



Report

# Assessment of forest governance in six Asian countries



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# Acronyms and abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organization
EUDR	The EU Regulation on Deforestation-free Products
FLEGT	The European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent
HS Code	Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System for traded commodities and products
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and local communities
NGO	Non-governmental organization
REDD+	Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries
SMEs	Small or medium enterprises
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

# Executive summary

Good forest governance is essential to create an enabling environment for forest landscapes to be sustainably and equitably managed, and for the Indigenous Peoples and local communities to thrive in those landscapes. It is characterized by accountability, equity, participation and transparency, along with efficiency and effectiveness in the forest and forest-related sectors.

In recent years, growing recognition of the importance of forests to climate action and sustainable, equitable development has increased attention on improving forest governance. This focus is reflected in national commitments made under global agreements on climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development, as well as growing demands from international markets for sustainable forest products.

This report presents an assessment of stakeholder perceptions of forest governance, and how it has evolved, in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam in the period 2018-2023. The assessment builds upon a previous assessment of forest governance in the Greater Mekong Subregion that RECOFTC and partners conducted in 2017-2018. The main objective of the present assessment was to identify priorities for strengthening forest governance in the selected countries to achieve equitable, sustainable development.

The assessment was based on regional and national interviews and a semi-structured survey with a combined total of 170 respondents, as well as a review of recent literature relevant to forest governance in the target countries. In addition, a regional workshop was held to review the main findings and to propose action in response to the challenges and opportunities identified.

The assessment looked at forest governance through four overlapping lenses to understand the current state of forest governance and the main areas of evolution since 2018:

1. Institutional framework, 2. Rights, 3. Forest management, and 4. Forest-risk commodities.

Interview and survey respondents were generally positive about changes to forest governance over the previous five years. This was based on perceptions of stronger legal frameworks covering the multi-sectoral aspects of the governance of forest landscapes. Such views were particularly prominent in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam, where legal reforms took place over the past few years.

Respondents also felt that the ongoing development of community forestry<sup>1</sup> programs was helping to safeguard the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), address deforestation and degradation, increasingly meet subsistence needs and, to a certain extent, provide income. Across all six countries, respondents recognized that significant work still needs to be done – especially to ensure that stronger legal frameworks, for community forestry and beyond, lead to sustainable results.

The overall level of optimism is somewhat supported by the literature and secondary data – for instance, showing a declining rate of forest loss in the last five years. However, the

literature also highlights concerning trends including a shrinking of civic space, especially in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam, the possible stagnation of community forestry in Nepal, and a partial reversal of the decentralization of forest governance in Indonesia.

Respondents generally viewed the evolution of **institutional frameworks** positively. They said the legal foundations for determining the roles and responsibilities of government agencies, and for coordinating action among these agencies across scales and sectors, were improving. This was particularly the case for Cambodia, Viet Nam and, to a slightly lesser extent, Lao PDR.

Implementation and enforcement were the main challenges that respondents identified, particularly in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Thailand. Their concerns centred around capacity gaps (including access to technology), which are linked to limited financial resources. Respondents also acknowledged that it would take time for governments to fully mainstream recent legal reforms and integrate them into, for example, government reporting frameworks and systems.

Perspectives varied regarding the space and quality of participation in decision-making by different stakeholders. The general feeling was that it is improving, but that capacity gaps among government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs) and IPLCs need to be addressed. These include the ability of government officials to create and facilitate participatory processes, and gaps in technical knowledge for all stakeholder groups. A prominent concern from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Nepal and Viet Nam was that multi-stakeholder participation is sometimes seen as a donor requirement, which raises concerns about the long-term viability and integrity of both the participatory processes and their outcomes.

Questions on trends relating to **rights** in the forest sector also drew out many optimistic responses, with some caveats. Community forestry programs were seen to be developing well, as data somewhat confirms. Respondents said these programs indicated a strengthening of the rights of IPLCs. However, challenges persist. One issue is that laws tend to focus more on setting out what actions are prohibited rather than on recognizing the rights of IPLCs. For example, the opportunity to use timber commercially is still strongly restricted in Cambodia and Nepal.

An additional concern, as highlighted above, was that the drive to respect the rights of IPLCs is donor driven – so it has become a ‘box-ticking’ exercise and is not sustainable. A related concern is that the rights of IPLCs are often seen to be subordinate to national targets for economic development. There were also mixed perspectives on the duty of governments regarding processes for obtaining the consent of IPLCs for projects that will affect them – often the aim is consultation, or even just awareness-raising, with no consideration of consent.

When considering **forest management**, respondents generally concluded that legal foundations are improving, particularly in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. There were, however, concerns about weak implementation and enforcement undermining sustainable forest management. There was a sense that there are rarely adequate financial incentives, and therefore resources, to protect forests and ensure they are sustainably managed. A common outcome is forest degradation and ultimately loss, even though overall rates of



loss have fallen in recent years. The financial returns from forest management were also raised as a limitation for rights holders such as IPLCs – the legal foundations and incentives are still not strong enough to encourage local communities to invest in their forests.

Regarding **forest-risk commodities**, there were perceptions of significant short- and long-term negative social and environmental impacts related to both production and trade. There was a feeling that despite improvements in the legal foundations for ensuring sustainable and legal production of forest-risk commodities, this was mostly in relation to the timber sector. Other challenges that respondents mentioned included the limited capacity of government agencies to monitor and ensure adherence to national laws and international market requirements, such as those linked to the European Union's Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR).

Respondents highlighted the need for governments to develop holistic monitoring systems, including using remote sensing to monitor forest loss due to the expansion of agriculture. There are fears that producers under pressure to ensure sustainability will instead shift to less demanding markets, emphasizing the need for governments in producer and consumer countries to work together. There are also concerns that smallholders will be unable to meet the increasing requirements of market regulations such as the EUDR or will be asked to bear a large part of the costs of compliance. Finally, there was recognition that the countries assessed here need to address their own foreign deforestation footprints, as many of them import large amounts of forest-risk commodities.

Throughout the assessment, respondents suggested priority activities to strengthen forest governance in the next five years. These form the basis for recommendations presented in this report.

# Introduction

Forests occupy roughly a quarter of land in the Asia-Pacific region (FAO 2020). They are important carbon sinks and habitats for biodiversity, and they ensure the well-being of millions of forest-dependent people, including Indigenous Peoples (Table 1). However, the region's forests face many threats and continue to suffer from loss and degradation.

This forest governance assessment covers six countries in Asia: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam (see section 1.2). In recent years, each of these countries has developed legal reforms affecting their forest sectors. Most have also been increasing uptake of various models of community forestry. Some have been negotiating or implementing Voluntary Partnership Agreements with the European Union to address illegal logging and associated trade. In 2022, they all took on new commitments to protect and restore species and ecosystems under the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework. And, as parties to the Paris Agreement on climate change, they all have committed to periodically update their Nationally Determined Contributions towards global action to mitigate climate change, although the extent to which they are using their forest and land sectors to do this varies greatly.

Together, the six countries lost over 9.3 million hectares of forest cover between 2010 and 2020 (FAO 2020). This equates to half of the land area of Cambodia. In addition, according to the Forest Declaration Assessment Partners (2023), Southeast Asia has four of the top seven countries in the world in terms of the largest absolute area of deforestation – Indonesia (position 2), Lao PDR (5), Malaysia (6) and Myanmar (7).

Good governance is crucial to ensuring that forests are managed sustainably and equitably. Weak forest governance, by contrast, is among the main underlying causes of deforestation (Yasmi et al. 2017). This makes it important to understand where governance is improving, where it is being challenged and what solutions could address existing gaps.

**Table 1.** Data illustrating the importance of forests in selected countries in the Asia-Pacific region\*

	Forest cover (2020)		Target forest area	Carbon stock in forest biomass (2020) (tonnes/ha)	Indigenous population	Key Biodiversity Areas (forest habitat)	World Bank country classification
	Area (million ha)	% of land area					
<b>Cambodia</b>	8.1	45.7	60% by 2050	50.8	170–400,000	27	Lower middle income
<b>Indonesia</b>	92.1	49.1	No data	104.3	50–70 million	335	Upper middle income
<b>Lao PDR</b>	16.6	71.9	70% by 2030	68.5	3,500,000 (ethnic peoples)	24	Lower middle income
<b>Nepal</b>	6.0	41.6	45% by 2030	107.9	9,540,000	24	Lower middle income
<b>Thailand</b>	19.9	38.9	40% by 2036	83.1	5,000,000	63	Upper middle income
<b>Viet Nam</b>	14.6	47.2	43% by 2030	37.3	14,100,000 (ethnic peoples)	75	Lower middle income

\* Forest cover and forest biomass carbon stock data are from FAO (2020). Populations of Indigenous Peoples are from IWGIA (2023). Key biodiversity areas data are from keybiodiversityareas.org. Country classifications by income level are from the World Bank (2022). Note: The United Nations classifies Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal as least developed countries.

## Defining forest governance

Forest governance is defined as “the way in which public and private actors, including formal and informal institutions, smallholder and indigenous organizations, small, medium-sized and large enterprises, civil society organizations and other stakeholders negotiate, make and enforce binding decisions about the management, use and conservation of forest resources” (FAO 2018). This includes how decisions are made and actions are taken to allocate and secure access to forests, as well as rights and benefits over them, through planning, implementation, enforcement and monitoring.

### Important aspects of good forest governance (adapted from FAO 2012) include:

1. Coherent, comprehensive and enabling laws and regulations, in the forest sector and other sectors that affect forest management
2. Coherent and effective implementation and enforcement of these laws, regulations and rules

3. Clear and participatory decision-making processes regarding rules, laws and regulations, at national and subnational levels
4. Clear mandates of, and arrangements among, different stakeholders including various units and levels of the government, civil society organizations, community organizations, the business sector and so on
5. Staff capable of executing tasks assigned to them, and sufficient financial resources to enable them to do so

Good forest governance helps countries optimize the production of forest products and services, enhance the rights and livelihoods of those living in and around forests, and control and reduce deforestation and forest degradation. The benefits extend beyond forests and their landscapes, contributing to several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals linked to climate, economic benefits and social equity.<sup>2</sup>

Strengthening forest governance is at the heart of international initiatives such as VPAs on timber trade under the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, and the UN-led initiative on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). It is also a key aspect of the European Union's Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR), which entered into force in June 2023.<sup>3</sup> These initiatives recognize the importance of good governance in the management of forests as it provides for accountability, equity, participation and transparency, resulting in effective oversight, respect for rights and equitable benefit-sharing.

## Assessing forest governance

In 2017-2018, RECOFTC worked with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and partners<sup>4</sup> to assess forest governance in the countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam (RECOFTC 2018a).<sup>5</sup> The aim of that work (hereafter 'the 2018 Assessment') was to understand the challenges and opportunities for strengthening forest governance, particularly in the timber sector in the context of FLEGT VPAs.<sup>6</sup> It used WWF's Enabling Environment Assessment Tool, which was based on the Forest Assessment and Monitoring Framework for Good Governance (FAO and PROFOR 2011).

The 2018 Assessment considered three pillars of governance:

1. The policy, legal and institutional framework
2. Planning and decision-making processes
3. Implementation, enforcement and compliance

The assessment was conducted using workshops at regional, national and landscape levels. More than 750 individuals took part, providing ratings for 152 indicators to show where the challenges and opportunities for forest governance lay.<sup>7</sup> Box 1 below summarizes the findings and recommendations from this assessment.

In 2023, RECOFTC conducted a new assessment that built on the previous one. It covered four of the countries in the 2018 Assessment — Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and

Viet Nam — but could not include Myanmar as the political situation there prevented this. It also assessed forest governance in Indonesia and Nepal, both of which are among RECOFTC's focus countries and were not in the scope of the previous assessment.

The main objective of the 2023 Assessment was to identify priorities for strengthening forest governance in the six countries, as a way of contributing to sustainable, equitable development and ensuring that Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including smallholders and practitioners of community forestry, can thrive in forest landscapes. Specifically, RECOFTC set out to obtain and share an updated understanding of the state of forest governance in the selected countries to:

- Inform policy-makers, civil society organizations, donors and other stakeholders of the progress and gaps relevant to national biodiversity, development and climate targets
- Engage stakeholders in bilateral and multi-stakeholder discussions on the state of forest governance and keep this issue on the political agenda



## Box 1. Main findings and recommendations from the 2018 Assessment

The 2018 Assessment found that legal foundations for forest governance were improving in most of the countries. Examples included Viet Nam's replacement of the Forest Protection and Development Law (2004) with the revised Forestry Law. In Lao PDR, the Forest Strategy 2020 was seen to be fostering interministerial coordination and collaboration to address inconsistencies in the legal framework. However, there were notable concerns about systematic failures in implementation, enforcement and compliance (RECOFTC 2018a; Gritten et al. 2019). These problems were linked to:

- Limited coordination across government agencies due to contradictions in legal frameworks regarding roles and responsibilities for achieving objectives linked to conservation, rights of IPLCs and economic development. Competition among agencies for limited resources compounded this problem.
- Limited multi-stakeholder participation due to top-down decision-making processes, as highlighted in Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam.
- Capacity gaps in government agencies due to a lack of resources and systems to monitor and enforce laws. A key issue facing state and non-state actors was limited access to information at the landscape, national and regional levels. This was felt to be contributing to illegal forest activities, ill-informed decision-making and limited monitoring of forest management.
- Lack of public awareness of threats to the region's forests and limited consideration by consumers of the sources of the forest products they consume.

