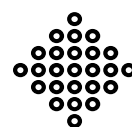




Guidelines

Membership in the Explore community of practice and participation in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism



Explore



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Guidelines

September 2021

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1. Introduction

Explore is a research network and community of practice dedicated to expanding and applying knowledge on forest landscape governance in Southeast Asia. It takes a transboundary, multi-disciplinary, participatory, inclusive multi-stakeholder approach, emphasizing gender equality and social inclusion. Launched in October 2020, Explore is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. The network is hosted by RECOFTC, in partnership with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), in collaboration with universities, research institutes, governments, civil society organizations, local communities, and the private sector in Southeast Asia. Explore research focuses on regional collaboration within Southeast Asia with emphasis on Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

This guide explains how Explore recruits members for the Explore community of practice on forest landscape governance and provides support for researchers through the Preparatory Grant Mechanism. It provides detailed information on membership, eligibility requirements, application and preparatory grant selection processes, training, mentoring, peer review, preparatory grant administration and principles of ethical research.

For more information on Explore, visit the RECOFTC website recoftc.org/projects/explore or the Explore community of practice supported by the Global Landscape Forum, or contact explore@recoftc.org.

2. Community of practice

Explore welcomes universities and researchers, policymakers, practitioners, companies, donors, development institutions and representatives of forest communities to join a community of practice dedicated to research on forest landscape governance. The community of practice is hosted by the Global Landscape Forum (GLF) and convened and moderated by RECOFTC and CIFOR. Explore aims to recruit at least 100 members by 2022, of whom at least 50 percent are women. It aims to achieve an inclusive and diverse membership. Inclusivity goes beyond representation to consider intersectionality: how gender intersects with age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and other social identifiers. To ensure inclusivity, Explore seeks members who represent women and men across these social identifiers.

Explore is an inclusive network and welcomes members who:

- Want to improve forest landscape governance in Southeast Asia
- Want to contribute to transboundary, interdisciplinary, and participatory action research
- Bring knowledge, experience and perspectives from forestry, gender, environmental policy, climate change, public health and other fields of knowledge associated with forest landscape governance
- Want to integrate gender inclusion and human rights into research on forest landscape governance and poverty alleviation
- Have conducted research and contributed to scientific publications on forest landscape governance in at least one or more of Explore's focal countries
- Want to learn and collaborate with researchers and forest landscape stakeholders
- Are able to communicate in English
- Are committed to principles of ethical research
- Respect different ethnicities, religions and belief systems

Explore highly encourages female and young prospective members to join the network.

How to apply for membership in the Explore community of practice

The Explore Secretariat invites people to apply for membership in the community of practice through networking and outreach through RECOFTC and CIFOR's communication channels, and those of its partners. Applicants provide personal and contact information, and express their interests when they sign up to the community of practice on the GLF platform. The Explore Secretariat acknowledges applications, with all applicants initially accepted as Explore network members by email. The Explore Secretariat sends applicants a survey to learn more about their research interests, expertise and interest in participating in Explore groups. Depending on their background and interests, Explore may invite applicants to join particular groups within the community of practice. To apply, visit Explore on the RECOFTC website: <http://recoftc.org/projects/explore/about-explore>.

3. Preparatory Grant Mechanism

Explore provides support for researchers who are interested in forest landscape governance through a Preparatory Grant Mechanism. The seven-step competitive process for receiving preparatory grants is shown in Illustration 1.

The process begins when Explore issues a call for concept notes. The call is open to all researchers including Explore members and those who are not members. Explore asks applicants who are currently not Explore members to become members when they submit a concept note in response to a call.

When the call closes, the assessment process begins. Grant panelists review concept notes and provide scientific comments based on guiding questions. They also grade concept notes using a weighted scoring system based on selection criteria. They follow a double-blind process. The Explore Advisory Committee reviews the comments and scores, and makes final decisions on the selection of concept notes that are eligible for preparatory grants and other support.

Research teams associated with the selected concept notes develop the concepts into full research proposals in Phase 1 of the Explore initiative. In addition to grants, Explore also supports research teams by organizing learning and mentorship opportunities, as well as peer review of draft proposals.

