



# Strategic Plan 2023-2028



# **Strategic Plan 2023-2028**

April 2023

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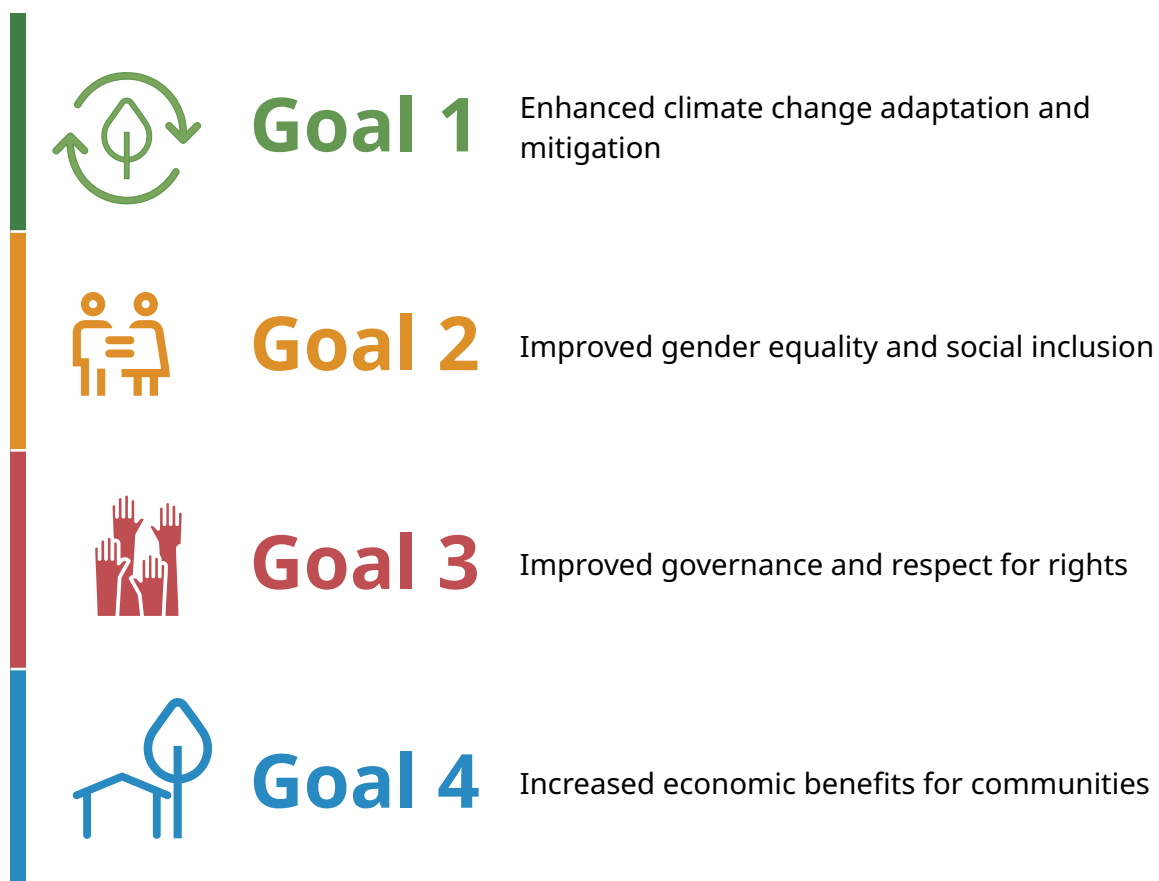
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# Summary

RECOFTC strives for a future where people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. It takes 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 equality.

RECOFTC's entry point to sustainable development and climate change solutions is community forestry. It works throughout the Asia-Pacific region, with a main office in Bangkok and offices in seven countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam.

This document presents RECOFTC's strategic plan for 2023-2028. It describes the following four interlinked goals and our strategies and tactics for achieving them in the landscapes in which we work.



Progress towards these goals will contribute to the overall impact RECOFTC wants to see, which is that: Resilient communities sustainably and equitably manage forest landscapes in collaboration with other stakeholders, ensuring that these landscapes provide goods and services that benefit all community members and wider populations, including by contributing to climate action and biodiversity conservation.





# Introducing RECOFTC's new strategic plan

“Greetings from Bangkok. It is my pleasure to introduce the Strategic Plan 2023-2028 that will guide RECOFTC for the next five years.” – David Ganz, RECOFTC Executive Director

Since 1987, RECOFTC has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure that people in the Asia-Pacific region are empowered to manage local forests sustainably and benefit from them equitably. Our vision is of a world where resilient communities with respected rights thrive in forest landscapes that they manage sustainably and equitably.

Our mission is to strengthen capacities, rights and governance to ensure that local people can maintain and benefit equitably from sustainable forest landscapes in the Asia-Pacific region. We do this through training, network building, research, demonstrating landscape interventions, convening, advocacy and outreach. We collaborate with governments, communities, businesses, academia and civil society organizations. We can do this thanks to the generous support of donors, especially the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), to whom we are deeply grateful.

Three years on from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we face intensifying social, economic and environmental challenges. There is a growing recognition that just as these challenges are linked so must be their solutions. Forest landscapes in particular offer opportunities for addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, poverty, and food and energy security. Integrated, landscape-scale solutions are needed.

## The words we use

By “capacity building”, we mean providing not only training, but also coaching, reflection, awareness-raising, and activities such as learning labs and participatory action research.

We use “communities” to mean the people living in and near forests. This includes communities of Indigenous Peoples, ethnic groups and all other local communities. While we use the catch-all term “communities” for brevity, we recognize that there are important differences within and among communities.

“Community forestry” is a broad term used to describe models of forest management that place local people at the centre of decision-making and implementation. In the countries where RECOFTC works, these models include social forestry, village forestry, community-based forest management, community forest management, participatory forest management, joint forest management, collaborative forest management, forestry partnerships, community protected areas, and so on.



It is in this context that RECOFTC had developed our Strategic Plan 2023-2028. We aim to contribute to positive outcomes for people, forests and ecosystems in our focal countries and priority landscapes, through progress towards four linked goals related to climate change, gender equality and social inclusion, governance and rights, and benefits to communities. This document outlines our theory of change and our strategies and tactics for achieving our intended impact. It highlights our readiness to fulfil our mission and shows how we are adapting to new challenges.

In the past, RECOFTC focused primarily on community forestry and the necessary capacity building for implementation and for communities to receive benefits. In recent years, we have broadened the scale of our thinking and action to encompass wider landscapes and address interlinked challenges. This is because forests are inextricably linked to other sectors and land uses, and community forestry alone cannot address all the problems faced by people and forests.

A landscape approach considers the interplay among forests and other land uses over a large area. It brings together diverse groups with a stake in the landscape to jointly agree and implement sustainable practices. It also connects individual projects, donors and other actors with similar objectives, helping to attract flows of finance into the landscape to support better management practices and sustainability. RECOFTC will continue taking this approach in the years ahead.

We will increase our focus on climate change to ensure that sustainably managed forest landscapes help to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and that communities in forest landscapes are resilient to extreme events and are adapting sustainably to the changing climate. We will place greater emphasis on directing flows of finance into forest landscapes to ensure they are managed inclusively and sustainably, bringing tangible benefits to the people living there. Having already piloted sustainable business models and community forest credit schemes, we will now prioritize efforts to improve, replicate and scale up the solutions that have proved effective.

## The words we use

By “resilient”, we mean that community members have sustainable livelihoods and can withstand health, economic and environmental shocks because they have the required capacities and because their rights are secured and respected.

By “forest landscapes”, we mean areas that have forests, often alongside other land uses such as agriculture. The map on the last page identifies our priority landscapes.

By “sustainably managed” we mean that landscapes and their resources are managed for long-term sustainability, are managed inclusively, and that social, economic and environmental benefits are shared fairly.