### Positives were also highlighted, including:

- Increased participation by non-state actors in policy and decision-making, partly

facilitated by VPA and REDD+ processes in some countries. However, there were concerns about the capacities of civil society organizations to seize these opportunities because, for example, of the technical nature of these programs.

- Ambitious community forestry programs across the region were seen to be helping to address the lack of tenure rights of IPLCs, and to facilitate multi-stakeholder participation. The assessment also found that these programs face challenges in delivering sustainable outcomes.

### Recommendations:

1. Development of forest governance monitoring systems, by state and non-state actors working in collaboration, to address poor access to information at the landscape, national and regional levels. This would help to address illegal forest activities, support informed decision-making and improve monitoring of forest management practices.
2. Capacity development programs for non-state actors, recognizing that civil society organizations and media, in particular, are key to ensuring good governance. The capacity development program proposed included technical knowledge such as measuring forest carbon, as well as process-oriented skills such as facilitating participation.
3. Action to inform decision-making by consumers of forest products in the region, and to increase awareness of the need to address climate change and support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

# Methodology

This assessment used the same three pillars as the 2018 Assessment (Table 2) but had a broader scope, looking beyond timber production and trade. It used four cross-cutting lenses to explore perspectives on forest governance in the focus countries (Table 2). The present assessment used a more streamlined framework, using 54 indicators to assess forest governance (see Annex 1).

**Table 2.** The three pillars and four cross-cutting lenses, with key criteria, provided the basis for the 2023 assessment.

Cross-cutting lenses	Pillar 1 - Policy, legal and institutional framework	Pillar 2 - Participation in decision-making	Pillar 3 - Monitoring and implementation
<b>Institutional framework</b>	Government regulations clearly set out the roles, responsibilities and coordination between government agencies concerning the sustainable and equitable management of forest landscapes.	Government agencies have the mandate and capacity to effectively engage with stakeholders in policy development. They facilitate participation by providing platforms/space for multi-stakeholder engagement and information-sharing with stakeholders in an appropriate (culturally, socially and contextually) and timely manner.	Government agencies effectively implement and monitor relevant regulations.
<b>Rights</b>	Regulations clearly recognize the rights of IPLCs, including land and forest tenure.	IPLCs and CSOs can participate in policymaking and decision-making processes.	Government agencies recognize the rights of IPLCs and monitor that these rights are respected.
<b>Forest management</b>	Regulations clearly prescribe the equitable and sustainable management of forests.	Rights holders (IPLCs, private companies and state organizations) manage and benefit from their forests in a sustainable way.	Government agencies and CSOs monitor that rights holders (IPLCs, private companies and state organizations) manage their forest in a sustainable manner.
<b>Forest-risk commodities</b>	Regulations clearly outline the legality and sustainability requirements for the production and trade of forest-risk commodities.	Supply chain actors (for example, smallholders, private companies, SMEs, traders) can equitably benefit from the production and trade of forest-risk commodities and mitigate the social and environmental risks from that production and trade.	The production and trade of forest-risk commodities are monitored to ensure legality and sustainability, with failures reported and addressed appropriately.

Six common principles of good governance also guided the assessment during interviews with respondents and data collection:

- **Accountability:** people and institutions should be accountable for their actions
- **Effectiveness:** the mechanisms of governance should achieve the ends they are intended to achieve
- **Efficiency:** governance should work with a minimum of waste
- **Fairness/equity:** the benefits and burdens of the forest resource should fall in a way generally viewed as just
- **Participation:** all interested people should have an opportunity to be heard or to influence government decisions that affect the forest
- **Transparency:** information about the forest and how it is governed should be reasonably available to all.

## Interviews and surveys

A total of 170 people from different stakeholder groups were interviewed or completed an online survey (Table 3). The criteria for identifying these individuals included expertise and experience in forest governance in one or more of the focus countries and/or regions. We strove to ensure a diversity of stakeholder groups, gender and expertise across different sectors.

The interview and survey each had 16 questions (see Annex 1). Most questions had two parts, with the respondents first providing a rating on a statement and then being asked to explain their answer. The rating used a scale of 1-5, with 1 denoting strong disagreement and 5 being strong agreement.

A total of 106 people were interviewed between 1 June to 25 August 2023. The interviews were semi-structured, took place online or in person, and typically lasted around one hour. Most were held in the interviewee's national language.

A survey was developed and shared online to access experts who were not considered or were unavailable for the interviews. RECOFTC shared the survey through its newsletter, social media channels and targeted emails. In total, 64 individuals completed the survey between 20 July and 18 August 2023.

Limitations to the data include the under-representation of certain stakeholder groups in some countries, such as the government in Viet Nam and the private sector in Cambodia and Nepal. Some respondents did not answer all the questions, for reasons including the loss of internet connection, the interview running over the allotted time, or the respondent feeling unable to answer. Time and staffing constraints limited the number of participants for each country. We, therefore, consider this to be a 'rapid assessment'. Quantitative data from different stakeholder groups in each country are presented as combined findings.

**Table 3.** Summary of the interview and survey respondents\*

	Cambodia	Indonesia	Lao PDR	Nepal	Thailand	Viet Nam	Regional	Total	%
<b>Group*</b>									
<b>Academic</b>	4	11	3	5	3	6	0	32	18.8
<b>Government</b>	4	3	3	7	4	1	0	22	12.9
<b>International organization</b>	1	0	0	0	1	0	6	8	4.7
<b>International NGO</b>	4	5	4	3	2	10	7	35	20.6
<b>National NGO</b>	9	5	4	10	6	6	0	40	23.5
<b>Private sector</b>	1	3	3	1	6	3	1	18	10.6
<b>Other</b>	3	2	4	1	3	2	0	15	8.8
<b>Gender</b>									
<b>Female</b>	3	9	9	7	9	10	5	52	30.6
<b>Male</b>	21	17	12	18	14	17	9	108	63.5
<b>Did not say</b>	2	3	0	2	2	1	0	10	5.9
<b>Total</b>	26	29	21	27	25	28	14	170	

\*'Others' was comprised mainly of consultants and representatives of donor organizations. One interview of private sector stakeholders from Lao PDR had two participants — their responses were treated as being from one individual.

## Literature review

RECOFTC reviewed 351 documents including academic, legal and grey literature to gain further insights into changes in forest governance since 2018 (Table 4). This enabled us to better understand the context of interview and survey responses and identify key challenges and opportunities in each country and at regional (Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific) levels. We identified documents using the Google search engine, Google Scholar and online databases such as FAOLEX. Some of the respondents also shared literature with us.

**Table 4.** Document types included in the literature review

Document type	Number
Academic articles	126
National government reports	13
National government strategies and/or plans	19
Indices	33
Intergovernmental organization reports	33
Overseas government reports	8
Non-governmental/civil society organization reports	65
Laws and regulations	40
Others (such as news articles)	14
Total	351

## Results-sharing workshop

RECOFTC held a regional workshop in Bangkok, Thailand on 28–29 November 2023 to seek feedback from experts on the assessment’s preliminary findings, particularly in relation to identified gaps, challenges and opportunities to improve forest governance. The workshop was also designed to:

- Determine priorities for promoting more responsible and equitable use of forests and related investments
- Propose clear recommendations of actions that can address governance gaps and challenges at the regional and country levels over the next five years
- Identify opportunities for collaboration and synergies in ongoing and future initiatives, related to forest governance and forest-risk commodities

In total, 34 experts from governments, the private sector, civil society and academia who are working at national and regional levels in Southeast Asia attended the workshop.

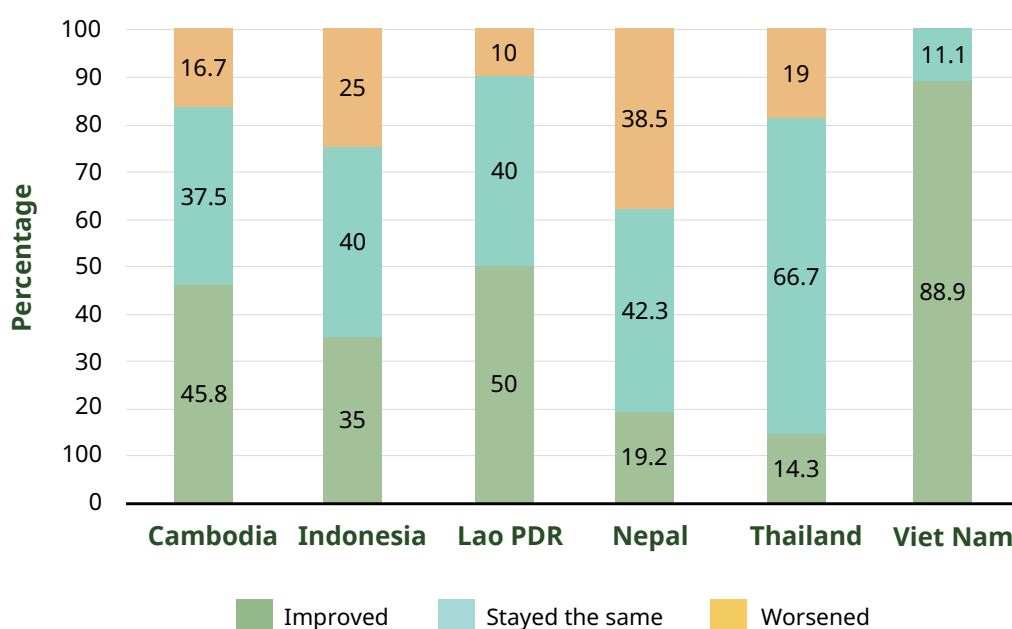


# Findings

## Trends in forest governance since 2018

Many of the findings of the 2018 Assessment remain relevant today. Overall, survey respondents and interviewees (hereafter 'respondents') had mixed views about whether forest governance had improved, stayed the same or worsened since 2018 in their countries (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Proportions of respondents saying that forest governance had improved, stayed the same or worsened.



Respondents were most positive in Viet Nam, largely due to perceived improvements in the legal framework and progress with the VPA signed with the EU. Those in Nepal were the most negative. They highlighted challenges facing community forest user groups, contradictions in the legal framework and overlapping roles and responsibilities of government agencies.

Perceptions also varied among stakeholder groups. Academics were the most positive, with 59 percent saying the situation had improved in their country. They were followed by representatives of the private sector (50 percent), government (45 percent) and international stakeholder groups (42 percent). Respondents from national NGOs were the least positive. Only 27 percent said forest governance had improved and 30 percent said it had worsened.

The main areas of progress since 2018 that respondents mentioned were: declining rates of deforestation; improving legal foundations; and ongoing development of national community forestry programs. The following sections explore each of these areas in more detail.

## Decreasing rates of deforestation

Some respondents referred to decreasing rates of deforestation, illegal logging or forest fires as indicators of improving governance. For example, a respondent in Cambodia felt that improving forest governance had resulted in reduced illegalities, including illegal logging. While in Indonesia, some respondents said that improved governance was reflected in the falling number of forest fires and reduced deforestation in general. The idea that forest loss is an indicator of governance is reflected in the literature and was also highlighted in the 2018 Assessment.

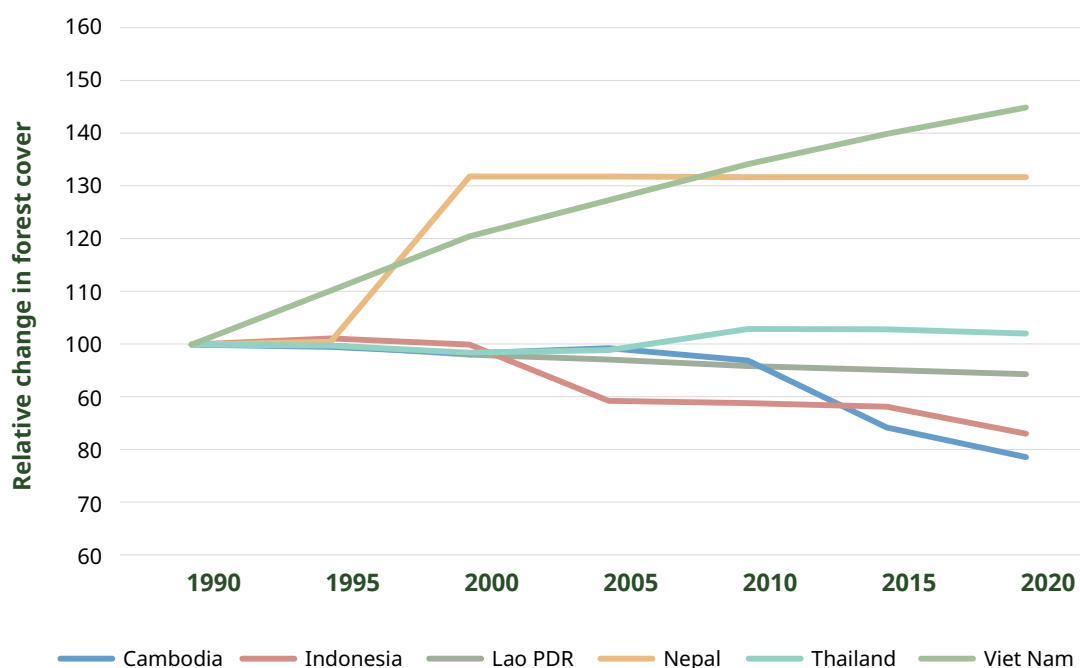
Data on deforestation supports the respondents' perceptions. For example, rates of forest loss in Cambodia and Indonesia were lower in the period 2015-2020 than in the preceding five years (Table 5; Figure 2). Forest areas in Lao PDR, Nepal and Thailand remained roughly the same between 2015 and 2020, while the forest cover in Viet Nam increased by 4.1 percent, though the country continues to lose its natural forests (FAO 2020). Despite the progress made, many respondents mentioned the need to be vigilant of continued pressure on forests.