Research teams submit their research proposals to Explore and apply for research implementation grants by the end of Phase 1. At the beginning of Explore Phase 2, the Explore Advisory Committee and scientific advisors review the research proposals and select those that receive Explore research implementation grants. In this way, the Preparatory Grant Mechanism builds collaborative research teams and helps to secure research funding. In addition, Explore helps to communicate research findings and translates research into policy and practice.

The leading university or research institution for a preparatory grant must complete a financial risk assessment form. The contract is signed by the authorized representative of the leading research organization, and preparatory grant installments are paid according to the terms of the contract.

Preparatory Grants Mechanism process



Illustration 1: The Preparatory Grant Mechanism follows a seven-step process.

Preparatory grant size

Preparatory grants cover costs associated with the development of full research proposals which may later be funded by research implementation grants in Phase 2 of the Explore initiative, subject to successful selection and funding availability.

The size of the preparatory grants ranges from US\$3,000 to US\$15,000. The preparatory grant size depends on the complexity of the research question, composition and number of researchers in the team, geographical distribution across the region, duration and other factors.

Preparatory grant duration

Preparatory grants should be used within the six-month period from February to July 2022.

Geographic focus

Preparatory grants must address forest landscape governance in Southeast Asia, with a focus in one or more of Explore's seven priority countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines and Viet Nam. Preparatory grants can include landscapes from other countries in Southeast Asia. Applicants can work in partnership with universities and institutions beyond the seven countries.

Explore welcomes applications for research on the following themes and related topics:

- Role of policies and institutions in the development of sustainable forest landscapes
- Impact of climate change on local communities and response mechanisms
- Gender and social drivers and impacts of forest governance focusing on rights and roles of women, youth and other marginalized groups in natural resource management
- Changes in forests and effects on local livelihoods and poverty
- Trade-offs among economic development, environmental conservation, and human rights in land-use planning
- Scaling up effective forest governance platforms
- Decentralizing natural resource management
- Links among forests, food and water
- Ways to mitigate risks in land and forest investments
- Forest governance and the Sustainable Development Goals
- Forest governance and COVID-19 response and resiliency
- Interdependence and intersectionality between local communities and natural resources in forest landscapes

Eligibility

To be eligible to participate in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism applicants must:

- Be a member of the Explore research network and community of practice
- Lead or substantially contribute to and participate in the successful development of transboundary and interdisciplinary research proposals
- Comply with the RECOFTC preparatory grant agreement and Explore's reporting requirements

Principal researchers must be affiliated with a university or research institution in Southeast Asia, and be a national of and reside in a country in Southeast Asia.

Female and young researchers are highly encouraged to participate. Research teams that involve researchers from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar are given a higher ranking in the assessment of concept notes.

Learning program

For selected participants in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism, Explore offers an online learning program with topics such as:

- Developing competitive research proposals
- Participatory Action Research (PAR)
- Stakeholder engagement
- Gender-inclusive research
- Rights-based approaches

- Sustainable development in forest landscapes
- Communication
- Conflict mitigation
- Ethics and scientific integrity
- Climate change
- Resource economics

Mentorship

Explore provides mentorship to support participants in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism to develop successful research proposals. Mentors support all steps of the research process from concept to proposal, implementation, communication of research findings, and development and presentation of policy briefs.

Mentorship is important to the success of early-stage researchers. Studies show that expert membership enhances mentee productivity, self-efficacy, and career satisfaction, and is an important predictor of the success of researchers in training. Studies also show that researchers from less developed countries often receive less mentoring than those in more developed countries. In addition, researchers from less developed countries often lack institutional support and encounter more social, cultural, and environmental barriers to advancing their careers. Explore addresses these barriers to success through preparatory grants, training and mentorship.

How to participate in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism

Explore issues calls for applications to participate in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism. Explore's first cycle of preparatory grant preparation is announced via its website, the GLF and social media.

In response to a call for applications, applicants apply to participate in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism by using a form available on the RECOFTC and GLF websites. All applications must be in English.