By “private sector”, we mean the sector in which organizations have an explicit goal of making profit. This includes commercial enterprises of any size, whether privately held, listed on the stock exchange, owned by the state or owned by local communities.

The Strategic Plan will guide us until 2028—just two years before the deadlines for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, now known as Global Goals, and the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, and the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use.

The world is at a crossroads. Decisions made in the next five years will shape humanity's future. What happens in the forest landscapes of Asia and the Pacific in the next few years will be profoundly important for climate action, biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods. RECOFTC's knowledge, networks and experience have never been more relevant. But we cannot achieve our goals on our own. We acknowledge and appreciate the support and partnership of our donors and many other organizations and individuals.

We invite new allies to join us as we implement this new Strategic Plan 2023-2028 to ensure that resilient communities are sustainably managing and equitably benefitting from thriving local forest landscapes, contributing to climate action and biodiversity conservation in collaboration with other stakeholders.

## Adapting to change

RECOFTC has taken steps to strengthen its performance in recent years. We have strengthened our technical capacities, improved internal management structures and enhanced operational efficiencies. Digital technologies are, for example, changing the way RECOFTC works, enabling low-cost, low-carbon training through online events, multistakeholder platforms, and e-courses. These technologies proved crucial when the COVID-19 pandemic prevented travel and in-person activities.

New media and the high degree of digital literacy among urban citizens and youth are also creating new opportunities for RECOFTC to engage audiences and influence change. Recognizing the fast-changing context in which we operate, RECOFTC must constantly adapt to ensure we are pointing in the right direction and have the knowledge, skills and resources to fulfil our mission. This is part of our commitment to being a cutting edge, exciting and inspiring workplace that attracts and retains a diverse group of talented colleagues.







# Playing to our strengths: RECOFTC's value proposition

RECOFTC has been operating in the forest governance sector in the Asia-Pacific region for 35 years. We occupy a distinct position as an international organization that supports, informs and brings together stakeholders from governments, communities, businesses, civil society and other groups. We are a trusted, honest broker and we have built strong long-term relationships with our stakeholders.

RECOFTC has a unique combination of knowledge, skills and experience relating to community-based natural resource management, as well as a long-term presence in forest landscapes in the region. Our work relies on the power of multistakeholder processes to enable different actors to identify and address challenges together. We act as a bridge among these groups, bringing our understanding of local, regional and global contexts. Our core principles guide everything we do.

RECOFTC is well-regarded as a regional knowledge hub and an upholder of strong social and environmental safeguards. We take a long-term, landscape-based and inclusive approach to supporting local communities to secure their land and resource rights, stop deforestation, develop sustainable livelihoods and foster gender equality. We embody a set of core values through our policies and practices.

RECOFTC collaborates with many other organizations. Our strengths include memorandums of understanding with

## Our guiding principles

- Clear, strong rights are essential to enable people to engage in and benefit from the sustainable management of local forest landscapes.
- Meaningful engagement among communities, the private sector and governments is imperative and should be based on trust, accountability, transparency and mutual respect.
- Good governance, characterized by the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and people's meaningful participation in decision-making processes that affect them, is the basis for community friendly policies, programs and regulatory frameworks.
- Benefits from forest landscapes should be shared fairly among local people to reduce poverty and motivate participation in the sustainable management of land and forests.

national governments and engagement with regional bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Our innovations, knowledge and initiatives enable countries to improve forest governance, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and make progress towards achieving the Global Goals and commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Paris Agreement, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

## Our core values



We are innovative, constantly and creatively testing new concepts, strategies and solutions.



We are adaptive learners, always flexible and open to fresh ideas.



We nurture commitment, responsibility and ownership.



We collaborate with diverse stakeholders in a spirit of trust based on mutual respect, open communication and accountability.



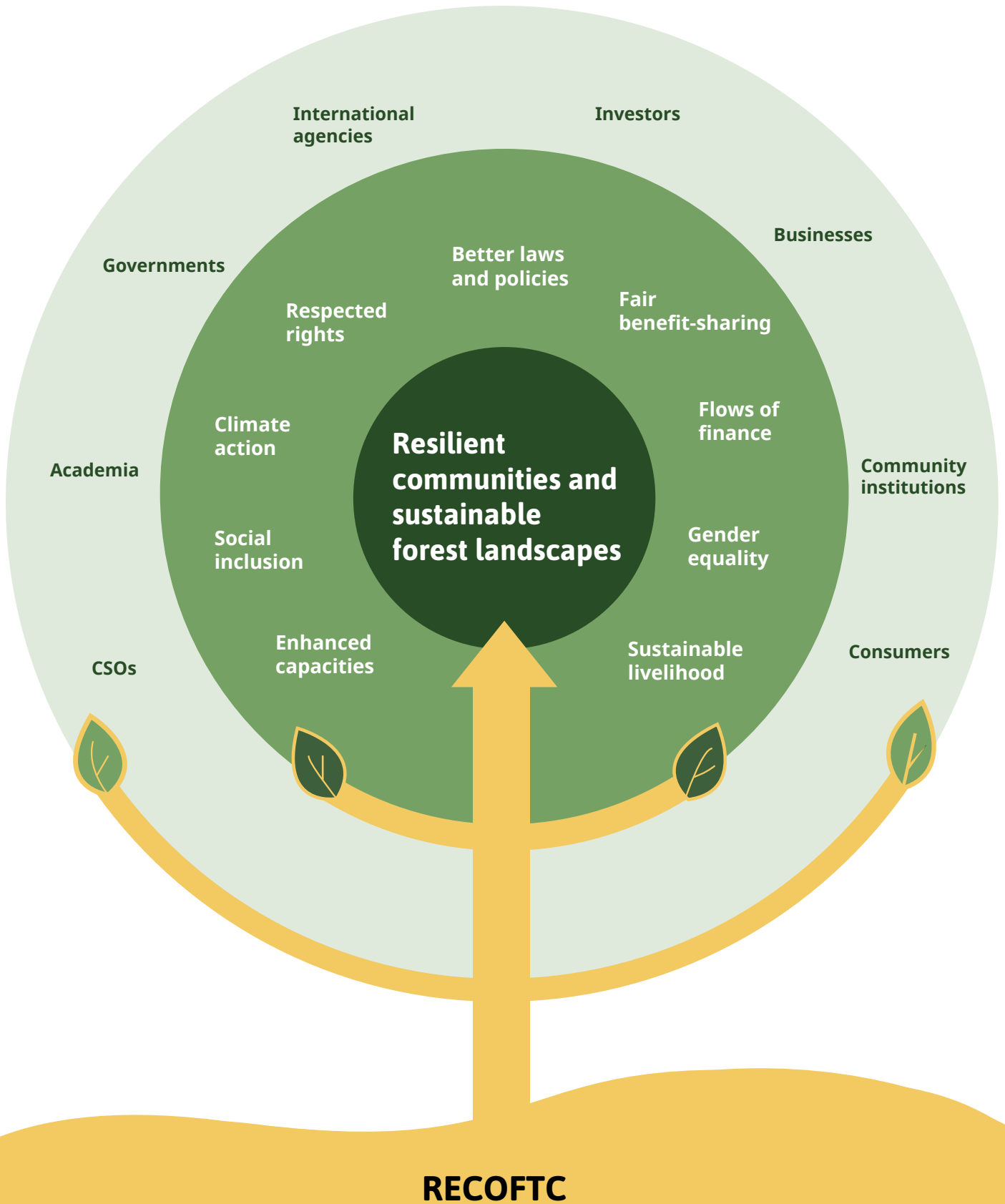
We are committed to sustainability, paying close attention to the social and environmental impacts of our procurement, partnerships and programs.



We cultivate participation, gender equality and social inclusion in all we do.