**Table 5.** Changes to forest area according to FAO (2020)

	Forest area (millions of hectares)*				
	1990	2000	2010	2015	2020
<b>Cambodia</b>	11.0	10.8	10.6	8.8	8.1
<b>Indonesia</b>	118.5	101.3	99.7	95	92.1
<b>Lao PDR</b>	17.8	17.4	16.9	16.8	16.6
<b>Nepal</b>	4.3	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
<b>Thailand</b>	19.4	19	20.1	20.1	19.9
<b>Viet Nam</b>	9.4	11.8	13.4	14.1	14.6

\*Data rounded to the nearest 100,000. The FAO (2020) data is largely based on official government statistics, which may include satellite monitoring and field data. Data for some years are extrapolated from data collected in the preceding and subsequent years. FAO's forest area data includes rubber plantations, which the Royal Forest Department of Thailand does not classify as forest.

**Figure 2.** Relative changes in forest area in assessment countries between 1990 and 2020. All 1990 forest areas in Table 5 are shown standardized to 100.



## Improving legal foundations

Respondents indicated that the legal frameworks covering the multi-sectoral aspects of forest landscape governance are stronger across the countries in this assessment but to varying degrees. There is, however, significant work to be done – particularly to ensure that stronger legal frameworks lead to sustainable results on the ground.

Respondents highlighted improving legislative foundations, particularly in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam (Table 6). Many noted the recent introduction of primary and secondary legislation. This was not restricted to the forestry, land and natural resources sectors, but included wider reforms relating to democracy, economic development and decentralization, which all impact the forest and land sectors.

Some respondents mentioned strengthening of statutory rights of IPLCs, as well as governmental measures to improve environmental protection, such as an increased number of protected areas in Cambodia – though respondents pointed out this may have adverse impacts on IPLCs living in and around these areas if the right safeguards are not in place. Respondents also noted positive impacts of Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam developing and implementing FLEGT VPAs over the past five years, including improvements in laws relating to the timber chain of custody and space for CSOs to engage in forest governance discussions.

Many interviewees from countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion felt that the improved legal foundations were helping to address fundamental challenges to forest governance – including through increased multi-stakeholder participation. Some respondents from these countries also highlighted the work of non-state actors in supporting policy reform and oversight. Opportunities for non-state actors, particularly CSOs, to play these roles are often

linked to external initiatives, such as funding and support through REDD+ (Cambodia) and FLEGT VPA processes (Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam) rather than being embedded in a government's systematic approach to participatory processes. The 2018 Assessment also noted this, with many respondents hoping that these foundations could be built on in future years.

Some respondents from each country also raised concerns that legislative developments could have a negative impact on communities or the environment. An example is the 2020 Job Creation Law of Indonesia (also known as the Omnibus Law), which sets out to improve the "ease of doing business" and attract investment. In Nepal, most of the focus was on contradictions in the legal framework, including regarding the roles and responsibilities of government agencies, and how this constrains the implementation of laws (Table 6).

Another challenge, in all countries, is that many older laws need to be updated to address inconsistencies and to reflect modern developments such as VPAs, REDD+, Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement on climate change, and commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

**Table 6.** Perceived impacts (based on interviews, surveys and literature) of recent legal reforms in each country. Impacts are coded as positive (+), negative (-) or mixed (±).

Cambodia		
Environment and Natural Resources Code (2023)	+	Likely improve multi-sectoral coordination
	±	Potential to strengthen the overall legal framework for forest landscape governance, including addressing transboundary impacts of large-scale projects, if resources and capacities for implementation are sufficient (ODC 2023).
	±	Mixed views on if and how it addresses inconsistency in previous regulations, including that it conflicts with aspects of Forest Law (2002), and Protected Areas Law (2008)
	±	Mixed views on inputs of non-state actors in Code's development

Indonesia		
Signing of the FLEGT VPA 2011 and issuance of FLEGT licences in 2016	+	Has facilitated multi-stakeholder participation and oversight (Neupane et al. 2019).
	+	Provides good foundations for addressing deforestation and meeting international commitments – including through increased transparency, such as improved timber chain of custody and enhanced capacity of stakeholders to support forest governance (Neupane et al. 2019).
	+	Helped to clarify roles and responsibilities among government agencies and created a mechanism for coordination.
Job Creation Law (2020) and associated regulations in the environment and forestry sectors such as Regulation 22 (2021) on the Implementation of Environmental Protection and Management and Regulation 23 (2021) on the Implementation of Forestry	±	Helps address barriers to investment, for example, by simplifying environmental impact assessment requirements (Hadi et al. 2023), including in community-based enterprises.
	±	The law could increase recognition of the rights and territories of Indigenous Peoples if they are able to participate in the decision-making process, but there are concerns about a lowering of environmental standards and the ability of communities to challenge business practices.
	-	Reduces environmental protection (Berenschot and Dhiaulhaq 2023; Hadi et al. 2023). For example, a project covered by a detailed spatial plan requires no environmental and social impact assessment.
	-	The Law was not developed in a participatory manner. Indigenous Peoples in particular had limited opportunities to provide meaningful input.
	-	Reverses decentralization of power and decision-making (Ramadhan et al. 2022).



Lao PDR		
Land Law (2019)	+	Increased statutory recognition of customary tenure but work is still needed, including on land titling and the tenure formalization process (Hackman et al. 2022; MRLG and LIWG 2021).
	+	Together with Forestry Law, strengthens the legal protection of natural forests (UN 2020).
	+	Provides clarity on government agencies' roles and responsibilities in relation to land-use management (UN 2020).
FLEGT VPA (negotiations with EU began in 2015)	+	Facilitated increased participation by CSOs in policymaking and other areas of governance (Fern 2019).
Prime Minister's Order 15 (2016)	+	Effective in reducing illegal logging (Forest Trends 2021b).
	+	Helps clarify roles and responsibilities of agencies.
	-	Created barriers for community-based wood enterprises (RECOFTC 2020b).
Forestry Law (2019)	+	Provided for meaningful participation in forest management by local communities.
	-	No reference to the customary use of wood and non-wood products (Hackman et al. 2022).

Nepal		
Local Government Operation Act (2017)	+	Provides an opportunity for local governments to formulate forest and environment-related plans and policies, as well as collaborate with forest users' groups at the local level to create economic opportunities for poor and marginalized communities.
	-	Contradictions between the Local Government Operations Act and Forest Act, and with the National Constitution. The Local Government Operations Act gives increased power to local government over natural resource management, but the Forest Act centralizes control over forest resources (Shrestha 2020).
Forest Act (2019)	+	Private forests can now be registered at the local level with the recommendation of the Division Forest Office or Subdivision Forest Office.
	+	Provides legislative framework for the operation of ecotourism activities for economic opportunities by forest user groups within the area of the community forest, buffer zones or conservation areas, based on the approved management plans.
	-	Fails to support livelihood development for most marginalized members of community forest user groups (Gautam et al. 2023).
Forest Regulation (2022)	+	Encouraged private forest owners to practice agroforestry and cultivate medicinal plants in their private land. Private forests can sell timber, medicinal plants and non-timber species (listed in Annex 48) like other agricultural crops. The species that private forests or private tree growers can sell are mostly softwood species (Bhatta et al. 2022).
	-	Limits market opportunities for community forest user groups to sell their timber (Joshi 2022).

Thailand		
FLEGT VPA (negotiations with EU began in 2013)	+	Has helped increase transparency and participation by key stakeholders (Lewis and Bulkan 2022) – with more than 50 organizations including state and non-state actors involved in various working groups and committees (TEFSO 2022)
Community Forest Act (2019)	+	Pioneering law in recognition of community forestry (RECOFTC 2021b)
	±	Allows communities to use and manage forests and forest resources but fails to consider those living in protected areas (RECOFTC 2021b)
	-	The process for getting tenure is cumbersome
	-	Does not allow for the commercialization of timber (Jenke and Pretzsch 2021), potentially discouraging investment and commitment to community forestry
	-	Is unclear about the issue of free, prior and informed consent for IPLCs
National Parks Act (2019)	+	Clarifies the rights of communities residing within national parks to access and use forest resources, while outlining how park authorities should accommodate such resource use
	-	Some ambiguity in how the rights of IPLCs will be recognized by the protected areas authorities
Kor Thor Chor (land allocation scheme) was initiated in 2014 and enacted into law in 2019	+	Clear roles and responsibilities for different agencies to support the process, and has supported multi-agency collaboration
	-	The process for getting tenure is slow (Gritten and Khunrattanasiri 2023)

Viet Nam		
Forest Law (2017)	+	Helped to address deforestation and increased emphasis on forest restoration, protection and development
	+	Aligns with international commitments such as FLEGT VPA, net-zero commitment and REDD+
	+	Strengthened legal foundations for community forestry, including allocating 1 million hectares of forests for communities and 3 million hectares for households
FLEGT VPA (negotiations with the EU began in 2010; the VPA was signed in 2018)	+	Helped to address trade in illegal timber
	+	Facilitated increased multi-stakeholder participation in policy and decision-making (Thuy et al. 2021)
	+	Helped to strengthen forest governance, including with the timber legality definition and monitoring systems and the elaboration of national action plans to address the causes of illegal logging and trade
	-	Inconsistencies between Forest Law and Land Law on tenure and rights of local communities and with other relevant laws such as the Law on Tourism and Construction Law

## Sustained community forestry programs

Respondents noted the continued development of national community forestry programs as helping to address deforestation and protect the rights of IPLCs, particularly in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Thailand. The 2018 Assessment also highlighted this, with particular emphasis placed on these programs facilitating multi-stakeholder participation at subnational levels.

As Table 7 shows, there has indeed been significant growth since 2018 in the spatial extent of community forests and the numbers of participating households and community forest user groups in Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand. In Nepal and Viet Nam, the number of user groups and area of community forests have changed little.

Some respondents, particularly from Indonesia and Viet Nam, also noted progress in the increased livelihood opportunities that communities with tenure are getting from their forests. However, they emphasized that much work is still needed in this area. Respondents in other countries said that tenure through community forestry programs is providing limited opportunities for communities to generate income.

Respondents from Nepal felt that progress with community forestry had somewhat stalled, particularly in relation to commercialization and livelihood development. However, they recognized the continued positive impacts of the country's community forestry program, including improvements in the internal governance and capacities of communities. Another concern for Nepal was the limited rights of IPLCs outside of community forestry.

**Table 7.** Extent of community forestry in 2022 by number of user groups, area and number of participating households, and percentage change for each measure between 2018 and 2022.<sup>a</sup>

	2022			% change 2018–2022		
	Number of community forest user groups	Area (ha)	Number of households	Number of community forest user groups	Area	Number of households
<b>Cambodia</b>	487	493,276	123,216	+13.8	+22.5	+20.7
<b>Indonesia</b>	7,694	5,087,754	1,127,815	+48.8	+129.2	+114.8
<b>Lao PDR</b>	1,366	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
<b>Nepal</b>	22,519	2,312,549	2,919,227	+1.1	+3.4	+0.4
<b>Thailand</b>	13,028	1,007,315	1,302,800	-2.7	-4.5	-2.7
<b>Viet Nam</b>	11,690	997,696	no data	-0.5	-13.7	no data

<sup>a</sup> Data provided by RECOFTC country offices

### Some general governance issues remain

Respondents also alluded to general issues related to weak governance in their countries, including corruption and civil society freedoms, as highlighted in all countries in the 2018 Assessment. Some respondents felt that unspoken and unaddressed corruption is still pervasive, affecting all the assessment’s focus countries and undermining all aspects of forest management – from the development of laws to implementation, enforcement and monitoring. Respondents mentioned that arrests and appropriate punishment of corrupt high-level officials are still rare and often hidden behind opaque processes.

This is reflected in indices calculated by Transparency International (2023) to measure corruption, by Freedom House (2023) to measure freedom and by the World Bank (2023a) to measure six aspects of governance (see Table 8 and Figure 3). These indices show that the countries we assessed are struggling with general issues of governance.

Since 2018, however, there has been some progress on corruption in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Nepal and Viet Nam, and on freedoms in Lao PDR and Nepal (Table 8). Despite this, when the World Bank’s indicators are averaged, all countries in this assessment other than Indonesia rank in the bottom half of the world’s countries — and Indonesia is only just in the top half. In Transparency International’s index, only Viet Nam is in the top half. Section 3.2. considers issues linked to these indices in more depth.

