

# Optimizing the role of community forestry to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through the ASEAN Cooperation on Food, Agriculture and Forestry

## Policy Brief



## Key messages

- \* Community forestry (CF) in Southeast Asia has the potential to significantly contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through, for example, improving livelihoods (SDGs 1, 2 and 8), local governance (5, 10 and 16) and increasing forest area and quality (7, 13 and 15).
- \* The contribution of CF to achieve SDGs can be optimized by ensuring security of tenure, an enabling regulatory framework, and the presence of good and strong governance.
- \* Institutions that are part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can play a key role in addressing the challenges that CF faces across the region, as well as supporting the scaling-up of best practices. One method for supporting CF in the region is through the implementation of the ASEAN Cooperation on Food, Agriculture and Forestry (2016-2025). The effectiveness of the cooperation as with achieving the SDGs is that it needs to be based on the principle of inclusivity.
- \* Additional steps that the ASEAN can play is to support Member States in their commitments to developing CF, including key efforts in strengthening tenure and rights of forest communities. ASEAN through, for example ASFN, can also play a coordinating role in various areas including strengthening data collection on impacts of CF and the barriers it faces, as well as facilitating identification of best practices across the region and scaling those up.

# Introduction

Despite significant development progress in tropical countries, including those in Southeast Asia, numerous social (e.g. rural poverty, inequality) and environmental challenges (e.g. loss of natural forests and biodiversity), compounded by the effects of climate change still exist in the tropics. Amongst numerous initiatives to combat these social and environmental challenges in the region, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs [2000-2015]) were arguably the most prominent and successful. Nevertheless, many of these challenges still remain – this is the main motivation of the United Nations in launching the SDGs as a follow up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>1</sup>.

The SDGs' aims are reflected in their official title of "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". In other words ensuring that national and global development is done in a sustainable manner. While forestry received little coverage in the MDGs<sup>2</sup>, it is, however, one of the key sectors in ensuring the SDGs are achieved, including in SDG 15<sup>3</sup>.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as a regional coordination body, is taking steps to achieve the SDGs, including supporting its Member States<sup>4</sup> in their initiatives. One example is the launch of the Vision and Strategic Plan of Action, ASEAN Cooperation on Food, Agriculture and Forestry (FAF) sectors (2016-2025). It aims to provide clear guidance for the Member States to identify priority areas for cooperation in the FAF sectors. The strategy is designed to serve the Member States in responding to regional and global socio-economic and demographic changes through seven strategic thrusts, including promoting sustainable forest management, which directly aligns with SDG 15.

ASEAN aims to promote the sustainable management of forest resources to increase livelihoods of forest communities, including indigenous peoples and family smallholders, while at the same time protecting and conserving the region's forests<sup>5</sup>. This will be achieved through strengthening the role of these communities in the sustainable management of forest resources while ensuring their livelihoods needs and cultural traditions are respected. The SDGs also place a great deal of importance, explicitly and implicitly, on community forestry (See Box 1) in achieving the Goals (Box 2). With this in mind it is clear that CF is a strategic approach in achieving both the ASEAN Vision for the FAF sectors as well as the SDGs.

## Box 1. The key role CF can play in achieving the SDGs

CF can play a fundamental role in achieving nearly all the SDGs through its focus on, for example, improving livelihoods (addressing SDG 1. No poverty, 2. Zero hunger, 8. Decent work and economic growth), strengthening local governance (SDG 5. Gender equality, 10. Reduced inequalities, 16. Peace and justice and strong institutions) and halting deforestation and improving forest quality (SDG 7. Affordable and clean energy, 13. Climate action, 15 Life on land).

## Community forestry in Southeast Asia

### Opportunities that CF provides

Various experiences of CF in the region have demonstrated that the allocation of forest management rights and responsibilities to local people is an effective strategy for sustainable forest management and provides potential contribution to improved outcomes for forest cover and condition and local livelihoods<sup>6</sup>. Providing clear and legal recognition for local communities to access forest resources and at the same time giving them rights to manage these resources has been proven as a powerful mechanism to sustainably manage forests, with social and environmental implications (see Box 3).

## Box 2. What is community forestry?

CF is associated with various initiatives, sciences, policies, institutions and processes that are intended to increase the role of local people in governing and managing forest resources. CF started to become increasingly prominent in Southeast Asian countries in the 1980s as a response to the need of the community's rights to extract forest resources as well as due to high incidence of forest degradation and deforestation. The basic principle for this was the understanding that those living in and around the forests are more likely to manage the forests in a sustainable manner, as they know the forests the best and have the greatest interest in ensuring they are managed sustainably.

In 2013, around 8.8 million ha. of forest land were managed by local people through official community forestry arrangements or land titles. This figure accounted for 3.5 percent of the region's total forest land. Additionally, 2.2

<sup>1</sup> UNDP, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs> for more information on the Goals.