We prioritise the wellbeing of RECOFTC staff, our partners and the communities we work with.



Training | Research | Demonstrating landscape interventions  
Network building | Convening | Advocacy | Outreach | Policy analysis







# Our context—challenges and opportunities

Environmental crises, economic turmoil and social inequalities are increasing and combining, with devastating effects on the poorest and most vulnerable people. Forests are threatened by each of these trends and related trade-offs. But they are a big part of the solutions too. RECOFTC's assessment of the strategic context identifies key challenges and opportunities.

## Environmental crises

The Asia-Pacific region is particularly vulnerable to environmental risks because it depends heavily on natural resources and agriculture, has densely populated urban areas, and has enduring challenges with poverty and governance. The climate emergency is a clear and present danger, marked by more frequent and extreme floods, droughts, heatwaves and forest fires. Crop production and food security are under threat. The 2019 drought in Viet Nam, the worst in decades, and the 2018 floods in Indonesia and the Philippines, greatly reduced production of important food crops such as rice, leading to price increases.

Ecosystems whose integrity underpins human wellbeing are also experiencing rapid losses of biodiversity. Ongoing deforestation and forest degradation, driven largely by commodity production, contribute to both climate change and biodiversity loss. Humanity's increasing pressure on forests is also linked to the rising incidence of zoonotic diseases. These environmental crises are growing, intensifying, and accentuating each other's social and economic impacts. They undermine progress towards the Global Goals and highlight the urgent need to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacities of communities, while tackling the drivers of harm.

## Economic trends

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have had profound effects on the global economy, disrupting supply chains, injecting volatility into food and energy markets, and contributing to widespread price inflation. There has been an increase in protectionist policies, such as food export bans, reinforced by nationalism. As governments prioritize food security and inflows of revenue, investors are clearing areas of forest to produce commodities. This, together with rising inequality, is increasing social tensions and contributing to growing conflict over land, water and forest resources.

Rural-urban and transboundary migration, especially among youth, is reducing labour availability in rural communities. This is threatening the long-term sustainability of community forestry and other management approaches in forest landscapes. But despite this economic outlook, there are many opportunities for forest communities and urban populations to engage in the growing green economy and to benefit from market demand for sustainable and deforestation-free commodities.

There are growing efforts to make global supply chains more sustainable, with deforestation-free commodities, regenerative agriculture, and inclusion of carbon offsetting to balance carbon footprints in business practices. This is increasing private sector interest in sustainable forest management, climate change, forest landscape restoration, de-risking commodity chains from deforestation and forest degradation, remedy of harm and carbon credits.

One major driver of change is the regulatory approach taken by the European Union (EU) in recognition of the importance of tropical forests and the role commodity consumption in the EU plays in driving deforestation and forest degradation. In December 2022, the EU agreed to a landmark regulation to eradicate deforestation from its supply chains for commodities such as timber, coffee, rubber and palm oil. The traceability requirements create opportunities for smallholders and community-based value chains in sustainably managed forest landscapes. But these requirements also threaten to exclude many smallholders from the EU market if they cannot assure buyers that they are producing commodities legally or meet the costs of complying with new systems.

Communities face significant technical, financial and policy barriers when engaging in value chains for sustainable products and services from forest landscapes. Moreover, private sector interest in investing in community-based enterprises is limited. Communities and marginalized groups such as women, youth and Indigenous Peoples risk missing out on the opportunities presented by green economies. Governments across the region have talked about the need to “build back better” as they attempt to stimulate economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an opportunity for countries to change course and lay the foundations of a just transition to a sustainable, resilient future. Forest landscapes, managed sustainably and equitably by local people for multiple benefits, have a big role to play in developing green and circular economies.

## **Growing appreciation of forests**

Governments, companies, investors and citizens increasingly recognize the urgent need to address the climate and ecological crises. At the same time, there is a growing understanding that forests are crucial to addressing both crises; they contribute to mitigating and adapting to climate change and conserving biodiversity

while improving people’s lives. These changes are reflected in commitments by countries and corporations to increase forest cover, reduce deforestation, restore forest landscapes, achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, and expand protected areas.

There is also a growing understanding among decision-makers that global challenges are interconnected and that solutions must be too. At the international level, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Food Systems process have set the direction and scope for increasing ambition. Forests increasingly feature as solutions in all.

At the national level, there have been positive changes to policies and laws on forests and the rights of people who live in forest landscapes. For example, the area managed under different forms of community forestry in the Asia-Pacific region is growing rapidly. Countries are also putting forests in their climate change plans and improving forest governance.

RECOFTC sees opportunities to apply its knowledge and competency in each of these areas. Our work over many years has demonstrated our knowledge and leadership on social safeguards, community involvement, gender equality, governance, sustainable approaches to natural resource management, and free, prior and informed consent.

## Governance

Some countries in the Asia-Pacific region have made good progress with legal reforms and multistakeholder participation in decision-making in the forest sector. But across the region, there are still significant challenges with transparency, accountability, legal clarity, rule of law, participation and respect for rights. In some countries, governments are closing the space for civil society and limiting press freedom.

### The growth of community forestry

Thanks to new laws and policies, the area managed under different forms of community forestry in ASEAN Member States more than doubled between 2010 and 2020, growing from 6.7 million to 13.8 million hectares. If Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam reach their targets, the total forest area managed by local communities will exceed 30 million hectares by 2030—almost a 500 percent increase in only 20 years.



Across the region, there are inconsistencies and gaps among policies, laws and regulations, as well as weak implementation. These create barriers that prevent communities from benefiting from local forests through community forestry and other approaches. Many government agencies, particularly at the subnational level, lack the capacity and resources to address forest-sector issues, engage with stakeholders, and implement policies and laws. This is exacerbated by weak coordination within and among government agencies from different levels and sectors.

There is increasing international political, economic and consumer pressure to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, which are disproportionately experiencing the impacts of the interlinked crises. There are also growing efforts to ensure that these groups are supported to manage and conserve forest landscapes, including through customary governance systems. These efforts include initiatives to strengthen tenure rights, increase participation in decision-making, and ensure that climate and conservation finance, and related benefits, reach these communities and particularly those most in need.

Notably, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted by parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022, recognizes the rights, territories and practices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in its targets on land management, conservation, and the sustainable use of biodiversity. However, the legal frameworks of most Asian countries do not recognize Indigenous Peoples and their customary land tenure rights. The Global Biodiversity Framework's target of protecting 30 percent of land by 2030 therefore creates the risk that governments will exclude such people from their land to create new protected areas. But the Framework also provides an opportunity for governments to recognize the contributions of land and forest management by Indigenous Peoples as "other effective area-based conservation mechanisms".

## **Finance for forest landscapes**

Sustainable forest management has consistently failed to attract sufficient finance. Bilateral donor funding is uncertain and, in some cases, shifting away from forests and the environment to other priorities. But there are many other potential sources of finance for sustainable forest management and forest landscape restoration. They include green funds, climate finance, blended finance, impact investment, private sector investment and philanthropic funds.

There is a growing interest among donors and investors in strengthening the rights and land tenure of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as implementers of nature-based solutions to climate change. However, as the Rights and Resources Initiative has shown, this will require considerable increases in funding, greater transparency and support to enable communities to overcome barriers to accessing finance. There is a need to bridge the gaps between donor requirements and the capacities of community-based organizations.

The carbon market is also growing. This is creating opportunities to finance sustainable forest management and clearly designate carbon rights to Indigenous People and local communities. But by mid-2022, Cambodia and Indonesia were the only countries in Southeast Asia to benefit from sales of verified emission reductions or carbon credits.