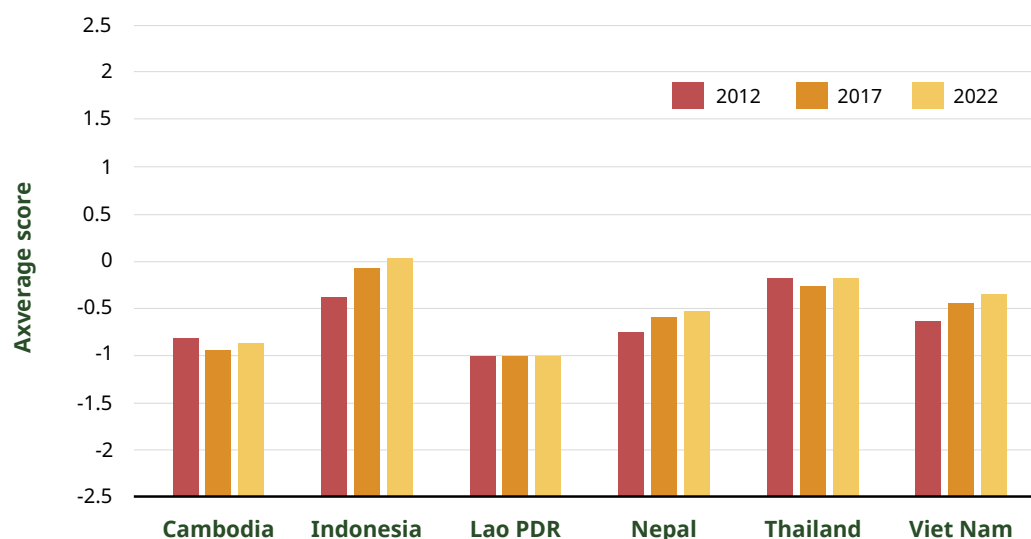


**Table 8.** Governance indicators for the six countries in this assessment<sup>a</sup>

	Corruption Perception Index (out of 100)			Freedom in the World Index		
	2013 (rank / 178)	2018 (rank / 180)	2023 (rank / 180)	2013	2018	2023
<b>Cambodia</b>	20 (160)	20 (161)	22 (158)	29 (Not free)	30 (Not free)	24 (Not free)
<b>Indonesia</b>	32 (114)	38 (89)	34 (115)	65 (Free)	64 (Partly free)	58 (Partly free)
<b>Lao PDR</b>	26 (140)	29 (132)	28 (136)	11 (Not free)	12 (Not free)	13 (Not free)
<b>Nepal</b>	31 (116)	31 (124)	35 (108)	47 (Partly free)	55 (Partly free)	58 (Partly free)
<b>Thailand</b>	34 (102)	36 (99)	35 (108)	53 (Partly free)	31 (Not free)	29 (Not free)
<b>Viet Nam</b>	31 (116)	33 (117)	41 (83)	19 (Not free)	20 (Not free)	19 (Not free)

<sup>a</sup> Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index ranges from 0 (most corrupt) to 100 (least corrupt). The scores are calculated from three data sources, and 13 surveys and assessments — see [www.transparency.org/en/news/how-cpi-scores-are-calculated](http://www.transparency.org/en/news/how-cpi-scores-are-calculated). Freedom House's Freedom in the World Index has three categories: Not free; Partly free; and Free. Each country's category is based on 10 indicators for political rights and 15 indicators for civil liberties — see [www.freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology](http://www.freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology)

**Figure 3.** Average scores of the assessment's focal countries across the World Bank's six worldwide Governance Indicators: 1. Voice and accountability; 2. Political stability and absence of violence; 3. Government effectiveness; 4. Regulatory quality; 5. Rule of law; and 6. Control of corruption. Each indicator is scored from -2.5 (bad governance) to +2.5 (good governance). See: <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Documents>



## Current state of forest governance

Respondents were asked to share their views on the current state of forest governance in their country by answering three questions relating to each of the four lenses through which the assessment looked at governance: institutional framework, rights, forest management, and forest-risk commodities. Figure 4 shows the average scores for each of these areas, on a scale of 1 to 5.

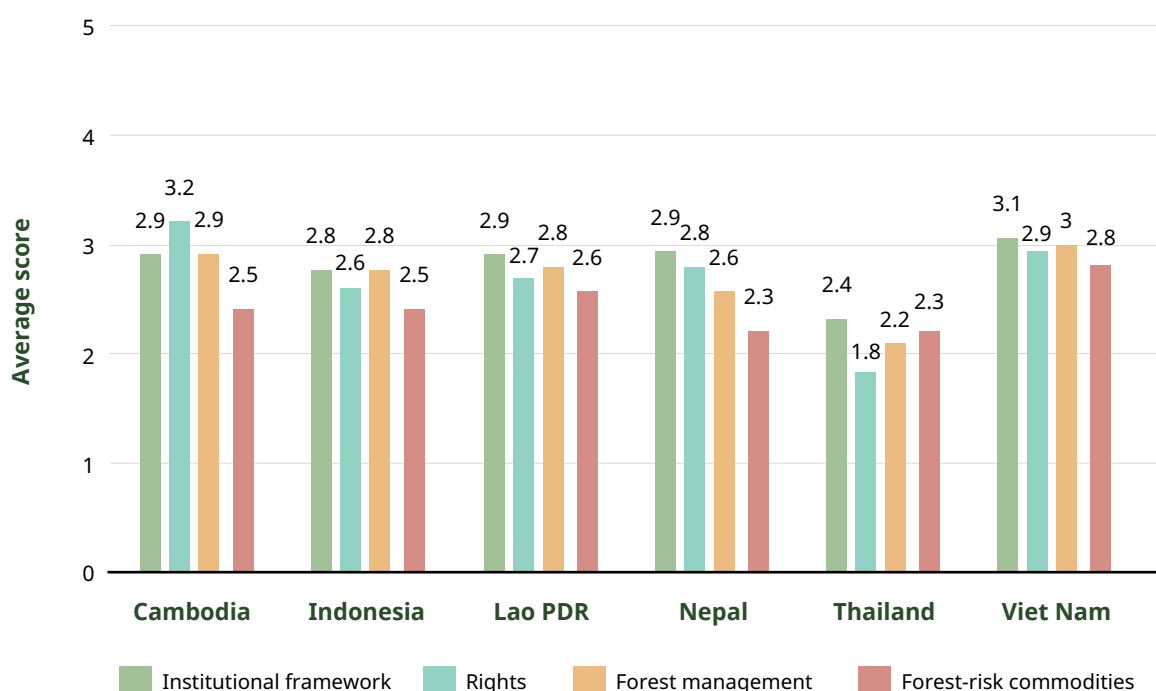
Respondents from Lao PDR, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam were slightly more positive towards the institutional framework than the other areas. Respondents from Cambodia looked most favourably towards rights, while those from Indonesia were most positive towards the institutional framework and forest management. The production and trade of forest-risk commodities were viewed least positively in all countries except Thailand. Overall, responses about Thailand were less positive than those for other countries. These responses are analysed in more detail in the country findings (Annex 3).

There was only minor variation among the average scores for each country. When scores for all countries were combined, the averages were 2.8 out of 5 for 'institutional framework', 2.7 for 'rights', 2.7 for 'forest management' and 2.5 for 'forest-risk commodities'.

Across all countries combined, the different stakeholder groups provided similar scores for each of the four lenses. Respondents from governments (3.0 out of five) and international NGOs (2.8) were the most positive, followed by academics (2.7) and the private sector (2.6). National NGOs (2.5) had the least positive perspectives.

The responses for each lens are presented in more detail below, along with findings from the literature review.

**Figure 4.** Average scores from respondents for each country in answers to questions about a) the institutional framework; b) rights; c) forest management; and d) forest-risk commodities. See Annex 1 for the questions.

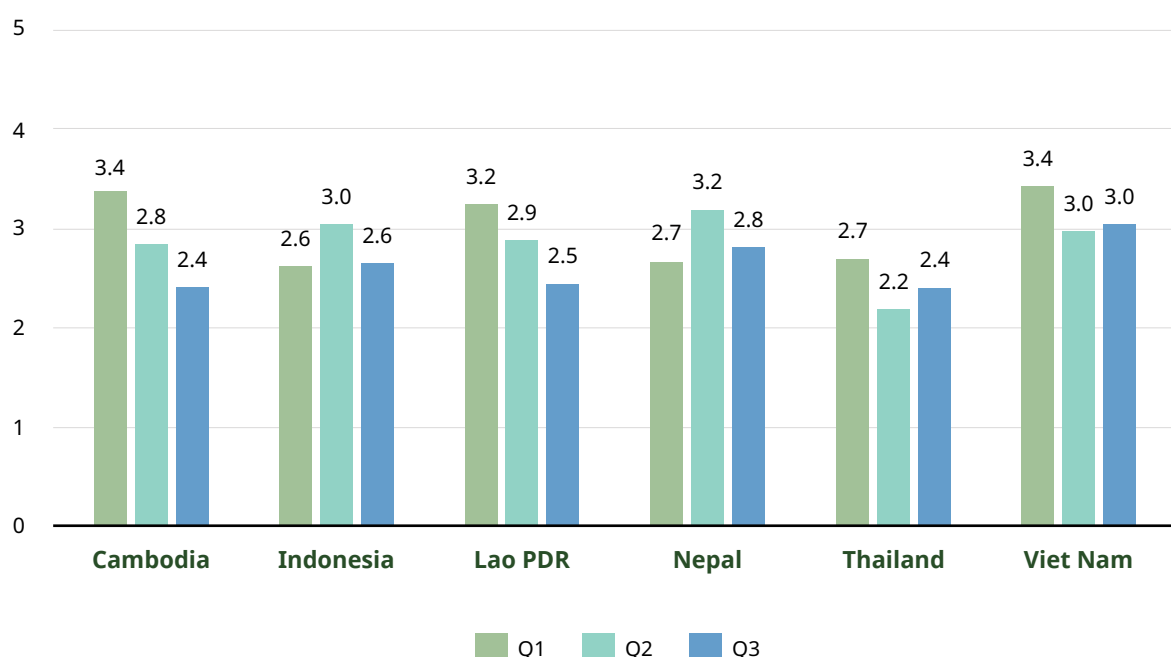


## Institutional framework

This lens examined the legal and institutional settings for government agencies working in forest-related sectors. This included: the legal framework determining roles and responsibilities of government agencies and coordination among them; the extent to which governments make space for and facilitate multi-stakeholder policymaking; and how governments implement and monitor regulations on the institutional framework (see Annex 1 for more information).

Figure 5 shows how respondents answered three questions about the institutional framework in the country where they work. Respondents for four countries – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – were more positive about the responsibilities of, and coordination among, government agencies than they were about stakeholder participation and implementation. Respondents from Indonesia and Nepal were most positive about the state’s efforts in facilitating multi-stakeholder participation. Across all countries, stakeholder groups did not differ greatly in their scoring. Government representatives (average: 3.1 out of 5) were the most positive, and the private sector and national NGOs (both with average ratings of 2.7) were the least.

**Figure 5.** Average scores for each country for answers (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being best) to questions about the institutional framework. Question 1: How well do laws set out the roles, responsibilities and coordination between government agencies working in forest-related sectors? Question 2: How well does the government make space for and facilitate stakeholder participation in policymaking processes? Question 3: How effective is the government in implementing forest-related regulations and in monitoring their implementation?



## Key findings were that:

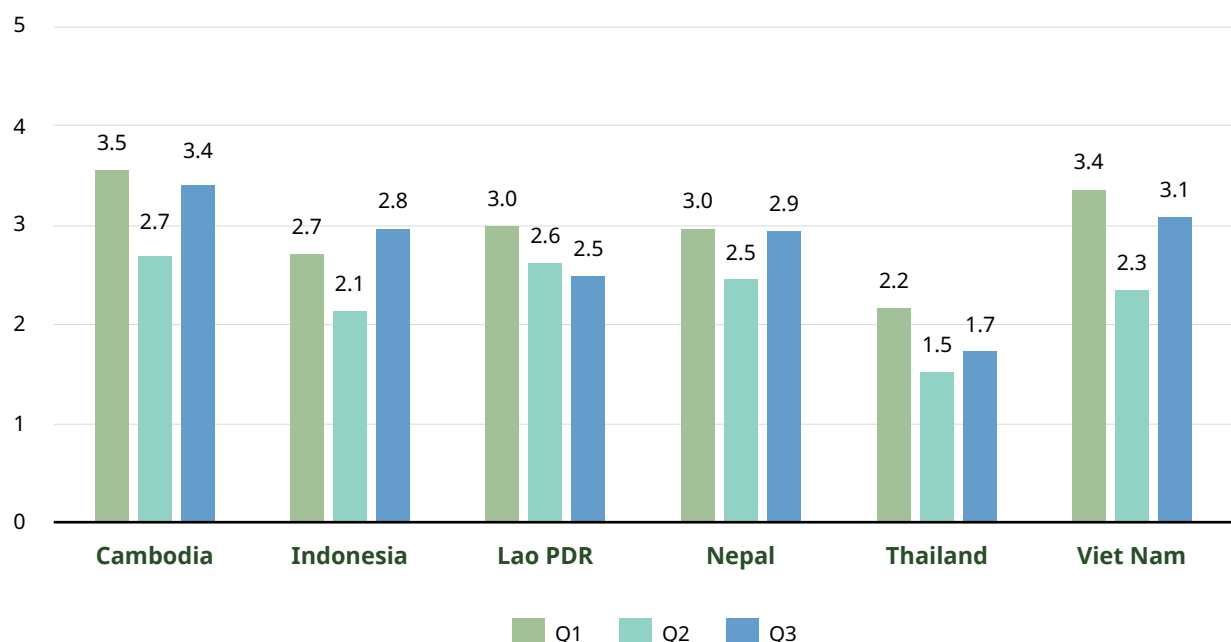
- The legal foundations for determining roles and responsibilities, as well as coordination between government agencies, across scales and sectors are improving. The main issue is implementation and enforcement – as the 2018 Assessment also found.
- The main challenges regarding implementation and enforcement centre around capacity gaps, including access to technology and limited resources, again as found by the 2018 Assessment. Respondents also recognized that the many legal reforms in recent years will need time to be fully mainstreamed and integrated into, for example, government reporting frameworks and systems.
- There were different perspectives about the amount and quality of multi-stakeholder participation. The general feeling was that participation is improving. However, government agencies, CSOs and IPLCs have many capacity gaps, such as in technical knowledge, that need to be addressed. This was also highlighted in the previous assessment.
- Multi-stakeholder participation is sometimes seen as being solely a requirement of donors – with numerous implications, including regarding the sustainability of both the processes and their outcomes.