Applicants must carefully follow the instructions provided in the application form. Applicants must fully complete a concept note submission template describing the research that they or their team want to pursue, and provide a budget estimate. The applicants must identify a lead university through which the research funds are to be administered and the names of members of the research team, their affiliation, and explicit roles and responsibilities.

Selection process

Explore awards preparatory grants through a series of steps that employ a double-blind scientific process. 'Double-blind' means that the members of the reviewers and selection panelists do not know the identity of the author(s), and the author(s) do not learn the identity of the reviewers. The Explore Secretariat screens applications to ensure they were submitted by the deadline and meet eligibility and other requirements. Three grant panelists provide scientific feedback based on Explore's guiding questions and score the concept notes using a weighted scoring system based on grant selection criteria. The Secretariat collects all information from grant panelists, and presents it to the Explore Advisory Committee for final decisions on the awarding of preparatory grants.

The decision on the funding of preparatory grants will be announced at the end of December 2021. Successful applicants go through financial assessment and contract agreement processes. Unsuccessful applicants may be encouraged to participate in developing proposals with other research teams if similar interests and issues are identified in the concept note review process. They are encouraged to continue engagement in Explore through the learning program and may be invited to serve as mentors and peer reviewers within the Explore community of practice.

Selection criteria

- Innovative and relevant to the topic to regional and national forest landscape governance priorities, policies and programs
- Technical quality and feasibility based on objectives, resources and timeframe
- Sustainability within the biophysical, socio-economic and cultural context
- Feasibility considering national and regional policy context, trends and future directions
- Relevance to other ongoing research initiative
- Potential for future funding

- Analysis of gaps and specific research issues to be addressed, methods and capacity-building requirements, if needed
- Inclusive of human rights-based approaches (HRBA)
- Integration of interdisciplinary, transboundary and regional approaches (a single country research proposal might be encouraged a merge with another research proposals)
- Strength of gender and social inclusion framework and research objectives (minimum of one gender-related objective) and methodologies (inclusive approach used for developing concept notes)
- Degree to which the proposal incorporates these elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR):
 - inclusive development tailored to the needs and views of stakeholders
 - cycles of reflection, learning and adaptation at all stages
 - opportunities for stakeholders to work together voluntarily, not in isolation
 - focus on achieving strategic and practical goals

Gender balance and social inclusion

Assessment and selection procedures help to ensure gender balance and social inclusion. Explore aims to ensure inclusion through two measures:

- Composition of research team: 50 percent of the participants in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism are women. Research teams are required to have at least one woman, with at least one woman as principal or co-principal researcher.
- Research teams must include young and early-stage researchers, as well as a mix of ethnicity and socio-economic status.
- Gender and social dimensions of the research question: Concept notes are assessed on the strength of the gender and social framework in the research objectives (minimum of one gender-related objective) and methodology (inclusive approach to be taken in developing and implementing preparatory grants).

Criteria for assessing and selecting grant recipients in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism

- Interest, involvement and experience working on issues of forest landscape governance or related issues, either leading or as a partner through engagement as part of the multi-stakeholder platform, including working with local communities and the private sector
- Experience and interest in integrating gender, climate change, livelihood and human rights into their future research and contributing to poverty alleviation
- Interest in conducting research on ways to address the post-COVID 19 situation
- Openness to using trans-disciplinary, participatory and reflexive approaches
- Commitment to co-learning and collaboration with researchers and other forest landscape stakeholders on any of the issues
- Experience engaging forest governance stakeholders to discuss and develop research ideas that address a regional issue, multicounty learning process, such as a comparative analysis or transboundary research
- Commitment to designing and implementing policy advocacy

Grant panelists

Grant panelists who assess concept notes in the Preparatory Grant Mechanism selection process are highly qualified scientists, with a significant publication record, expertise in forest landscape governance and experience in Southeast Asia. At least 50 percent of grant panelists are women.