## **Digital transformation**

Rapid advances in information and communication technology are transforming the way forests landscapes are managed and governed. We are using satellites to measure forest cover and carbon stocks, mapping technologies to help secure tenure, and digital tools to track forest products and deforestation-free agricultural products through supply chains. Digital innovations are enabling community-based monitoring of supply chain. Mobile apps are helping communities access market information. And artificial intelligence is helping to measure company impacts. These approaches can boost traceability, transparency and accountability, and help to attract investment.

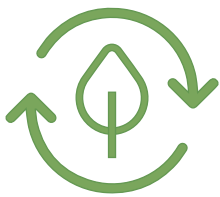
Information and communication technologies are helping producers to connect with each other, work together and benefit from economies of scale and collective bargaining power. These technologies are also enabling producers and consumers to connect like never before, creating new opportunities to market forest products and services. But for many forest communities, especially marginalized groups, limited technical capacities, internet connectivity and access to technology present barriers. They risk being left behind by the digital transformation.





# Towards a better future: Four key goals

RECOFTC will work towards four interlinked goals that will contribute to the overall impact we want to see, which is that: Resilient communities sustainably and equitably manage forest landscapes in collaboration with other stakeholders, ensuring that these landscapes provide goods and services that benefit all community members and wider populations, including by contributing to climate action and biodiversity conservation.



## Goal 1 Enhanced climate change adaptation and mitigation

- Deforestation, unsustainable development, biodiversity loss, financing gaps and climate change are among the factors limiting the ability of forest landscapes to provide environmental goods and services that benefit both local and distant people, including in responses to climate change.
- Sustainable management of forest landscapes can help address the climate crisis by mitigating carbon emissions, limiting loss and damage, and enabling communities to adapt and become more resilient to the impacts of climate change. But the climate change and land-use sector plans and commitments of most countries in the region do not adequately reflect this. Meanwhile deforestation continues, releasing more carbon into the atmosphere and reducing the resilience and adaptive capacities of ecosystems to support local people.
- While community forestry and other community-led approaches to forest landscape management cannot address climate change and biodiversity loss on their own, they can make an important contribution by simultaneously providing livelihoods and economic benefits alongside direct climate adaptation and mitigation benefits.
- When communities in forest landscapes can access finance from different sources, the results can be transformative, while supporting community stewardship of the environment. But for this to happen, communities involved in forest landscape management will require access to capacity building, tools and networks. They will need support to strengthen the capacities of community institutions to manage



finances and do so transparently. This will help communities to access and benefit from financing from both public and private sources, including climate finance and conservation finance.

## Goal

Communities in forest landscapes are contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation, through sustainable forest landscape management, strengthened adaptive capacities, biodiversity conservation and securing of landscape-level ecosystem services. Stakeholders within landscapes, including communities, are applying effective strategies for adapting and mitigating to climate change impacts. Climate and conservation finance is flowing directly to landscape stakeholders, including communities, with measurable impacts on carbon sequestration and adaptive capacities.



## Goal 2 Improved gender equality and social inclusion

### Rationale

- In forest landscapes, marginalized groups such as women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic groups and people with disabilities are often the most dependent on forest resources for subsistence, food security and livelihoods. But they are often the least involved in decision-making processes, leadership roles and economic opportunities. They risk being “left behind” in transitions to low-carbon economies.
- Indigenous peoples manage a quarter of the world’s land and 80 percent of its biodiversity, yet they receive little funding to support their stewardship of natural resources. For example, they receive less than one percent of climate finance, making them a key group to support.
- Gender inequalities remain entrenched in the Asia-Pacific region. This is evident with respect to the governance, management and use of forests and natural resources. Compared to men, women in forest landscapes tend to have weaker rights, fewer resources, less say in decision-making, fewer positions of authority, and less access to justice. Women face challenges to their legitimacy as key actors in forest landscapes.

- Existing mechanisms and complicated procedures limit opportunities for marginalized groups to participate in decision-making about forests and natural resources.

## Goal

Communities—and women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups in particular—have secured and are exercising their rights to live in and around forests. They are gaining a fair share of the benefits that forest landscapes provide because of these rights, together with enhanced capacities, access to opportunities and inclusive business models. Members of marginalized groups have assumed leadership roles in forest landscape management, forest-based businesses and forest restoration initiatives.



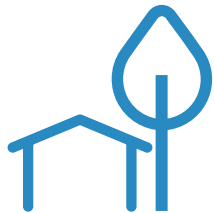
## Goal 3 Improved governance and respect for rights

### Rationale

- Legal frameworks, policies and community norms provide the basis for governance of forests and their resources. But policy and legal frameworks are often inconsistent, out-dated and poorly implemented. Company policies on sustainability and rights are sometimes inconsistent or non-existent. Some company policies directly work against good governance and some incentivize poor governance.
- Because of their customary management practices, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have often been shown to be more effective than governments at sustainably managing forests and conserving biodiversity.
- Communities in forest landscapes should be included equitably in governance processes that affect them. They should be able to shape decisions, exercise rights and benefit fairly. But communities are often left out of policy processes. Weak rights, insecure tenure and a lack of social safeguards prevent many communities from managing forest landscapes sustainably and equitably to achieve the maximum environmental, economic and social benefits.

## Goal

- Governments, businesses and communities shape and implement policies, laws and standards that recognize the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples and promote sustainable management of forest landscapes. Communities exercise their rights and participate meaningfully in processes relating to forest landscapes. All stakeholders follow “good governance” principles.



## Goal 4 Increased economic benefits for communities

### Rationale

- Poverty rates are high in many communities living in forest landscapes in the countries where RECOFTC works.
- Forest landscapes provide many goods and services, from foods, medicines and materials to watershed protection, crop pollination and maintenance of cultural and spiritual values. These goods and services are the basis for subsistence and income-generating livelihoods. Rarely are they monetized to fully reflect their benefits to society. In addition, the rights of communities to own, manage, use and benefit from land and forests are often weak and insecure. Nor are they respected by external landscape stakeholders.
- Capacity gaps, legal restrictions and bureaucracy create barriers to local communities engaging in and benefitting from value chains for goods and services from forests and agricultural land. In many places, young people lack interest in livelihoods based on forest landscapes. This is, in part, because they cannot envision economic benefits under current conditions. Taking a landscape approach will help overcome their disinterest and ensure the next generation’s leadership and involvement in sustainable forest management.
- Scaling up successful interventions and business models in forest landscapes, such as community forestry and inclusive restoration initiatives, is essential for improving livelihoods, addressing climate change and conserving biodiversity. But scaling up will require large amounts of financing and different delivery mechanisms. Despite strong commitments, traditional overseas development cooperation cannot meet the needs.
- Private sector partnerships can enable communities to effectively engage in value chains and access markets, address rights issues, increase the negotiating



power of communities and address deforestation risks in value chains. These partnerships can bring added value in the context of the mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence requirements adopted by some European countries and under development by the EU.

## Goal

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Communities are benefitting from healthy, resilient forest landscapes through participation in viable and sustainable forest-based jobs, enterprises, financial mechanisms and value chains for forest landscape products and services, including through partnerships with private sector actors. They have the knowledge, skills, networks and resources to thrive in a low-carbon green economy.



# Our theory of change, strategies and tactics

RECOFTC's work is designed to maximize the contributions of forest landscapes to local livelihoods, climate action and biodiversity conservation. We believe that forest landscapes can only be sustainable and resilient, and so can only deliver these gains, if local communities are empowered and able to manage and benefit from them.

Securing and strengthening community rights to land and forest resources is therefore crucial. So is good governance. It promotes collaboration among stakeholders, enhances transparency and accountability, and provides the legal and policy frameworks needed to ensure that the benefits of forest landscapes are shared equitably and that resources are managed responsibly for present and future generations. Sustainability depends on women, Indigenous Peoples, youth and other marginalized groups having equal opportunities to participate in forest landscape management, access finance and influence decisions that affect them. We believe this can be achieved by promoting policies, laws and standards that recognize the rights of communities and their marginalized members, and by strengthening the capacities of these groups to participate in forest landscape management and governance.