## Rights

This lens looked at whether, and how, legislation recognizes human rights and forest and land tenure rights, especially those of IPLCs and marginalized groups, including women. It also assessed how IPLCs and CSOs contribute to decision-making and examined the effectiveness of government agencies in recognizing and safeguarding these rights (see Annex 1 for more information).

Figure 6 shows how respondents answered three questions relating to rights. In all countries except Indonesia, the legal basis for IPLC rights was viewed more positively than IPLC and CSO contributions to decision-making or government recognition and safeguarding of rights. In all countries except Lao PDR, respondents gave their lowest rating to the capacity and opportunities available for IPLCs and CSOs to contribute to decision-making. Across all countries, government representatives were the most positive respondents (average score: 3 out of 5), while respondents from national NGOs and the private sector were the least positive (average for each: 2.4).

**Figure 6.** Average scores for each country for answers (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being best) to questions about rights. Question 1: How well do laws recognize the rights of IPLCs, including marginalized groups such as women? Question 2: How well do IPLCs and CSOs contribute to decision-making processes (opportunity, capacity and effective engagement)? Question 3: How effectively does the government recognize and safeguard the rights of IPLCs?



### Key findings were that:

- Community forestry programs are developing in the assessment's focus countries, as well as in other ASEAN Member States. These programs illustrate a strengthening of some of the rights of IPLCs, though numerous challenges still need to be addressed, including concerns that:
  - Government officials in all ASEAN countries covered in this assessment focus more on economic development than on the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities
  - Respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is donor driven and has become a box-ticking exercise, so it is not sustainable
  - Laws are more focused on the prohibition of certain activities than the promotion of rights
- Most of the critical perspectives came from foreign NGOs while national organizations are less inclined to criticize
- Regional initiatives and institutions are seen to be supporting the tenure rights of IPLCs, in particular by ensuring that such rights are integrated into regional plans and guidance to the ASEAN Member States (see Box 2)

## Box 2. ASEAN mechanisms supporting tenure rights of IPLCs

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has formal bodies and mechanisms that support the rights of IPLCs in its Member States. For example, the ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry (AWG-SF) “provides specific policy recommendations on the effects of social forestry in enhancing sustainable forest management, to enhance welfare and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, forest dwellers and other forest-dependent communities”.<sup>a</sup>

The AWG-SF, with partners, oversees various activities. These include research projects such as regular assessments of the state of social forestry in the region (RECOFTC 2020a), and the development of guidelines supporting social forestry such as the *ASEAN Guiding Principles for Effective Social Forestry Legal Frameworks* and the *ASEAN Guidelines on Recognition of Customary Tenure in Forested Landscapes*, both adopted in 2022.<sup>b</sup>

Another five ASEAN working groups directly or indirectly support the rights of IPLCs. They include the ASEAN Working Group on Forest Management and the ASEAN Working Group on Forest and Climate Change. These working groups play key roles in developing strategies and programs at the ASEAN level, which then feed into national level initiatives, as well as supporting inter-agency coordination at national levels.

Continued financial support highlights donor commitment to community forestry at the ASEAN level. For example, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) supported the ASEAN-Swiss Partnership on Social Forestry & Climate Change (ASFCC) from 2009 to 2020. SDC is now supporting the FAO and UNEP-led project ‘Climate change mitigation through social forestry actions in ASEAN countries’ which started in 2021.

<sup>a</sup> <https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/enhanced-connectivity-and-sectoral-development/asean-food-agriculture-and-forestry/forestry-cooperation/>

<sup>b</sup> See: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/12.-ASEAN-Guidelines-on-Recognition-of-Customary-Tenure-in-Forested-Landscape.pdf> and <https://www.recoftc.org/publications/0000433>

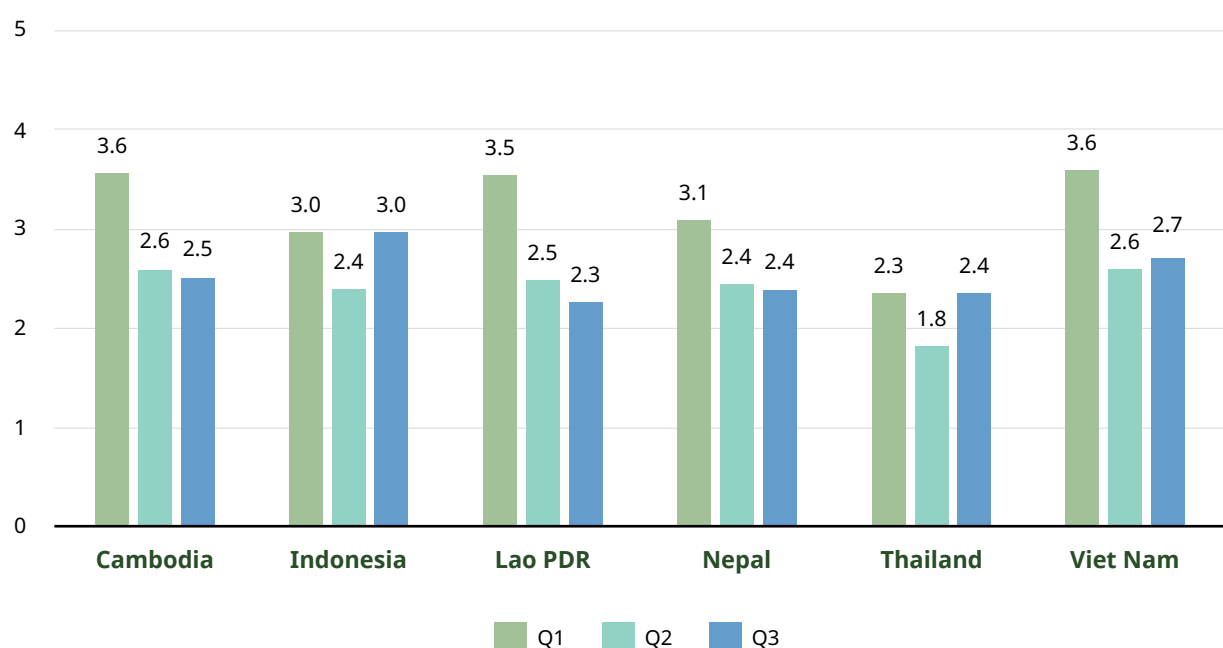
## Forest management

Through this lens, the assessment considered the legal foundations for sustainable forest management; how IPLCs, companies and the state manage forests; and how effectively state agencies and CSOs monitor forest management (see Annex 1 for more information). When referring to ‘sustainable forest management’, we mean ‘a dynamic and evolving concept that aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental value of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations’ (UNGA 2007).

Figure 7 shows how respondents answered three questions about forest management in each country. As with the ‘Rights’ lens, the respondents from all countries except Thailand were more positive about the legal framework for sustainable forest management than

they were about implementation and monitoring. Respondents from international NGOs (average score: 3.0 out of 5) and governments (2.9) were the most positive, while academics were the least positive (2.6).

**Figure 7.** Average scores for each country for answers (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being best) to questions about forest management. Question 1: Do laws enable sustainable forest management, considering economic, environmental and social outcomes? Question 2: Do IPLCs, companies and state organizations manage forests in a sustainable manner, contributing to economic, environmental and social outcomes? Question 3: How effectively does the government and CSOs monitor sustainable and equitable forest management?



### Key findings were that:

- The rate of deforestation is falling in the focal countries but continues to be a significant concern
- The legal foundations for sustainable forest management are improving, but there are notable concerns about weak implementation and enforcement, which can undermine sustainable forest management in practice
- Budgetary constraints facing government agencies also limit efforts to sustainably manage forests
- forest that pays is a forest that stays – too often there are limited financial incentives to protect forests and it is more beneficial in the short economic term to allow for their clearance
- Legal foundations and incentives are not strong enough to encourage communities to invest in their forests
- Monitoring depends on donor funding, which has implications for sustainability and accountability



### Box 3. Ensuring that IPLCs benefit from their tenure: the case of Social Forestry Business Groups (KUPS) in Indonesia

Effective community forestry depends on secure tenure, strong governance and livelihood development opportunities that incentivize investment by IPLCs in their forests. Such opportunities, in turn, depend on an enabling regulatory framework, supportive bureaucracy, and communities having market access and knowledge, and access to appropriate technologies (FAO 2016).

Tenure-related limitations on livelihood opportunities are key, and perhaps the main barriers restricting the development of community forests in the countries assessed in this report. In Cambodia and Nepal, for example, government agencies still appear not to trust communities to commercialize timber from their forests.

The countries in this assessment are all developing and testing different community forestry models, including for the commercialization of timber. One model from Indonesia called Social Forestry Business Groups (KUPS) has the potential to both ensure strong tenure and provide livelihoods. The starting point is the community getting tenure, with which they are then allowed to develop a social forestry enterprise, including processing and selling timber.

By February 2024, there were 10,968 KUPS, with an estimated combined income of

37.9 billion IDR (US\$46 million).<sup>a</sup> They are categorized according to their stage of development, as follows, and receive corresponding levels of support from government agencies:

- **Blue (5,287 KUPS):** These have the legal right to establish an enterprise with an appropriate commodity from their forest (such as timber, non-timber forest products and/or environmental services)
- **Silver (4,566 KUPS):** These have appropriate management plans and have established an enterprise unit.
- **Gold (1,057 KUPS):** These have a method for implementing the management plan and access to the necessary capital and local market.
- **Platinum (58 KUPS):** These have managed to expand their market beyond the local area.

The government has a target of 45,200 operational KUPS by 2030. It is working to ensure that financial and human resources are in place to support the KUPS' development, recognizing the scale of the program, as well as challenges such as linking with the private sector (Nugroho et al. 2023).

<sup>a</sup> For information on the different models of community forestry of Indonesia see: [www.recoftc.org/recoftc-community-forestry-models-Asia-Pacific](http://www.recoftc.org/recoftc-community-forestry-models-Asia-Pacific)

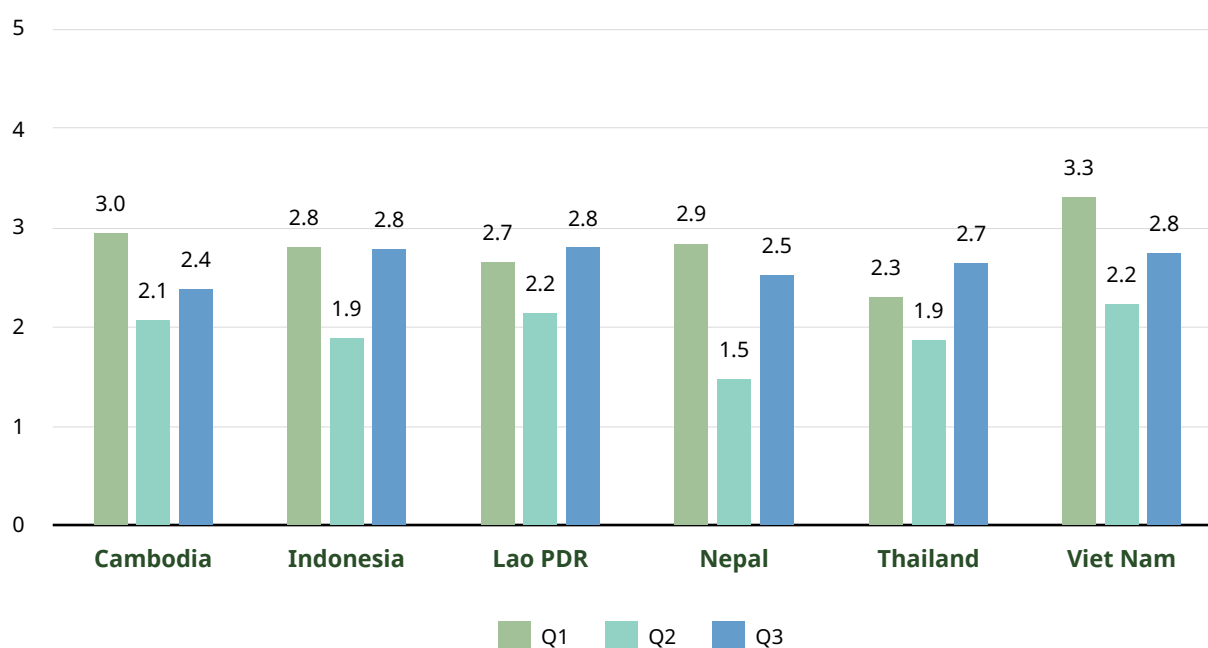
<sup>b</sup> Source: [www.gokups.menlhk.go.id/](http://www.gokups.menlhk.go.id/)

## Forest-risk commodities

This lens considered the legality and sustainability of the production and trade of forest-risk commodities. This included examining: the legal foundations; the capacity of supply chain actors to mitigate social and environmental risks; and how government agencies and CSOs monitor trade and production (see Annex 1 for more information). By forest-risk commodities, we mean globally traded goods and raw materials that originate from tropical forest ecosystems, either directly from forest areas, or from areas previously under forest cover, and whose extraction or production or trade contributes significantly to global tropical deforestation and degradation. Beef, palm oil, soy, wood, cocoa, rubber and coffee are examples of forest-risk commodities.