4. Peer review

The Explore Secretariat, with guidance from the Explore Advisory Committee, administers a 'double-blind' process of peer review during the development of preparatory grants. The objectives of the review and assessment are to:

- Advance discovery in forest landscape governance by selecting highly relevant research proposals
- Ensure the highest standard of preparatory grant proposals and published literature
- Achieve gender and social inclusion targets
- Foster regional and transboundary collaboration and learning among Explore members
- Provide opportunities for reflection
- Build research capacities and skills

Peer reviewers

Explore selects peer reviewers from a roster of scientists with expertise in the central themes of forest landscape governance. The reviewers engage in transparent and objective peer review of research proposals, with the support of expert mentors. Each research proposal is reviewed by three peers, with at least one male and one female peer reviewer.

Criteria for selecting peer reviewers

Explore peer reviewers are independent of one another and do not work at the same university or research institution as grant applicants or research team members.

Reviewers have experience securing funding for research proposals, a PhD or five years' experience in a relevant field related to forest landscape governance. They have published more than 10 articles in the past five years. Peer reviewers are free of bias or conflicts of interest.

Reviewers must have no co-project or co-publications with an applicant and no current or recent affiliation with the applicant or author. In addition, they must not have strong views or opinions on the topic, unless they can be balanced by additional reviewers and panelists.

Explore issues open calls for peer reviewers through surveys and outreach through RECOFTC, CIFOR, ICRAF, GLF and other organizations and platforms. In addition, it seeks peer reviewers through networking at conferences and searches on the Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia and other networks and databases. The Secretariat identifies peer reviewers from within the Explore network based on their background, expertise and consent.

5. Mentorship

Explore mentors create a supportive environment for all participants in the Preparatory Grants Mechanism, particularly those who are female, young and early-career researchers, come from under-represented groups and those who face barriers to career success. They guide, counsel and help to build the confidence of early-stage researchers. Explore mentors have a wide range of research experience. Ideally, at least 50 percent of the mentors are women, but all volunteer mentors are welcome. Mentorship is voluntary on the parts of the mentor and the mentee. The Explore Secretariat serves as a matchmaker.

When recruiting and selecting mentors, Explore looks for people who:

- Have a PhD or at least five years' research experience in forest landscape governance themes at regional and international levels
- Have experience mentoring in academic or non-academic settings
- Are scientists or experts working with RECOFTC, CIFOR, ICRAF and other research or capacity development institutions in Southeast Asia
- Are familiar with Participatory Action Research methodologies
- Are available to mentor for at least 6 consecutive months and dedicate at least four and up to six working days

Explore mentorship follows three stages: initiation, cultivation and evaluation.

Initiation

The Explore Secretariat conducts a capacity development needs assessment (CDNA) to identify mentee needs, selects an approach for mentorship, and matches mentees and mentors. Mentorship approaches include: one-on-one; group; dual; specialty; and blended.

Cultivation

Mentors and mentees enter a consensual relationship in which they consider, define and work toward goals and timelines. The mentor supports the mentee by:

- Acting as a role model
- Providing acceptance, encouragement, moral support, advice, counsel, coaching, and guidance
- Sponsoring the mentee in networks and professional organizations
- Facilitating professional development
- Challenging and encouraging growth
- Ethical and moral guidance
- Helping to navigate relationships with individuals and institutions and within political environments and situations

Mentorship relationships can be two-way, where mentees advise mentors in new and unfamiliar areas and skills, such as emerging technologies.

Evaluation

The Explore Secretariat conducts an evaluation of the mentorship program from the perspective of mentee and mentor, shares feedback with both parties and uses the information derived to improve the Preparatory Grant Mechanism, and the design and delivery of future capacity building activities.

6. Preparatory Grant administration

Arrangements

Explore administers preparatory grants through a lead partner in the research team, such as a university or research institution. Preparatory grant administrators are responsible for receiving, disbursing, monitoring and reporting on use of Explore funds. Research partners are the co-researchers within a research team receiving a preparatory grant allocation for collaborative research under the lead partner's guidance. The Explore Secretariat selects the most economical methods of transferring funds to lead and participating partners.

When a preparatory grant is awarded, the lead research partner completes the Explore financial assessment form. Then, the Explore Secretariat issues a partnership agreement or letter of agreement for the selected project to the research partner, specifying the total preparatory grant amount, fund disbursement schedule, reporting requirements, and responsibilities of each partner.

Allowable expenses

Preparatory grants cover administration, activity and operational costs.