We believe increased economic benefits will incentivize communities to manage forest landscapes sustainably and equitably. For such benefits to flow, communities will need enhanced capacities, appropriate financial mechanisms, and inclusive business models that enable them to participate in value chains for forest landscape products and services. We also recognize that when communities manage forest landscapes sustainably and equitably, they mitigate carbon emissions, secure ecosystem services, and enhance their adaptive capacities and resilience to shocks including climate change impacts. For this to happen, communities must be

## The power of the public

RECOFTC operates in the space between communities, governments and private companies. That space is also where the public can play an important role in driving change, as consumers, taxpayers and voters. Public action in favour of forest landscapes and forest communities remains relatively weak in the region, but it is growing. RECOFTC wants to unlock its potential, recognizing that relatively small shifts in public perceptions and behaviour can have big effects



empowered to manage forest landscapes, to understand and adapt to climate-related threats, and to access climate and conservation finance.

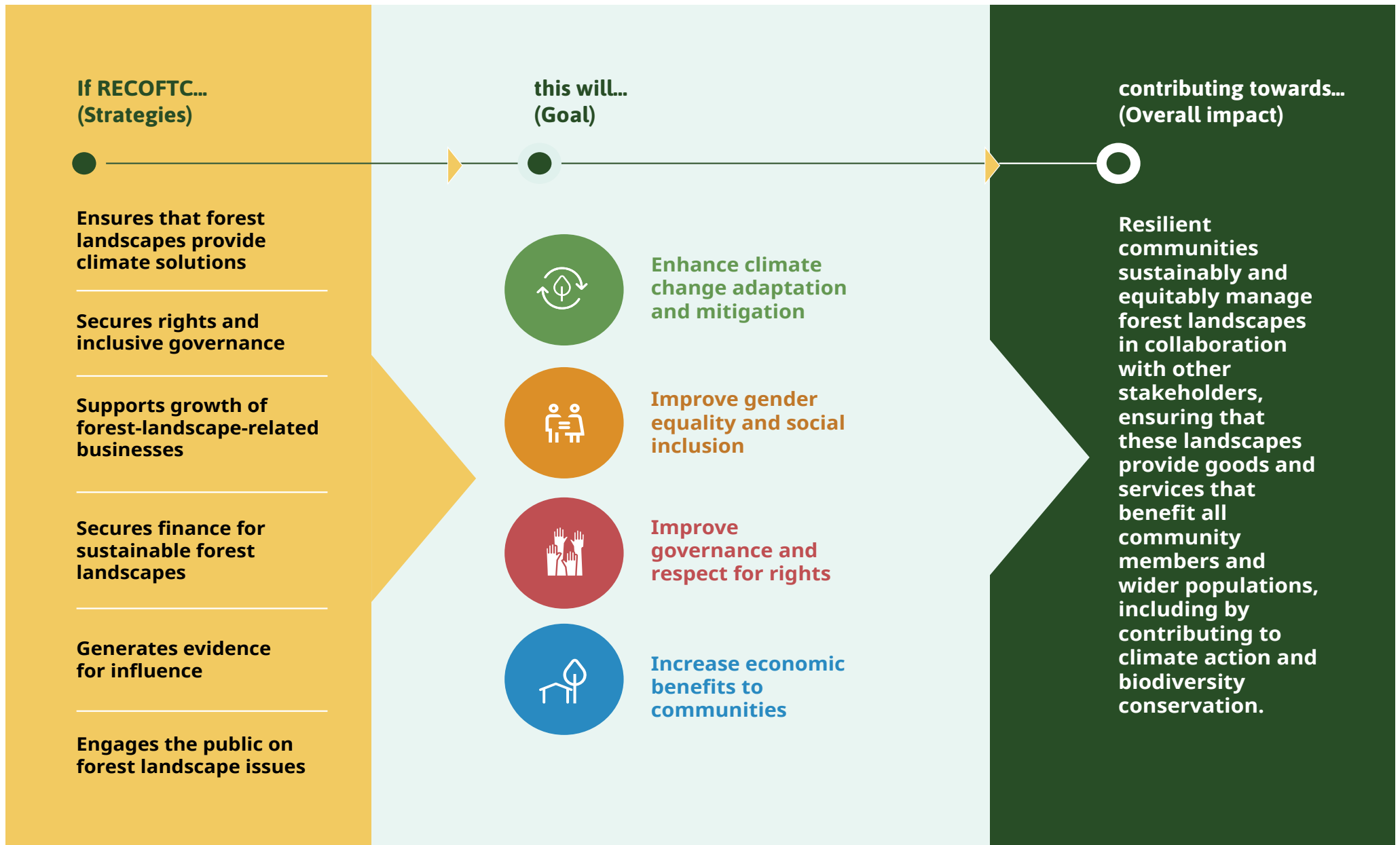
The changes we want to see will result from a complex interplay of social, political and economic factors. While shifts in policy and practice tend to be slow, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that this is not always the case. Market forces, environmental change and public sentiment can lead to tipping points and rapid change.

Our theory of change is based on some fundamental assumptions. We assume that good policies, respect for rights, and enhanced capacities will enable communities in forest landscapes to meaningfully participate in and benefit from the sustainable management of those landscapes. This further assumes that policies and laws are developed inclusively, that governments have the will and capacity to implement and enforce them, and that communities, businesses and others meet their obligations. We also assume that countries fulfil their commitments under the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Below, we expand on our theory of change and assumptions in relation to six mutually reinforcing strategies that will help us to achieve our desired goals, outcomes and impact. While each strategy roughly corresponds to one of the four goals, they also align with other goals. As we implement the Strategic Plan 2023-2028, we will develop these and other strategies, along with intended outcomes, work plans and progress indicators. The ways in which RECOFTC develops and implements activities in different countries will be shaped by national and local contexts, priorities and possibilities.

We will complement our activities in our focal countries with actions at the regional and global levels. Our engagement with ASEAN will contribute to the development of regional policy frameworks and guidelines on social forestry and climate change. For example, we plan to disseminate the ASEAN Social Forestry Guidelines in a few countries to help them assess, develop or improve community forestry laws and programs. We will shape the development of international and regional solutions through our work with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and through our engagement at international forums such as the World Forestry Congress and the United Nations Climate Change Conferences.

## RECOFTC's pathways to impact: Each strategy contributes to multiple outcomes and goals



# 1. Ensuring that forest landscapes provide climate solutions

We will continue to implement and promote community-based approaches to forest landscape management as nature-based solutions to climate change, showing that they can reduce and remove carbon emissions while increasing local people's resilience and ability to adapt to the changing climate. We believe this will increase policy support for community-based approaches to forest landscape management, unlock new sources of finance and generate sustainable goods including timber, agricultural commodities and non-timber forest products, and environmental services such as the regulation of water cycles and local climate. Communities will have more resilience to climate and other shocks, as well as increased adaptive capacities. We also expect forest ecosystems and biodiversity to be less vulnerable to climate change.

## Examples of what RECOFTC will do

- Create an enabling policy environment and attract finance, including from carbon and green markets, by strengthening the evidence base for a greater role for forest landscapes and their communities in national climate solutions.
- Support communities to understand local climate threats and assess vulnerabilities including risks to women, youth and other marginalized groups. Develop, pilot and promote community-based approaches and landscape-based responses to floods, fires, food insecurity, invasive species, and increasingly severe storms and climate change impacts in forestry landscapes. This will boost ecological and social resilience to climatic shocks and transitions to low-carbon economies.
- Assist communities to use digital tools for monitoring forest cover and carbon stocks, enabling them to quantify and verify the carbon sequestration potential of their forest landscapes and participate in carbon markets.
- Build and promote pathways for Indigenous Peoples and local communities to receive climate and conservation funding directly and have the capacity to co-design projects and benefit from them equitably. This includes developing innovative platforms that leverage digital marketplaces for carbon and nature-based offsets.
- Foster trusting relationships between Indigenous Peoples and local communities and the private sector for leveraging finance to incentivize sustainable forest management to achieve climate and conservation goals.
- Advise countries on pathways for achieving the land-based climate targets in their Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement on climate change—in ways that balance multiple objectives in relation to carbon, social, economic, biodiversity, rights, community and other benefits.
- Support community forestry groups and community-based enterprises to integrate climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience into their management plans..