Figure 8 shows how respondents answered three questions relating to forest-risk commodities. For all countries except Lao PDR, the most positive responses were about the legal foundations. The biggest area of concern in all six countries related to the capacities of actors throughout supply chains — from smallholders to private companies, small and medium enterprises and national and international traders — to mitigate the risks involved in the production and trade of forest-risk commodities. Respondents working for national governments, international NGOs and the private sector were the most positive (giving an average rating of 2.7 out of 5), while the respondents from national NGOs were slightly less positive (2.3).

**Figure 8.** Average scores for each country for answers (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being best) to questions about the production and trade of forest-risk commodities. Question 1: Do laws outline legality and sustainability requirements for the production and trade of forest-risk commodities? Question 2: Do smallholders, private companies, SMEs and national and international traders have the capacity to mitigate socio-environmental risks from the production and trade of forest-risk commodities? Question 3: How effectively do the government and CSOs monitor and implement regulations on the production and trade of forest-risk commodities?



## Key findings were that:

- The production and trade of forest-risk commodities have had clear social and environmental impacts in all the countries, many of which also have a large potential deforestation footprint through their imports
- Respondents perceived improvements in the legal foundations for ensuring sustainable and legal production of forest-risk commodities, particularly in Cambodia, Indonesia and Lao PDR
- Despite this, numerous challenges remain:
  - Government agencies have mixed capacities to monitor adherence to national and international regulations (such as the EUDR — see Box 4)
  - Capacity gaps are linked to the need to develop a holistic monitoring system, including using remote sensing or aerial technology to monitor the use and expansion of agricultural land in the context of forest loss
  - With growing pressure on producers to ensure sustainability, there are concerns that they will shift to less demanding markets, emphasizing the need for governments in producer and consumer countries to work together
  - There are concerns regarding the ability of smallholders to meet increasingly demanding requirements of regulations such as the EUDR in consumer countries, as well as the costs of compliance, particularly if larger companies shift the burden of responsibility to smaller companies and smallholders.

Forest conversion for agricultural production is a problem throughout the Asia-Pacific region. According to Global Forest Watch, it is the main cause of forest loss in all the assessment countries except Nepal, where most forest loss is related to unsustainable forestry practices.<sup>8</sup>

Many forest-risk commodities covered by the EUDR are important for national economies and the livelihoods of many IPLCs in the region (see data in Annex 2 and Table 9). For example, in 2022, Indonesia exported nearly US\$40 billion of palm oil and nearly US\$15.5 billion of timber and wood products.

Commodities that the EUDR does not cover, such as cassava, maize and sugar cane – are also forest-risk commodities in the region (Kong et al. 2019; Zhang et al. 2018; Han and Huang 2021; Table 12 in Annex 2). Examples include Lao PDR exporting over US\$720 million of cassava in 2022. The country has no policy about the production and trade of cassava, which is seen as a growing issue by some respondents. The countries in this assessment also have potentially significant external deforestation footprints because of their imports of forest-risk commodities. For example, in 2022, Thailand imported over US\$3.6 billion of soya, while Nepal imported nearly US\$600 million of the commodity (Annex 2).

Three respondents raised the concern of the impacts of gas and oil fields, and mining, on the region's forests and IPLCs. For example, an estimated 500,000 hectares of forests have been lost to nickel mining on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi alone (Hidayat and Hermawan 2022). Nickel mining will likely increase, as demand for the metal for electric vehicle batteries is anticipated to grow by nearly 200 percent between 2022 and 2027 (Chen 2023). The scale of the problem is also found in other areas of the country. In East Kalimantan, it is estimated that there are nearly 30,000 hectares of coal mines that the concession holders should have rehabilitated but have not (Jong 2022). Mining also affects other countries to varying degrees. In Lao PDR, for example, it accounts for 8 percent of gross domestic product and 20 percent of merchandise exports (World Bank 2020).

#### **Box 4. EUDR – What is the cost for smallholders of halting deforestation and degradation in the commodity production sector?**

The EU Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR) came into force in June 2023. Companies in the EU that are not SMEs must demonstrate compliance from 30 December 2024, while SMEs must comply from 30 June 2025. The Regulation covers seven commodities – cattle, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, rubber, soya and wood – and their derived products. It requires operators and traders in the EU (hereafter operators) to demonstrate that the commodities and products they trade are legal and deforestation-free.

This means that the commodities were produced on land that was not subject to deforestation (or degradation for wood) after 31 December 2020, and that they comply with all relevant laws in the country of production. The implementation of the EUDR is centred on mandatory due diligence, with strict traceability for commodities along the supply chain. To meet the due diligence requirement, operators will have to collect detailed information demonstrating that commodities/products comply with the EUDR – this includes proof of where the commodity was produced. They must also act to assess risks of non-compliance and mitigate such risks.

The EUDR is among a growing number of regulations that consumer countries are considering or developing to address deforestation risk in their supply chains. Others include the Environment Act 2021 of the United Kingdom and the New York Tropical Deforestation-Free Procurement Act of 2023. The EU is also developing other relevant legislation, including the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive. There is much support for the EUDR, including from civil society in producer and consumer countries, but there are also many stakeholders who have concerns or

are openly hostile towards it. Critics of the EUDR are grouped around various issues – including concerns about protectionism by the EU and about potential impacts on smallholders, and small and medium enterprises, in producer countries. Concerns that the EUDR could exclude many smallholders are linked to the abilities of smallholders to access and share the necessary documentation. This could result in a two-tiered system:

1. Smallholders who are better integrated into the supply chain, and who can access information and support through their connection to infrastructure, would be more able to meet the EUDR's requirements. This tier would more likely get a premium for their products.
2. Smallholders in more remote areas, who already struggle to access information and capacity development programs, would be even more challenged to meet EUDR's requirements. This tier would likely not receive a price premium while having the same production costs or higher due to their location. They may even find they are cut from supply chains, forcing them to seek income from surrounding forests, especially in times of adversity.

The Accountability Framework Initiative, Preferred by Nature and FAO are developing tools to help operators and traders comply with EUDR and similar regulations. RECOFTC is raising awareness of these regulations among smallholders, small and medium enterprises and government officials. Additionally, the EU is committed to providing support to help address the challenges that smallholders and small and medium enterprises in producer countries may face, including through the Forest Partnership Program.

**Table 9.** Smallholder production of selected EUDR-regulated commodities in four Southeast Asian countries (area managed and number of households). Empty cells indicate a lack of data.<sup>a</sup>

		Indonesia	Lao PDR	Thailand	Viet Nam
<b>Cocoa</b>	Area managed by smallholders (ha)	1,464,838		2,008	
	Number of smallholder households	1,604,518		2,859	
<b>Coffee</b>	Area managed by smallholders (ha)	1,239,113		42,914	480,000
	Number of smallholder households	1,875,379	20–25,000	30,833	640,000
<b>Palm oil</b>	Area managed by smallholders (ha)	6,379,937		970,000	
	Number of smallholder households	2,652,016		400,575	
<b>Rubber</b>	Area managed by smallholders (ha)	3,459,815	78,002	3,516,091	476,258
	Number of smallholder households	2,168,965		1,682,638	263,876
<b>Timber</b>	Area managed by smallholders (ha)			206,844	3,183,067
	Number of smallholder households			58,225	2,500,000

<sup>a</sup> Data for Indonesia are from 2022 (GoI 2023). Data for Lao PDR are from UNCTAD (2013) for coffee and Smith et al. (2020) for rubber. Data for Thailand are from the Department of Agricultural Extension and the Office of Agricultural Economics — see Gritten and Khunrattanasiri (2023) for details. Data for Viet Nam are from various sources and years: coffee (ICO 2019); rubber (VRA 2018); timber – area (MARD 2016) and timber – households (Carias et al. 2022).

# Ways forward

Considering the overarching nature of forest governance and its central role in sustainability, one could argue it should be the top priority of governments, donors, the private sector and all stakeholders working to protect forests, address rural poverty, achieve sustainable development and meet climate change adaptation and mitigation goals.

Unfortunately, this priority is not reflected in practice. This is because of the complexity of achieving good forest governance, as well as the investments needed, the barriers some stakeholders face, and other factors such as corruption. The findings from this assessment briefly touched on these challenges.

The next step is to identify how to build on the progress made and overcome the challenges. To do this, the interviewees and survey respondents proposed general and specific ways to strengthen forest governance in their countries. There are many commonalities to the proposals, as well as recommendations that were unique to individual countries. Section 4.1 provides an overview of the main proposals for each country.

## Across all countries, the following main recommendations emerged:

1. **Evaluate the impacts** of existing laws, regulations and policies on forests and IPLCs, and make necessary amendments.
2. **Address contradictions** in legal frameworks and clarify roles and responsibilities of government agencies, across hierarchical levels and across sectors.
3. **Strengthen stakeholder participation** through capacity development and the establishment and systematic use of procedures for participation.
4. **Enhance coordination** among government agencies, across sectors and between national and local levels, and between governments and non-state actors.
5. **Accelerate provision of tenure** to IPLCs and improve opportunities for IPLCs with tenure to generate income and sustainable livelihoods.
6. **Strengthen legal foundations** for free, prior and informed consent, and for environmental impact assessments, and ensure that the requirements are understood and followed.
7. **Develop transparent mechanisms** for redressing grievances in the forest sector and for ensuring fair and equitable benefit-sharing.
8. **Strengthen women's rights** and participation in forest governance mechanisms.
9. **Develop and implement transparent national forest monitoring systems** in collaboration with IPLCs and CSOs (see Box 5).
10. **Increase use of technology by all stakeholders**, including for monitoring forests, controlling supply chains, engaging with markets and tracking land-use and investment.

**11. Assess the impacts of EUDR-like regulations** on smallholders and address challenges and gaps to enable a fair transition to deforestation-free supply chains.

**12. Address challenges to Forest Law enforcement** and the application of penalties for infringements. Respondents highlighted the importance of countries aligning their forest-related laws, policies, strategies and monitoring approaches with their Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement on climate change, and with the Sustainable Development Goals and other international initiatives.

For the countries in Southeast Asia, respondents also recommended increasing awareness and implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines on Promoting Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry, the ASEAN Guiding Principles for Effective Social Forestry Legal Frameworks and the ASEAN Guidelines on Recognition of Customary Tenure in Forested Landscapes. For these guidelines, respondents also recommended the adoption of a multi-guideline plan of action by ASEAN, to enhance synergies in their implementation and enable cross-learning. Finally, respondents recommended increasing support for other related ASEAN initiatives, including the Single Window system, to promote transparency in trade between ASEAN Member States.

## Recommendations

The following pages present a country-by-country overview of proposals for strengthening forest governance in relation to the four lenses used in the assessment. These recommendations were formulated by the interview respondents and the participants at the regional workshop.