<sup>3</sup> "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss"

<sup>4</sup> ASEAN consists of 10 countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam

<sup>5</sup> ASEAN, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Dahal et al., 2010.

million ha of forest land have been officially managed by local people under other arrangements<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, some of ASEAN Member States, such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines and Viet Nam, have set national targets on the area of forest land to be transferred to local communities: 15.9 million ha (6% of region's forest area) by 2030. Recently in the region, CF has been implemented in line with other initiatives such as the payment for ecosystem services (PES) especially in Viet Nam, reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) including in Cambodia, Indonesia and Viet Nam (see Box 4).

### Box 3. Rights to access and manage forest resources in Indonesia

The community of Labbo village, South Sulawesi in Indonesia are allowed to collect the non timber forest products and engage in agro-forestry (e.g. cultivating coffee, cacao and cloves) in their 343 ha forest. Government has secured legal right for community to engage with other livelihood activities such as ecotourism and honey production. This has resulted in the increase of benefits for the community in terms of livelihoods sources and income generation from the forests; and at the same time, a sense of forests ownership has reduced encroachment and illegal activity in the forest area.

### Challenges facing CF's development

The forms of CF across the countries in the region vary greatly in many of the ASEAN Member States. There are numerous common challenges faced by countries, such as lack of clear tenure arrangements, weak governance, absence of supporting regulatory framework and market infrastructure. Unfortunately, the efforts to improve CF practices are also hindered by the fact that empirical information on the connection between science, policy and practice on the ground is still lacking, hindering the effectiveness of CF<sup>8</sup>. To overcome these challenges, currently there are some existing CF sharing and learning platforms in the region such as ASEAN Social Forestry Network (ASFN) that can be supported by the ASEAN to gather empirical information on CF practices in the region.

Insecure land tenure and weak recognition of community rights to use and manage forests can inhibit incentives for long-term sustainable forest management. For example, in the Philippines unstable government policies on resource

utilization in the early 2000s resulted in widespread forest destruction, and in Cambodia allocation of Economic Land Concessions<sup>10</sup> frequently includes land claimed or used by local people and has led to destruction of community forests and conflicts between concession holders and local communities<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, a great deal of work is needed in linking CFs and the markets for their products – there is a great deal of unfulfilled potential in this area.



### Box 4. PES pilot program in Lam Dong province, Viet Nam

The experience from Lam Dong Province in Viet Nam showed that under the payment for ecosystem services (PES) pilot program, communities were put in the central role in protecting forests and being paid for doing so. The arrangement is that the communities were given a role not only to protect the community forests, but also forests under other forms of tenure, such as protection and conservation forests. Communities were also involved in forest measurements to provide data for ground-based carbon stock assessment and monitoring<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> RECOFTC, 2013. Current status of social forestry and climate change mitigation and adaptation in the ASEAN region.

<sup>8</sup> Gilmour, 2016

<sup>9</sup> IGES, 2011

<sup>10</sup> Economic Land Concession is An economic land concession (ELC) is a long-term lease that allows a concessionaire to clear land in order to develop industrial-scale agriculture, and can be granted for various activities including large-scale plantations, raising animals, and building factories to process agricultural products

<sup>11</sup> Dhialulhaq et al., 2014

# Recommendations for ASEAN

Recognizing the value of CF in achieving the SDGs through the implementation of the ASEAN Cooperation on Food, Agriculture and Forestry (2016-2025), ASEAN could do well to:

1. Continue support for the ASEAN Member States in mainstreaming and implementation of people-centered forestry programs to achieve the SDGs by learning from past experiences and lessons on CF in the region and beyond.
2. Provide strong support and advocacy to the Member States in strengthening local and indigenous tenure and rights.
3. Invest in empowering local institutions and their capacities, and support CF regimes contributing to sustainable livelihoods that are responsive to local and regional markets.
4. Support and promote research on CF based on past experience in the region in order to improve future implementation by strengthening existing sharing and learning platform among Member States such as ASFN, and supporting regional initiatives working on CF.

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ASEAN Social Forestry Network (ASFN) is a government-initiated network that aims to strengthen social forestry in Southeast Asia through the sharing of information and knowledge. ASFN was established by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Senior Officials on Forestry (ASOF) in August 2005, linking government forestry policy makers directly with civil society organizations, research organizations, academia, private sector, and all who share a vision of promoting social forestry policy and practices in ASEAN.

The ASEAN-Swiss Partnership on Social Forestry and Climate Change (ASFCC) is a Partnership Programme of the ASEAN that aims to contribute to the ASEAN Mandate and Policy Framework through support for the ASEAN Social Forestry Network (ASFN) and the ASEAN Multi sectoral Framework on Climate Change towards Food Security (AFCC).