## Assumptions

- National governments and development cooperation agencies give the climate change emergency appropriate levels of attention.
- The contributions of community forestry and other landscape approaches to climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience can be quantified and verified.

## 2. Securing rights and inclusive governance

We will identify and work to address gaps and weaknesses in legal frameworks, support communities to claim and exercise their rights, and make the case for multistakeholder participation in decision-making processes. We believe that multistakeholder platforms and processes will enable rightsholders, including marginalized groups, to engage in and influence decision-making, claim their rights, and hold governments and businesses accountable for implementing sustainable policies and practices. Meaningful and representative multistakeholder participation will also drive the development and implementation of inclusive, gender-responsive policies, investments and business practices. Communities and other stakeholders will understand and comply with laws, and governments will effectively enforce the laws.

### Examples of what RECOFTC will do

- Build awareness among communities regarding their rights in the context of national policies, laws and regulations, promote multistakeholder dialogue and participation in policy development and implementation, and strengthen capacities of civil society to monitor policy implementation and law enforcement.
- Work with communities, civil society groups and their platforms to enhance their knowledge, skills, strategies, tactics and tools so they can articulate and advocate for the rights of communities, influence policy reforms through multistakeholder platforms and participate in implementation.
- Support communities to secure tenure rights to forest land. This will include the use of digital tools for mapping and documenting land use and tenure to provide evidence of community rights to land and natural resources.
- Use digital platforms to facilitate the participation of communities in decision-making processes related to forest landscapes.
- Analyse legal frameworks to identify gaps and opportunities for reforms that would empower communities, particularly marginalized members, to benefit from local forests.

- Promote legal reforms that enhance tenure and other rights of forest communities, and promote gender equality.
- Support women, youth and other marginalized groups to take part in and lead community forests and community-based enterprises, and engage in policy processes.
- Support development and implementation of processes for free, prior and informed consent, benefit-sharing mechanisms, and grievance mechanisms.
- Engage with the private sector to promote more transparent and responsible business practices and greater links with community-based and other forest enterprises.
- Improve the internal governance of community forestry institutions and community enterprises.

## Assumptions

- Governments allow stakeholders to meaningfully participate in and influence decision-making processes, and stakeholders want to engage in these processes.
- Rightsholders use their enhanced understanding and capacities to claim their rights, and governments and private companies respect those rights.

## The gender dimension

RECOFTC recognizes that gender equality and equity are matters of fundamental human rights and social justice, and are preconditions for sustainable forest governance. They are therefore central to RECOFTC's mission and vision, and to all our strategies and tactics.

We believe that gender equality will lead to more equitable resource management and healthier, more resilient forest landscapes. Increased women's participation will lead to improvements in local natural resource governance, conservation and sustainable livelihoods, contributing to lives lived with security and dignity.

We use an equity-oriented intersectional approach to expand the representation and leadership of women and other marginalized groups, increase their access to income and other economic assets, promote gender-inclusive policy and extension services, and tackle root barriers including harmful gender norms, practices and knowledge gaps.

Our Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality (WAVES) initiative has, for example, been based on the idea that having stronger leadership and expertise will improve policymaking and investments in ways that promote gender equality and social inclusion more broadly. It has built a network of 36 gender champions from seven countries and is supporting them as they advocate for equality and lead gender-mainstreaming programs in their communities and institutions.

### 3. Supporting the growth of businesses based on forest landscapes

We will continue to enable communities to establish and manage enterprises that sell products and services from forest landscapes. We will facilitate equitable partnerships between communities and other actors in value chains, improve enabling policy, promote accountability and fair distribution of benefits, and raise awareness among youth of the economic opportunities in forest landscapes. We believe this will attract investment and motivate young people to take leadership roles in the agriculture, forestry and environmental sectors, contributing to the long-term sustainability of forest landscapes. As a result, we expect to see the growth of sustainable, community-based businesses that provide livelihoods for local people, healthier ecosystems, increased carbon sequestration and enhanced biodiversity conservation.

#### Examples of what RECOFTC will do

- Foster landscape-level associations or cooperatives of forest enterprises and replicate and scale-up adoption of sustainable business models for community forestry, agroforestry, agriculture and other approaches.
- Build capacities for entrepreneurship, product development and business management, with a focus on ensuring that women and other marginalized groups can participate in value chains for products and services based on forest landscapes.
- Improve policy and laws to make it easier for communities to establish business and improve access to market information, including through innovative e-market platforms that connect producers and customers of sustainable products and services.
- Facilitate community access to finance, technologies and technical support, and mutually beneficial partnerships among community-based enterprises, the private sector and investors.
- Work with national and regional stakeholders to facilitate dialogue with the EU on legal compliance in supply chains for forest-risk commodities covered by the EU regulation on deforestation-free products.
- Create value and acceptance for community forestry and enterprises based on forest landscapes among youth in local communities, and support government efforts to increase young people's interest in working in these sectors.

#### Assumptions

- Governments are committed to encouraging environmentally and socially responsible businesses with supportive policies and resources.
- There are responsible private companies that will form partnerships and trading relationships with community-based and youth-led businesses.



- Community-based enterprises have adequate resource bases and viable business models and want to collaborate with the private sector.
- Continued and growing markets for forest-related goods and services, including carbon offsets, provide significant income to community members.
- Market interest continues in sourcing sustainable products from forest landscapes, including deforestation-free forest and agricultural commodities.
- Private companies provide investment or in-kind support to scale up community-based enterprises and promote forest-positive value chains.

## 4. Securing finance for sustainable forest landscapes

We will demonstrate the financial, social and environmental benefits of investing in inclusive and sustainable forest landscape management, and support communities to adopt viable business models and manage finance at the community level. We believe this will encourage flows of investment into forest landscapes and their communities from public and private sources and enable community-based models of forest landscape management to become self-sustaining and supportive of the most marginalized community members. As a result, we envision that sustainable management of forest landscapes will generate economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities, while also conserving biodiversity and securing important ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration.

### Examples of what RECOFTC will do

- Promote direct private investment in community-driven forest conservation and restoration projects as a facilitating partner of the Peoples Forests Partnership, which aims to mobilise USD 20 billion annually by 2030.
- Support mobilization of USD 10 billion for the formal recognition of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' land rights, and the conservation and sustainable management of forest landscapes, through the Community Land Rights and Conservation Finance Initiative (CLARIFI), which RECOFTC supports as a coalition member.
- Develop business cases for investment at the community-level, explore opportunities for mobilizing finance from various sources and channels, and strengthen collaboration with other institutions to mobilize funding.
- Advocate for supportive policies and link communities to wider networks that enable them to access finance, including from international sources.
- Support community access to external sources of finance, including blended finance, impact investment, payments for ecosystem services, carbon offsets and other forms of climate finance and in exploring the use of digital platforms for activities such as crowdfunding, microfinance and peer-to-peer lending.
- Improve financial mechanisms for communities, such as community forest

credit schemes, and build community capacity to manage finances and replicate and scale up successful models. This includes the capacities to set up their own financial management and reporting systems, use digital technologies to monitor project performance, track the impact of investments, and align community-level monitoring, reporting and verification systems with national systems.