Administration costs

Explore allocates up to seven percent of preparatory grants to universities and other institutions to cover the overhead or indirect costs of preparatory grant administration including administration work and financial reporting.

Activity costs

- Travel: air fares, transportation, vehicle rental, fuel
- Accommodation during research group meetings and field trip
- Meetings: meals, refreshments, meeting space

- Connectivity: internet, mobile phone charges
- Honorariums for resource persons
- Translation and interpreter costs

Operational costs

- Printing and photocopying
- Postage and courier services
- Banking and currency exchange fees

Activity and operations costs can follow the cost norms of respective universities, as long as they don't exceed the cost norms of RECOFTC. Explore preparatory grants do not cover assets with a value of more than US\$150 or that can be used for more than two years. The purchase of assets is limited to a maximum of 10 percent of the value of the preparatory grant.

Disbursement

Explore disburses funds to the lead partner's bank account in US dollars in three installments, according to schedules for each grant, unless otherwise stated in the individual preparatory grant agreement:

- 40 percent after signing the agreement
- 40 percent after receiving the first draft of the proposal with an interim financial report
- 20 percent after the final proposal and financial report are approved by the Secretariat

Reporting

Preparatory grant recipients submit a narrative report and detailed financial report, along with original or verified scans of receipts and vouchers of expenditure. When approved, Explore disburses the next installment or the final payment. In cases where there is an outstanding advance, preparatory grant recipients return the advance to Explore. All parties must keep original receipts and copies for seven years after the end of the grant agreement; or longer if the receiving partner's requirements are longer than seven years. Only original full receipts are accepted. English receipts are preferred, however, local language receipts can be translated and verified by partner's designated focal persons.

7. Principles of ethical research

Researchers funded by or associated with Explore with regard to their work and relationships with Indigenous Peoples, local communities, farmers, youth, agencies and other collaborators must adhere to these principles of ethical research, as well as the ethical guidelines and protocols of their countries and universities.

- Ensure that relevant persons and authorities are contacted and informed, and that necessary approvals and permissions are obtained prior to conducting research.
- Respect applicable national laws, customary rules and norms, and international laws.
- Involve and respect people with a stake in the research. Involve them in the design of research to ensure it serves their interests.
- Inform collaborating organizations and their staff members, and participating community members, about any developments and progress of research. Ask for ideas and feedback. Make the research findings and products derived from research available to participants, in forms that are useful to them.
- Ensure that research is commissioned and conducted with respect for all groups of society, regardless of race, gender, age, ethnicity, religion and culture.
- Ensure that participants/human subjects are protected from undue intrusion, distress, indignity, physical discomfort, personal embarrassment, and psychological or other harm.
- Ensure that research is commissioned and conducted with respect for under-represented gender and social groups. Avoid marginalization or exclusion.
- Ensure that research is commissioned and conducted with respect for, and awareness of, gender differences.
- Ensure that the concerns of stakeholders are addressed and included in the research results.
- Select an appropriate research method on the basis of informed professional expertise.
- Ensure that the research team has the necessary professional expertise and support.

- Ensure that the research process does not involve any unwarranted material gains or losses for any participants and/or human subjects.
- Ensure factual accuracy and proactively prevent and report falsification, fabrication, suppression or misinterpretation of data and results.
- Reflect and share with the research team and stakeholders any foreseeable consequences the research engagement might cause for participants/human subjects.
- Mitigate and alleviate potential disadvantages that engagement or participation might cause for any individual.
- Ensure that reporting and dissemination are conducted in a transparent and responsible manner.
- Ensure that the methodology and findings are shared openly and that there are opportunities for discussion, feedback and peer review.
- Ensure that any debts to previous research as a source of knowledge, data, concepts and methodology are fully acknowledged in all documents, outputs and publications.
- Ensure that participation in research is always voluntary and the selection process of enumerators and respondents is transparent, and research is carried out within a reasonable time frame and at the appropriate time so as not to impact on the daily routine and life of respondents.
- Ensure that all decisions about participation in research are made from an informed position.
- Ensure that consent forms and supporting information are in the native language of those involved, readable and understandable.
- Ensure all data is managed with appropriate confidentiality and anonymity, and that the personal information of research subjects and key informants is protected and managed securely to ensure that there is no risk to participants.
- Respect that Explore's research results are International Public Goods and endeavor to assume the public responsibility that such results entail.
- Ensure that all stakeholders involved in the research are aware of RECOFTC's whistleblower and grievance mechanisms and have equal access to these mechanisms.
- Ensure that field work and activities related to proposal development comply with the COVID-19 restrictions of the countries and project areas and prevent risk of COVID-19 transmission.