## Cambodia

### Institutional framework

- Periodically review the Environment and Natural Resources Code, including to understand if and how it facilitates coordination among relevant agencies
- Revise guidelines for community protected areas in line with the Environment and Natural Resources Code
- Develop REDD+ benefit-sharing guidelines
- Formalize the roles and responsibilities of CSOs and IPLCs in legal reform processes, including how these groups can provide inputs and how those will be addressed.
- Develop capacity of national CSOs to provide efficient and effective inputs to legal reforms, as well as monitoring of implementation and enforcement of laws

### Rights

- Improve the development of livelihoods that IPLCs can derive from having tenure, including building the evidence base by piloting the development of successful enterprises selling forest products and services including timber
- Promote collaboration between community protected areas and the private sector to generate investment
- Register Indigenous Peoples and cultural heritage sites in protected areas
- Ensure that the rights of IPLCs are respected and protected in mechanisms relevant to forest management such as REDD+, including through updates to the Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement on climate change, and through the Long-Term Strategy on Carbon Neutrality
- Improve legal foundations for free, prior and informed consent, as well as grievance redress mechanisms
- Strengthen requirements for environmental and social impact assessment and increase monitoring to ensure compliance and transparency

### Forest management

- Increase mechanisms and opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the design and implementation of the national forest monitoring system
- Support improved working environment for monitoring and reporting by CSOs
- Support alignment of forest management monitoring, including for community forestry, with reporting for the Nationally Determined Contribution of Cambodia under the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sustainable Development Goals and other international initiatives.
- Provide clear guidance for fair benefit-sharing from forest management practices allowing sufficient incentives for sustainable forest management

### Forest-risk commodities

- Support ASEAN initiatives including the Single Window to support transparency in trade between ASEAN Member States
- Review the Cassava Policy (2020-2025) to more systematically address risks related to forest loss and rights of IPLCs
- Recognize potential income from legal and sustainable production of forest-risk commodities, and increase investment in enforcement
- Integrate and raise awareness of the ASEAN Guidelines on Promoting Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry and Guidelines on Recognition of Customary Tenure in Forested Landscapes
- Pilot and implement a Public-Private-Producer Partnerships (4Ps) policy

## Indonesia

### Institutional framework

- Conduct multi-sectoral evaluation of the Job Creation Law and associated regulations
- Evaluate the impact of recentralization on forests and related livelihoods
- Review the impacts of the OneMap program
- Enhance coordination mechanisms to create trust between government agencies and national and international CSOs
- Strengthen capacity to facilitate multi-stakeholder participation

### Rights

- Review progress on the allocation of tenure to Indigenous Peoples in all provinces
- Accelerate the provision of tenure through social forestry programmes
- Review the impacts of Social Forestry Business Groups (KUPS) across the country.
- Improve the distribution of benefits from REDD+ by evaluating and enhancing the procedures that enable IPLCs to access these benefits
- Support equitable partnerships with the private sector
- Conduct a situational analysis of women's rights in forest landscape management and develop a program to address the gaps
- Assess the impact of the Job Creation Law on IPLCs
- Increase awareness and understanding of current regulations, such as regarding women's participation in social forestry

### Forest management

- Address remaining illegal timber plantations with appropriate penalties and by funding restoration
- Increase access to modern technology among stakeholders, including social forestry tenure holders, and integrate the data they collect into national forest monitoring systems
- Clearly identify synergies or overlaps among commitments under the Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sustainable Development Goals and other international initiatives — and align reporting and monitoring systems
- Link economic returns to environmental and social sustainability

### Forest-risk commodities

- Assess the impacts of private sector commitments, including zero-deforestation commitments, across provinces and explore the potential to scale up such commitments, including commitment to free, prior and informed consent
- Assess the impacts of EUDR-like regulations on smallholders, and create a program to address challenges and gaps
- Investigate challenges to enforcement, including understanding how large areas of illegal plantations were established
- Assess the application of penalties for infringements, such as illegal forest clearing, and if they are a sufficient deterrent
- Improve the use of technology for communication, marketing, due diligence and data gathering by smallholders

## Lao PDR

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### Institutional framework

- Conduct multi-sectoral impact assessment of relevant regulations (such as the Forestry and Land Laws)
- Review and clarify roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and at the department level, regarding addressing land tenure conflicts and avoiding overlapping mandates
- Evaluate the impact of the Regulation of Association on the roles of CSOs in policy development
- Formalize the roles and responsibilities of CSOs, ethnic groups and local communities in legal reform processes, including how their inputs are used
- Develop transparent land allocation procedures aligned with regional and global frameworks, including the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests and ASEAN Guidelines on Recognition of Customary Tenure in Forested Landscapes
- Support an agreement among ministries on the recognition of tenure rights inside and outside of state forestland

### Rights

- Improve the development of sustainable livelihoods linked to tenure (for example, by reviewing the Forestry Law)
- Scale up a capacity development program, including facilitating participatory approaches
- Systematically evaluate the village forestry program, including regular updates measuring understanding and use of rights, as well as economic, environmental and social impacts
- Develop regulations and guidelines under the Land and Forestry Laws to strengthen the rights of women, including ensuring that land titles include the names of wives as well as husbands in the case of married couples
- Raise awareness among communities and ethnic groups of topics related to land, forests, non-timber forest products and carbon
- Promote the concept of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) to all local communities
- Use legislation to oblige companies, government agencies and non-government organizations to follow an FPIC process — balancing the need to protect communities with a need to ensure that requirements are straightforward for companies and other project implementers

### Forest management

- Periodically review and revise the plan and process for achieving the target of 70 percent forest cover
  - Increase access to modern technology among stakeholders in forest-related sectors, with data integration in national forest monitoring systems
  - Align forest monitoring with reporting on the Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals and other initiatives
  - Provide capacity-building to government and CSOs to support the implementation of village forestry management plans
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**Forest-risk commodities**

- Assess the impacts of EUDR-like regulations on smallholders and develop programs/projects to address gaps and challenges
  - Develop a land information system and accessible platform that integrates land-based investment databases across multiple ministries
  - Formalize, promote and monitor professionalized environmental impact assessment processes to increase transparency, reduce burdens on investors and ensure procedures are rigorous. This should include a periodic review of assessment procedures and the division of categories between environmental impact assessment and Initial Environmental Examination
  - Promote and enhance the role of civil society to improve community engagement by investors, support gender equality and protect vulnerable groups — including through monitoring the application of voluntary guidelines, such as the ASEAN Guidelines on Promoting Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry
  - Develop a consistent governmental message for the subnational level with clear instructions on how to manage and monitor forest-risk commodities
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## Nepal

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### **Institutional framework**

- Conduct impact assessment of relevant regulations (such as the Local Government Operation Act and the Forests Act)
  - Address contradictions among the forests policy, Forests Act, Forests Regulation and related circulars and guidelines
  - Improve governance and coordination across federal, provincial and local levels of government
- 

### **Rights**

- Address bureaucracy constraining livelihood development from community forestry.
  - Increase participation and transparency in decision-making processes
  - Ensure the development of fair and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms in the forest sector
- 

### **Forest management**

- Improve documentation and use of technology
  - Create incentives for sustainable forest management
- 

### **Forest-risk commodities**

- Better understand and analyse the contribution of Nepal to the deforestation of tropical forests due to its imports of forest-risk commodities
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## Thailand

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### **Institutional framework**

- Conduct a multi-sectoral impact assessment of relevant regulations (such as the Community Forest Act and the National Parks Act)
  - Identify a lead agency to deal with rural fires and ensure it has a clear mandate and resources
  - Increase coordination among government agencies at all levels
- 

### **Rights**

- Create a government and private sector program to assess and increase productivity from existing plantations
  - Review opportunities and risks for REDD+
  - Review the forest area target and how it will be achieved
  - Improve recognition of tenure rights, for example in national forest reserves and protected areas
- 

### **Forest management**

- Improve livelihood development for ethnic minorities and local communities by:
    - Improving their access to tenure
    - Building the evidence base through the piloting of successful enterprise development, including from timber
    - Setting out a process to involve communities in timber production
    - Improve women's participation in forest governance mechanisms
    - Improve legal foundations for free, prior and informed consent
- 

### **Forest-risk commodities**

- Bring forward the target date and develop a plan for the National Strategy component on transparency in supply chains and clarify if it covers imports
  - Finalize VPA negotiations with the EU and learn from this multi-stakeholder process approach for commodities other than timber
  - Assess the impacts of EUDR-like regulations on smallholders, a create a program to address challenges and gaps
  - Consider how smallholders will take part in sustainable commodity value chains and ensure the burden of responsibility is shared equitably
-

## Viet Nam

### Institutional framework

- Conduct multi-sectoral impact assessment of relevant regulations (such as the Forest Law)
- Improve coordination between the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Similarly, improve vertical collaboration – from national to local levels

### Rights

- Support climate change resilience through tenure, including through diversifying income sources
- Continue to support equitable partnerships between tenure holders and the private sector
- Review the impacts for local communities of the Payments for Forest Environmental Services scheme and REDD+
- Improve legal foundations for free, prior and informed consent
- Increase and improve participation by CSOs and smallholder communities in decision-making processes on forests and forest management

### Forest management

- Implement a government and private sector program to assess and increase productivity from existing timber plantations
- Ensure IPLCs have a voice in policies related to Payments for Forest Environmental Services and how benefits will be shared
- Ensure that forest landscape restoration principles, such as meaningful participation and diverse outcomes, are at the heart of restoration initiatives
- Improve data management and access across government agencies
- Invest in information technology and remote sensing to support forest protection, including by detecting real-time forest loss
- Make benefit-sharing mechanisms (for example, for carbon trading) more effective and transparent

### Forest-risk commodities

- Support ASEAN initiatives, including the Single Window system, to promote transparency in trade between ASEAN Member States
- Assess the impacts of EUDR-like regulations on smallholders and create a program to address challenges and gaps
- Improve government employees' access to information and capacities in relation to the production and trade of forest-risk commodities, such as requirements from importing countries, national limitations, existing policies



## Box 5. The importance of systematic monitoring for meeting subnational, national and international targets and commitments

The countries in this assessment have many targets and commitments directly or indirectly linked to forest management and governance. Sadly, target setting rarely considers the process required to meet the targets. It often fails to consider the complexities of opportunities and challenges to be addressed, including the interests and needs of stakeholders at landscape levels, and the need to invest in systems to monitor progress.

A prime example is the slow progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recent analysis by the UN has found that, at the current pace of progress, the Asia-Pacific region will miss 90 percent of the 118 measurable targets in the 17 Goals (UNESCAP 2023). Some, such as Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), are proving to be problematic because of limited data collection. Goal 13 (climate action) is particularly worrying as, according to the indicators, countries in the region are regressing.

Fundamental issues undermining progress towards the SDGs include the top-down development of the goals and the strategies created to achieve them. This is compounded by government agencies still working in siloes, and by the failure of states to recognize the value of participatory processes in achieving the goals and in monitoring progress (Moallemi et al. 2020). There are numerous examples of appropriate consideration of participatory processes, including in monitoring. They include the Peatland Restoration Program in West Kalimantan (Moallemi et al. 2020), where participation of IPLCs is seen as

key. However, these positive examples are exceptions rather than the norm. The challenge is addressing the deep-seated top-down processes, distrust of non-state actors, and failure to invest in robust and inclusive monitoring systems that also consider the multi-sectoral dimensions of forest landscape management and governance.

There are, however, an increasing number of opportunities across the region, such as:

- Action by governments, for example, integrating social forestry mechanisms in National Forest Monitoring Systems (as in Indonesia).
- Reporting requirements of international mechanisms such as obligations to report on progress in achieving Nationally Determined Contributions, including under the UNFCCC Enhanced Transparency Framework<sup>9</sup>, and reporting on REDD+ to access funds.
- Reporting requirements in consumer markets, including requirements on companies to improve their sustainability reporting (for example, the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, which applies to certain EU and non-EU companies).

Additionally, initiatives by the private sector, such as zero-deforestation commitments and supporting tools and mechanisms such as the Accountability Framework Initiative are increasingly important, as is the increased accessibility to technology such as smart phones. These developments give hope that at least the partial achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and other commitments, will not be beyond stakeholders in the region.

# Annex 1. Criteria, questions and indicators that formed the basis for the assessment

**Interviewees and survey respondents were asked four general questions about forest governance:**

- How do you evaluate the evolution of forest governance over the past five years: has it improved, stayed the same or regressed?
- On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good, how would you rate the current state of forest governance in your country?
- What do you consider to be the key challenges to good forest governance?
- What are the key priorities for forest governance in the next five years?

RECOFTC also asked 12 more questions, each of which relates to one of the assessment's three pillars and one of its four lenses. Table 10 below presents these questions along with their related criteria and indicators.