- Develop mechanisms for channelling finance to universities, researchers and other local partners working on sustainable forest landscapes.
- Ensure finance is environmentally friendly, inclusive, gender-responsive and accessible to marginalized groups.

## Assumptions

- Funding facilities are interested in sustainable landscape management and RECOFTC's priority landscapes.
- Communities, civil society organizations, and governments are willing to work with the private sector and vice versa, and they can develop healthy collaborations based on trust and common visions.
- Policy enables flows of investment and there is clarity, transparency and equality regarding benefit-sharing with communities.
- Local communities are ready to adopt viable business models and manage finances efficiently.
- Finance motivates communities to maintain healthy forest landscapes, resulting in sustainable livelihoods.

## 5. Generating evidence for influence

We will continue generating and communicating evidence of the benefits and practicalities of inclusive and sustainable forest landscape management and restoration. We believe this will support the development of an enabling policy environment, encourage investment in forest landscapes and communities, and improve forest landscape management practices. It will also promote multistakeholder participation in decision-making and implementation, and encourage more responsible business practices. As a result, sustainably and inclusively managed and restored forest landscapes will provide multiple goods and services to local communities and beyond, including forest products and ecosystem services such as flood regulation and carbon storage.

## Examples of what RECOFTC will do

- Generate and share evidence through a variety of methodologies such as participatory action research and piloting solutions that can be implemented at scale.
- Build the capacities of researchers to produce high-quality evidence and use it to influence policy through initiatives such as our Explore program, which strengthens the capacities of universities and researchers in Southeast Asia to conduct quality, impact-oriented research on forest landscape governance.
- Demonstrate that when communities have rights and capacities to manage and use local forest landscapes and their resources, they can protect those areas, secure decent livelihoods, and contribute to action addressing climate change and the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Show the significant benefits that accrue when women, youth and other marginalized groups are included in forest landscape management and promote greater participation.
- Document and share indigenous and traditional approaches to forest landscape management that support climate adaptation and mitigation efforts and support the mainstreaming of these approaches in national policies.
- Ensure that research is gender-inclusive, recognizing that gender inequities pose significant challenges to forest landscape governance in the region but are often overlooked.
- Using research findings, conduct the networking, communication and advocacy activities required to influence policies and practices through actions by RECOFTC's main office at the international and regional levels, and our country offices at the national and subnational levels.

## Assumptions

- The necessary evidence can be generated and effectively communicated, and governments and the private sector will accept and act on it.
- Governments have the capacity and will to implement supportive policies and laws.

## 6. Engaging the public on forest landscape issues

We will increase awareness among consumers about the value of forests and community-based forest management and strengthen the capacity of groups and networks to advocate for forests and forest communities. We believe this will increase public demand for sustainable products and services generated by communities in forest landscapes, and motivate people to advocate for better policies, more investment, and fairer, more inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches to forest landscape management. As a result, we expect to see the development of sustainable policies and practices that create new opportunities for community-based businesses

and benefit communities and forest landscapes. Governments and companies will be held accountable for sustainable, climate-resilient development in forest landscapes. This will create a virtuous circle where the growth of community-based businesses will further increase awareness and demand for sustainable forest products and services.

### Examples of what RECOFTC will do

- Broaden public awareness of the connections among inclusively and sustainably managed forest landscapes, the wellbeing of forest communities, and quality of life in urban areas through communication, networking and mobilizing journalists and influencers.
- Advocate for the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in climate policy processes at national and global levels such as REDD+ policy development or under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- Lead and engage in selected global initiatives addressing the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in relation to forests and climate change, such as the Peoples Forests Partnership and the LEAF Coalition's efforts around REDD+ at the jurisdictional scale.
- Raise awareness of links among sustainable forest management, ecosystem services, biodiversity conservation and resilience to climate change.
- Amplify the voices of community forest leaders and champions and generate consumer interest in community forest products.

### Operational approaches

In addition to programmatic strategies, RECOFTC will implement operational strategies to help us achieve our goals:

- **Business development:** We will increase and diversify our funding, tapping into new public and private sources including climate and conservation finance.
- **Partnerships:** We will develop new partnerships and build on existing ones, working with governments, businesses, investors, universities, nongovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, community organizations, and others to achieve our goals.
- **Adaptive management:** We will track progress and adjust tactics over time guided by our monitoring, evaluation and learning framework.
- **Staffing:** We will enhance in-house capacities and recruit staff whose knowledge, skills and experience align with our priorities.
- **Regional to national coordination:** We will strengthen coordination between our main office and our country offices on fundraising, monitoring, evaluation, learning, efforts to influence policy change at the national and subnational levels, and other aspects of our work.



- Create spaces and opportunities for the public to voice their views and help them to build the capacity to do that.
- Collaborate with civil society groups and other stakeholders to improve public accountability.

## **Assumptions**

- Increased awareness influences consumer choices and encourages advocacy for change.
- Citizens are free to express their views and advocate for change.
- Decision-makers in governments and the private sector respond positively to calls for change.
- Media outlets create more space for these issues and journalists can accurately report on them.



## Financing our work

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, RECOFTC experienced growth and we were able to adapt our approaches to deliver our work over the past five years. With the adoption of this new Strategic Plan 2023-2028, we anticipate many opportunities for strategic partnerships, revenue generation, and increased collaboration with local communities. RECOFTC is committed to enhancing our operational efficiency and project management systems, allowing us to take on larger and more complex projects. We are also focused on building the capacity of local organizations and community groups to manage funds according to international standards, which will improve access to sustainable financing.

Our projected budget for the next five years is USD 58 million, with an average annual growth rate of five percent as shown in Table A. Over this period, we aim to increase our grant funding to partners from about 10 percent of our total annual expenditures to 20 percent, which will amount to USD 9.4 million over five years. This aligns with our mission and the principle of local communities having the right to manage and spend funds according to their priorities. RECOFTC's strong operational systems and expertise, coupled with clear understanding and connections on the ground, enable us to work collaboratively with communities to increase their capacity to manage funds effectively.

Table B details our projected expenditures for the next five years across high-level categories. The total of USD 48 million is only inclusive of RECOFTC expenditures and does not cover the grants to partner funds in Table A. The personnel cost in Table B is based on RECOFTC's staffing plan and accounts for annual inflation. The remaining categories are split according to historical estimates, which inform the forecasted expenditures that will be charged to RECOFTC funds and core funds, or to project funds. This table provides a realistic target for RECOFTC's expenses for the next five years. However, it is subject to annual adjustments according to operational changes and funding levels.

**Table A:** Financial target: Projected expenditures (USD)

Fiscal year	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	Total
Total expenditure	10,500,000	11,025,000	11,576,200	12,155,000	12,762,800	58,019,000
RECOFTC expenditures	9,240,000	9,481,500	9,724,000	9,967,100	10,210,300	48,622,900
Grants to partners	1,260,000	1,543,500	1,852,200	2,187,900	2,552,500	9,396,100
Grants to partners as percentage of total expenditure	12%	14%	16%	18%	20%	16.2%



**Table B: RECOFTC five-year expenditure breakdown (USD)**

	Personnel	Activities	Operations	Capital	Total
RECOFTC expenditures	27,357,900	17,522,100	3,423,500	319,400	48,622,900
<b>Breakdown by funding</b>					
RECOFTC funds* and core funds**	13,473,900	2,825,900	1,919,800	192,100	18,411,700
Project funds***	13,884,000	14,696,200	1,503,700	127,300	30,211,200

## Notes:

\* RECOFTC funds include income from RECOFTC dormitories, consultancies, and project overheads.

\*\* Core funds include unrestricted programmatic funding provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

\*\*\* Project funds are funds given to RECOFTC on a project agreement or contract-basis, and include funding from public donors, intergovernmental organizations, international non-profit organizations, the private sector and foundations.

