on sustainable development and the climate change goals and how applying the Voluntary Guidelines [↗](#) can strengthen the forestry sector. The course also teaches learners how to use the Voluntary Guidelines [↗](#) to assess forest tenure and governance.

Looking ahead, RECOFTC is further developing its e-learning program.



Research network builds a cadre of researchers to improve forest landscape governance

Explore in Southeast Asia aims for 50 percent female researchers dedicated to improving landscape governance.

RECOFTC and CIFOR-ICRAF launched the world's first research network dedicated to forest landscape governance, in October 2020. Explore aims to benefit more than 190 million people living in and around forest landscapes in Southeast Asia. It works to strengthen rights, reduce poverty and inequity and contribute to achieving sustainable development.

Southeast Asia is one of the most forested regions in the world. Nearly 50 percent of its land area is covered by forests that contain many of the remaining biodiversity hotspots. The good governance of these forests is crucial to conserving biodiversity, overcoming climate change and ensuring the good health and well-being of people throughout the region.

These forests are also important for safeguarding against pandemic outbreaks and infectious diseases, such as COVID-19. Yet, between 1990 and 2015, Southeast Asia lost more than 11 percent of its forests to infrastructure development and agricultural expansion.

“Forests are vital to life on Earth,” says David Ganz, Executive Director of RECOFTC. “Yet, they are under increasing pressure in Southeast Asia from unsustainable economic development, climate change, demographic shifts and conflicts over tenure and land use. Explore is multiplying the power of research to support governments and the people of Southeast Asia to overcome these challenges.”

Explore is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). It is hosted by RECOFTC, in partnership with CIFOR-ICRAF and in collaboration with universities, research institutes, governments, civil society organizations, local communities and the private sector from across Southeast Asia.

“ Sida is excited to partner with Southeast Asia’s researchers in this effort to create new knowledge that addresses the climate crisis and improves the well-being of all people across the region. – Eren Zink, Senior Research Advisor, Embassy of Sweden, Thailand


Through research grants, mentorship, dialogue and collaboration, Explore encourages high-quality research that will improve forest landscape governance in the region. Explore takes a multidisciplinary, participatory and inclusive multistakeholder approach. It emphasizes gender equality and social inclusion. More than 50 percent of its advisory board members are women, and it seeks equal representation by female researchers.

In August 2021, Explore released its first call for concept notes under its preparatory grant mechanism for research on forest landscape governance. By December, it had selected 19 concept notes and research teams. The 19 teams include 224 researchers from 67 research institutions and universities across the region. By early 2022, the teams were developing research proposals.

“We have been supporting the research teams every step of the way,” says David Gritten, Explore program manager. “They have had training in participatory action research, research methods and how to develop effective communication strategies. They are also learning approaches for influencing government policy. We anticipate that we will have many strong proposals when the teams submit their final proposals for review in August 2022.”

In phase 2, many of the research proposals will be funded by Explore and other donors.

“Sida is excited to partner with Southeast Asia’s researchers in this effort to create new knowledge that addresses the climate crisis and improves the well-being of all people across the region, especially persons living in poverty, women and other marginalized groups,” says Eren Zink, senior research advisor at the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok. “The network will work to ensure that the rights of indigenous and local communities living in and around forests are recognized and respected.”

Explore is supported by a community of practice hosted by the Global Landscapes Forum. To learn more about Explore, including how to become a network member, visit www.recoftc.org/projects/explore  .



RECOFTC looks ahead to 2022–2023

Next year RECOFTC will build on achievements in community forestry, climate change mitigation and e-learning.

The Asia–Pacific region faces the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inequality and the ever-increasing impacts of climate change. These factors reinforce how important it is that people are empowered to equitably and sustainably manage local forests and wider landscapes. This is the core of RECOFTC’s vision, and it will guide the organization’s work in the year ahead.

RECOFTC will continue to focus on scaling up community forestry, supporting research on forest landscape governance, helping communities to mitigate and adapt to climate change and ensuring that fair benefits flow to them from market-based and non-market-based carbon initiatives. It will also continue to improve forest education curricula and expand its offering of e-courses to make learning widely accessible.

Here are anticipated highlights from the next fiscal year.

Ensuring that forest communities benefit from carbon initiatives

Indigenous and local communities manage about half the world’s land and more than one fifth of forest carbon. Despite being the primary stewards of the world’s remaining natural forests, they receive just 1 percent of international climate finance.

Direct investments in these communities are crucial for achieving the internationally agreed goal of limiting global heating to 1.5 degrees Celsius. RECOFTC believes [that](#) voluntary carbon markets can be part of the solution but only if they meet high-quality standards.

Recognizing the potential and the risks, RECOFTC is developing carbon projects in its priority landscapes in the Asia–Pacific region. It will engage with companies and other investors on behalf of local communities so that the highest standards of social and ecological safeguards are maintained. RECOFTC will also work to ensure that communities receive a fair share of the benefits flowing from climate finance.

One way RECOFTC will do this is through the Peoples Forests Partnership [\(PFP\)](#), which it launched [with partners](#) in 2021. The founding members include three corporations, two international non-profit organizations and three organizations representing Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The PFP has already created a set of principles for developing and implementing carbon projects that direct finance to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. These were authored by an expert who is a member of an indigenous group in Latin America.

Scaling up community forestry

RECOFTC’s work with communities, governments and civil society has proved that community forestry can contribute to addressing many challenges—climate change, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, land tenure insecurity, poverty, gender inequality, social exclusion and more.

As it has done throughout its history, RECOFTC will continue to call on countries and the global community to scale up community forestry in the Asia–Pacific region and beyond. In Southeast Asia alone, the area of forests managed by communities doubled between 2010 and 2020. By 2030, it could reach 30 million hectares, a fivefold increase in only 20 years.

This would ultimately benefit millions of people living in and near forests as well as the forests themselves. But, as RECOFTC Executive Director David Ganz explains, it will require more inclusion, investment and innovation.

“Scaling up community forestry will require a wholehearted commitment to diversity and inclusion of marginalized groups, such as women, Indigenous Peoples and youth,” says Ganz. “It will also require innovative policies, regulations and models of community forestry. And it will need direct investment in communities through carbon markets, landscape restoration and secure supply chains for forest products.”

Expanding e-learning

RECOFTC is the premier knowledge hub for community forestry in the Asia–Pacific region. With a long history of building capacities through in-person training, RECOFTC has now embraced e-learning and will expand its online training in the year ahead.

RECOFTC’s Learning Gateway [↗](#) will host a Burmese language version of its popular Community Forestry 101 [↗](#) e-course, adapted for learners in Myanmar. There will also be a new e-course in 2022 on inclusion in community-based enterprises developed within community forestry.

As RECOFTC’s experience has shown [↗](#), such enterprises have the potential to improve the lives of their members and others who depend on forests. They also incentivize forest conservation and restoration, both of which are vital in the fight against climate change. But women and other marginalized groups are often excluded from participating in and benefiting from community forestry enterprises.

The new e-course will explain how and why exclusion occurs, provide practical ways to promote inclusion and present a business case for doing so.

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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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