These principles serve as a set of guidelines for risk mitigation to be used by research teams in the implementation of preparatory grants. The guidelines for risk mitigation are reviewed and improved with input from research teams, other Explore network members and the Advisory Committee ahead of the awarding and implementation of research implementation grants in Phase 2.

8. Acknowledgements

Explore is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. The network is hosted by RECOFTC, in partnership with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), in collaboration with universities, research institutes, governments, civil society organizations, local communities, and the private sector in Southeast Asia. Explore is governed and guided by an Advisory Committee whose members bring outstanding and diverse research and policy experience in Southeast Asia. The principles of ethical research were adapted from CIFOR's Research Ethics Review (RER) Policy and Toolkit, 2017.



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.

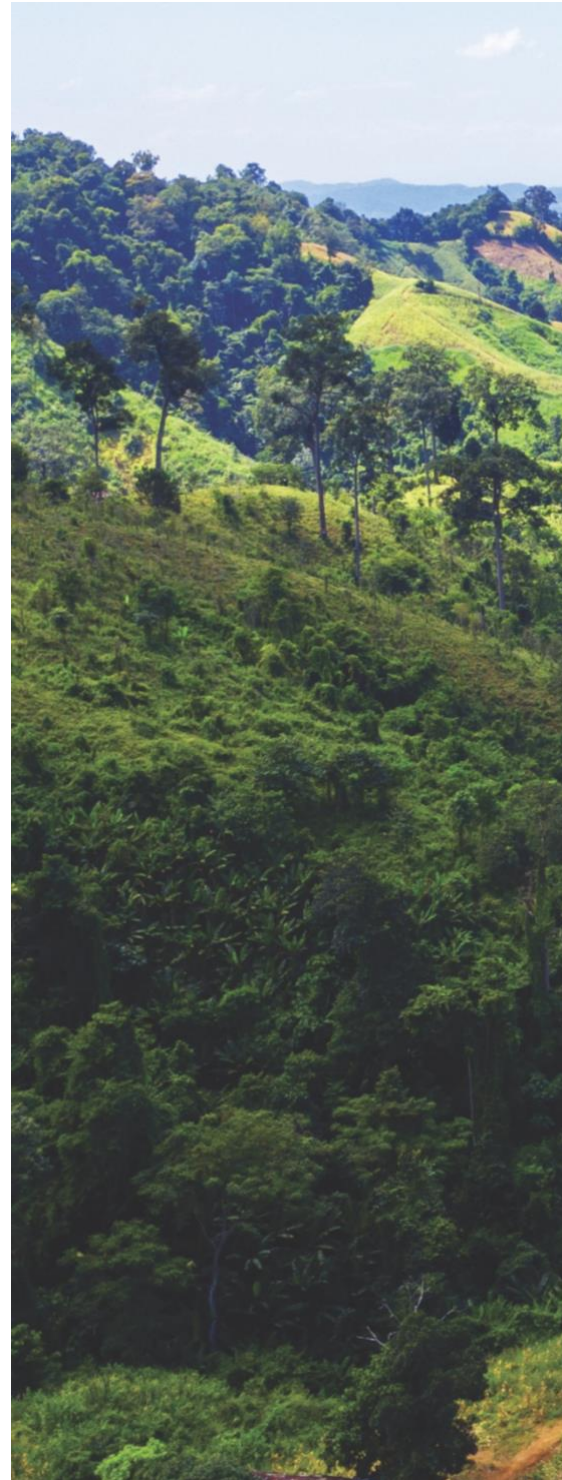
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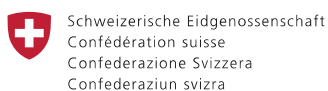
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