Thanks to our core donors, SDC and Sida, RECOFTC receives unrestricted support. This provides significant operating resources that allow for flexibility in our overall operations and growth. The contributions from SDC and Sida make up approximately 20 to 25 percent of our overall revenue, whereas contributions from projects, courses, consultancies, and other sources, make up 75 percent of RECOFTC's income. In the past five years, we have been able to develop innovative projects, including sustainable finance mechanisms, leveraging our core funding as co-finance, and expanding our understanding of sustainable development. We expect these trends to continue, and we are working to develop market-driven business models that meet the demands of green growth targets in our region.

To mobilize the resources required to meet our projected budget growth, we will pursue the following strategies:

- **Sustain and increase core funding** as the foundation of our institution and our key growth capital. We will leverage our strong relationships and shared vision with our closest funding partners, while expanding our networks to access new and diverse funding sources. We will capitalize on the growing convergence of climate, forestry, and biodiversity funding around healthy ecosystems and nature-based solutions, and the growing interest in channelling funding directly to those who need it most, local communities.
- **Achieve greater diversity in revenue sources** by continuing to secure funds from public-sector donors while also deepening our engagement with the private sector, as both a funder and a partner. Leveraging our strong ties to private actors, both large companies and small local or national operators, we will seek alignment with those that wish to improve their supply chains, secure the natural areas from which they source their materials, and help develop sustainable partnerships with local communities.



- **Target larger funders and awards** by focusing on multi-year funding and larger grants, building in multi-country approaches and leveraging our position and expertise as a regional organization that works from local levels to ASEAN, and in some cases, globally. While our portfolio is made up of many small grants, we aim to balance them with larger funding volumes to increase our impact.
- **Increase our grant-making infrastructure and capabilities** by mobilizing funding around direct grant-making and grant management to other organizations, researchers and local communities. There is a growing trend in directing finance to local actors on the ground, and RECOFTC is well positioned to build the financial facilities to achieve this.
- **Continue to take on selected and strategically aligned consultancies** and service provision assignments that advance our mission on a full cost recovery or profitable basis.
- **Build strategic partnerships with philanthropic foundations** and other mission-driven grant making organizations. We believe we have a lot to offer. We plan to deepen this work over the next five years, building on the foundation grants we have already received and deploying marketing and strategic communication to demonstrate our value proposition to new audiences.
- **Continue to improve our fundraising capacity** and experience both at our main office and in our country offices through training and triangulating around funders and opportunities, as well as regularly mapping and updating strategic partnerships and following global trends.







# Governance and operations

## Governance

RECOFTC's Board of Trustees oversees governance and strategic direction. Volunteer members from across the Asia-Pacific region bring perspectives and experiences from governments, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, and research and educational institutes. They also bring expertise in forestry, natural resources, environment and finance.

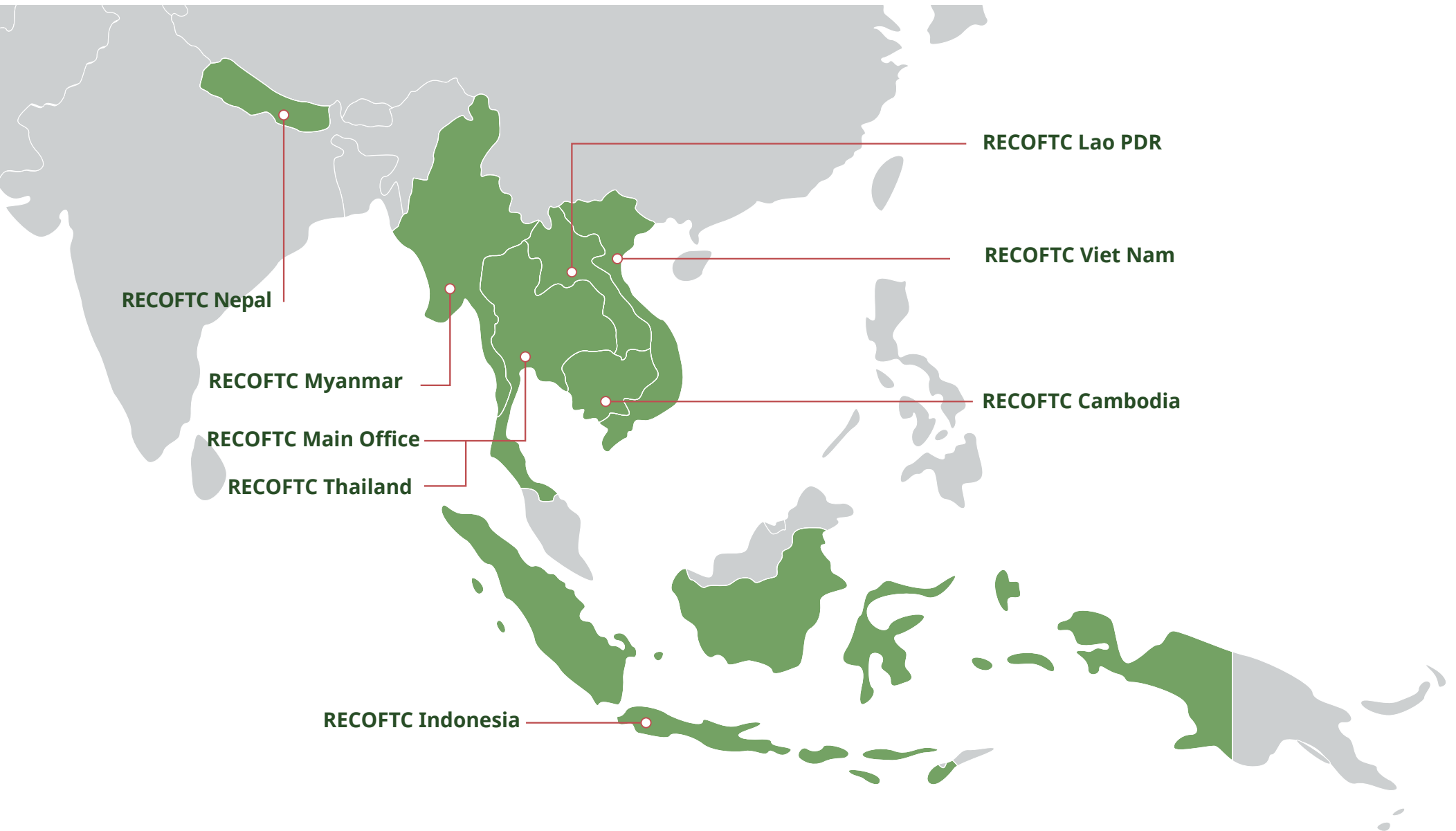
## Management and coordination

RECOFTC's regional office is home to four units:

- Executive Office leads development of RECOFTC's monitoring, evaluation and learning systems, donor relations, business partnerships, and program planning and development.
- Knowledge Management and Strategic Communication leads regional communication, supports national-level communication, and designs and administers knowledge management and information technology systems.
- Programme Coordination and Technical Services coordinates programs and projects, and oversees technical services delivered by country offices and through multi-country and regional approaches.
- Corporate Services manages human resources, finance and accounting, and office administration.

The Executive Office and the Executive Committee manage RECOFTC, with the Executive Director ultimately overseeing program coordination, technical and corporate support services.

# Where we are based







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 equality. We are the only non-profit organization of our kind in Asia and the Pacific. We have more than 35 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.



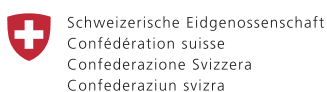
#### **RECOFTC**

P.O. Box 1111  
Kasetsart Post Office  
Bangkok 10903, Thailand  
T +66 (0)2 940 5700  
F +66 (0)2 561 4880  
info@recoftc.org



**recoftc.org**

#### **Our sponsors**



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