**Table 10.** Criteria, questions and indicators used to assess government across three pillars and through four lenses.

	<b>Pillar 1: Policy, legal and institutional frameworks</b>	<b>Pillar 2: Participation in decision-making</b>	<b>Pillar 3: Monitoring and implementation</b>
<b>Lens 1: Institutional framework</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	Legal frameworks clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of government agencies — and coordination within and among agencies — concerning the sustainable and equitable management of forest landscapes.	Government agencies effectively engage stakeholders in policy development and decision-making processes.  They facilitate participation by providing platforms/space for multi-stakeholder engagement and sharing information with stakeholders in an appropriate (culturally, socially and contextually) and timely manner.	Government agencies effectively implement and monitor relevant regulations on the sustainable and equitable management of forest landscapes.
<b>Questions</b>	On a scale from 1-5, how well does the legal framework set out the roles, responsibilities and coordination between government agencies working in forest-related sectors? Please explain your answer / provide examples.	On a scale from 1-5, how well do government agencies facilitate stakeholder participation in policy development and decision-making processes (including sharing information in an appropriate and timely manner and providing opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement)? Please explain your answer / provide examples.	On a scale from 1-5, how effective are government agencies in implementing forest-related regulations and in monitoring their implementation? Please explain your answer / provide examples.
<b>Indicators</b>	<p><b>Roles and responsibilities:</b> Government agencies across forest-related sectors and from landscape to national levels have clear mandates and responsibilities to develop, implement and enforce regulations for sustainable and equitable management of forest landscapes.</p> <p><b>Equity and mandate:</b> Government agencies are in place, with specific mandates in regulations to support the rights and welfare of IPLCs and other relevant stakeholders, including women (for example, a specifically mandated focal point for Indigenous Peoples or gender).</p> <p><b>Coordination:</b> An institutional body has a clear mandate set out in State regulations to facilitate inter-agency coordination.</p>	<p><b>Platforms for engagement:</b> Platforms exist with a clear mandate to facilitate multi-stakeholder participation in policymaking processes (such as platforms related to land or to legal reforms including REDD+ and FLEGT).</p> <p><b>Access to information:</b> Stakeholders receive information from government agencies through appropriate means and in a timely manner (for example, invitation to public consultations, policy drafts and other material for policy design and decision-making in relevant languages).</p> <p><b>Process and feedback:</b> Clear procedures are in place on how input will be used and reported back to relevant stakeholders.</p> <p><b>Monitoring and capacity:</b> Processes are in place for reviewing and reporting on the effectiveness of government agencies' engagement in participatory approaches. Capacity development support is available to address government weaknesses and scale up good practices.</p>	<p><b>Agencies are effective:</b> Government regularly verify if its agencies are carrying out their mandated work for implementation and enforcement in an efficient and effective manner.</p> <p><b>Monitoring and evaluation system:</b> Government agencies develop and use a transparent and inclusive system to regularly monitor and report on the effectiveness of regulations.</p> <p><b>Dispute resolution:</b> The State facilitates the resolution of disputes between stakeholders through inclusive and transparent mechanisms and procedures with equitable objectives.</p> <p><b>Coordination:</b> Institutions meet regularly to discuss and act in coordination, with no overlapping/ redundant roles across institutions from different sectors on multiple levels.</p>

	<b>Pillar 1: Policy, legal and institutional frameworks</b>	<b>Pillar 2: Participation in decision-making</b>	<b>Pillar 3: Monitoring and implementation</b>
<b>Lens 2: Rights</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	The legal framework clearly recognizes the rights of IPLCs, including for land and forest tenure.	IPLCs and CSOs can participate in policymaking and decision-making processes.	Government agencies recognize the rights of IPLCs and monitor that these rights are respected.
<b>Questions</b>	On a scale from 1-5, how well does the legal framework recognize the rights of IPLCs, including marginalized groups such as women? Please explain your answer / provide examples.	On a scale from 1-5, how well do IPLCs and CSOs contribute to policy and decision-making processes (opportunity, capacity and effective engagement)? Please explain your answer / provide examples.	On a scale from 1-5, how effective are government agencies in recognizing and safeguarding the rights of IPLCs? Please explain your answer / provide examples.
<b>Indicators</b>	<p><b>Differentiated rights:</b> Forest-related regulations clearly recognize the differentiated rights of IPLCs, including land and forest tenure, traditional knowledge and free, prior and informed consent — without prejudice to their ethnicity, indigeneity, gender, or age.</p> <p><b>Gender:</b> There is no discrimination in terms of land-use rights for men or women.</p> <p><b>Right to participate in decision-making:</b> Regulations recognize the rights of IPLCs and their representatives to participate in relevant decision and policymaking processes.</p> <p><b>Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC):</b> External actors (state organizations, private companies, NGOs) are required to conduct an FPIC process in order to use and manage forestland where land is claimed or owned by IPLCs.</p> <p><b>Clarity and complementarity:</b> The texts of relevant regulations refer to one another, are unambiguous and complement each other in the prescription of the rights of IPLCs.</p>	<p><b>Space:</b> IPLCs and CSOs have opportunities (space) to participate in decision-making on forests and land.</p> <p><b>Voice:</b> IPLCs and CSOs actively engage and provide contributions to policy and decision-making processes.</p> <p><b>Knowledge of rights of IPLCs:</b> IPLCs understand their rights, including tenure and have the capacity to claim them.</p> <p><b>Internal governance of IPLCs:</b> IPLCs and their representatives have their own platforms or networks to structure their contributions and engage in relevant decision-making processes</p> <p><b>Knowledge of rights of CSOs:</b> CSOs understand their rights and have the capacity to intervene in decision-making processes.</p> <p><b>Internal governance of CSOs:</b> CSOs have their own platforms or networks to structure their contributions and engage in relevant decision-making processes.</p> <p><b>Participation in tenure allocation process:</b> Processes for allocating tenure rights allow for the participation of IPLCs and CSOs.</p>	<p><b>Strategy/roadmap:</b> There is a publicly available strategy and roadmap to recognize and safeguard the rights of IPLCs and it is implemented and monitored.</p> <p><b>Record of rights:</b> There is a registry of land and forest rights (titles, certificates, and so on) including a map and allowing identification of, for example, overlaps of users.</p> <p><b>Land rights officially recognized:</b> Share of forest (land) that formally belongs to IPLCs.</p> <p><b>Grievance redress mechanism:</b> An accessible, transparent and effective grievance redress mechanism to address rights violations is in place and IPLCs use it.</p>

	<b>Pillar 1: Policy, legal and institutional frameworks</b>	<b>Pillar 2: Participation in decision-making</b>	<b>Pillar 3: Monitoring and implementation</b>
<b>Lens 3: Forest Management</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	The legal framework clearly prescribes the equitable and sustainable management of forests.	Rights holders (IPLCs, private companies and state organizations) manage their forests in a sustainable, participatory way.	Government agencies and CSOs monitor that rights holders (IPLCs, private companies and state organizations) manage their forest in a sustainable manner, including adhering to the legal framework.
<b>Questions</b>	On a scale from 1-5, how well does the legal framework facilitate sustainable forest management, with appropriate consideration of economic, environmental and social outcomes? Please explain your answer / provide examples.	On a scale from 1-5, how well do forest rights holders (IPLCs, companies and state organizations) manage their forests in a sustainable manner, contributing to economic, environmental and social outcomes? Please explain your answer / provide examples.	On a scale from 1-5, how effectively do government agencies and CSOs monitor sustainable and equitable forest management? Please explain your answer / provide examples.
<b>Indicators</b>	<p><b>Objectives and mechanisms:</b> Policies and legal texts have clear objectives and mechanisms for achieving sustainable forest management, including:</p> <p><b>Environmental:</b> biodiversity and other ecosystem services</p> <p><b>Social:</b> human well-being</p> <p><b>Economic:</b> sustainable production of timber, non-timber forest products and forest services</p> <p><b>Management plans:</b> Forest management plans are required by law for the sustainable management of forest services and products</p> <p><b>Small and medium enterprises and smallholders:</b> Regulations on smallholders and SMEs are clear and not too stringent to allow them to carry out forest management.</p> <p><b>Community forestry:</b> Regulations on community forestry are clear and not too stringent to allow communities to carry out sustainable forest management – the strength of the bundle of rights for communities to use and manage forests</p> <p><b>International requirements:</b> Regulations on use of timber and of non-timber forest products meet national and international legal requirements.</p> <p><b>Benefit-sharing requirement:</b> Right holders are required to establish a benefit-sharing mechanism to carry out forest management.</p>	<p><b>Allocating forests:</b> The processes for allocating forests are transparent and inclusive.</p> <p><b>Platforms and tools:</b> There are platforms and tools to enable the participation by stakeholders in decision-making on forest management.</p> <p><b>Capacity of communities:</b> Communities (including different interest groups) have the capacity to participate in forest management and the design of benefit-sharing mechanisms.</p> <p><b>Capacity of small and medium enterprises and smallholders:</b> Smallholders and SMEs have the capacity to participate in forest management.</p>	<p><b>CSO monitoring:</b> CSOs conduct independent forest monitoring, verifying the use of forests and can report on failures by rights holders.</p> <p><b>Government monitoring:</b> Government agencies regularly monitor that stakeholders use forest resources in line with legal requirements, and support stakeholders to do so.</p> <p><b>Effective benefit-sharing:</b> Benefits related to the management of forests are shared equitably.</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> Government agencies prosecute law violations concerning the use of forests according to appropriate legal procedures.</p> <p><b>Dispute resolution:</b> The state facilitates the resolution of disputes between stakeholders through existing mechanisms and procedures.</p>

	Pillar 1: Policy, legal and institutional frameworks	Pillar 2: Participation in decision-making	Pillar 3: Monitoring and implementation
<b>Lens 4: Forest-risk commodities</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	The legal framework clearly outlines the legality and sustainability requirements for the production and trade of forest-risk commodities.	Supply chain actors such as smallholders, private companies, small and medium enterprises, and traders sustainably and legally produce and trade forest-risk commodities and mitigate the social and environmental risks.	The production and trade of forest-risk commodities are monitored to ensure legality and sustainability, with failures being reported and addressed appropriately.
<b>Questions</b>	On a scale from 1-5, how well does the legal framework outline legality and sustainability requirements for the production and trade of forest-risk commodities? Please explain your answer / provide examples.	On a scale from 1-5, do supply chain actors (such as smallholders, private companies, small and medium enterprises, and traders) benefit from the production and trade of forest-risk commodities and have the capacity to mitigate social and environmental risks? Please explain your answer / provide examples.	On a scale from 1-5, how effectively do government agencies and CSOs monitor and implement regulations on the production and trade of forest-risk commodities? Please explain your answer / provide examples.
<b>Indicators</b>	<p><b>Clear requirements:</b> The legal framework provides legal and sustainability requirements for the production, harvesting, transportation and sale of forest-risk commodities.</p> <p><b>Transparency:</b> Regulations include strong transparency and risk management requirements for the production and trade of forest-risk commodities, in particular on the product, quantity, geolocation, legality and deforestation.</p> <p><b>Safeguards for conversion:</b> There are appropriate legal safeguards preventing or minimizing forest land conversion and forest degradation for other land uses, such as ensuring commodities have not caused deforestation/degradation after 2020.</p> <p><b>Workers' rights:</b> There are strong labour laws protecting workers participating in the production and trade of forest-risk commodities.</p>	<p><b>Capacity of supply chain actors:</b> Supply chain actors have the capacity to meet the legal requirements for the production and trade of forest-risk goods.</p> <p><b>Knowledge of the legislation:</b> Supply chain actors are aware of and understand legislation (national and international — such as the EUDR) having an impact on their production.</p> <p><b>Access to information:</b> All relevant stakeholders, including smallholders, cooperatives and communities, have access to key information (such as market prices, sourcing, and so on) on the production and trade of forest-risk commodities and can share information.</p> <p><b>Social and environmental safeguards:</b> Safeguards to avoid damages/impacts on the environment and local people are in place all along the supply chain.</p> <p><b>Due diligence in place:</b> Companies have due diligence systems in place to ensure sustainable and legal sourcing of their products.</p>	<p><b>Government monitoring:</b> The state monitors the production and trade of forest-risk commodities through regular checks of supply chain actors.</p> <p><b>Monitoring by CSOs:</b> CSOs can monitor the production and trade of forest-risk commodities and report on failures to relevant government agencies for appropriate action.</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> The state prosecutes those who sell or buy illegal forest-risk commodities.</p> <p><b>Coordination:</b> There is coordination among government agencies at the national, regional and international levels to verify the legality of the production and trade of forest-risk commodities.</p>

## Annex 2. Trade data for forest-risk commodities

**Table 11.** Value of imports and exports (US\$) of forest-risk commodities covered by the EU Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR), for the six focal countries and for all ASEAN Member States combined (2022)<sup>a</sup>

		Cattle	Cocoa	Coffee	Palm oil	Rubber	Soya	Wood
<b>Cambodia</b>	Imports	162,329,546	6,177,701	5,852,670	19,640,179	247,940,982	56,361,491	966,488,171
	Exports	8,647,578	411,316	25,000	69,637,987	530,945,688	7500	598,332,875
	Exports to EU	19,176	0	0	0	11,617,941	0	1,173,551
	EU exports as % of total	0.22	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.19	0.00	0.20
<b>Indonesia</b>	Imports	1,971,833,967	822,900,175	60,788,777	174,176,380	1,784,803,626	4,887,435,425	5,033,706,680
	Exports	48,117,399	1,185,163,356	1,149,168,137	39,105,332,201	6,059,889,946	7,828,433	15,436,150,207
	Exports to EU	615,879	199,764,099	260,852,361	5,081,678,432	839,674,685	46,262	1,121,106,478
	EU exports as % of total	1.28	16.86	22.70	12.99	13.86	0.59	7.26
<b>Lao PDR</b>	Imports	41,432,085	632,156	523,466	1,013,756	39,275,914	16,330,884	606,681,384
	Exports	6,652,791	20,160	95,655,700	100,570	367,783,799	1,447,857	923,833,597
	Exports to EU	0	0	16,876,791	0	19,053	0	670,780
	EU exports as % of total	0.00	0.00	17.64	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.07
<b>Nepal</b>	Imports	1,962,566	18,258,678	1,535,514	259,738,770	103,898,198	567,024,081	199,658,369
	Exports	2,752,445	49,775	867,344	189,258,006	45,100	187,991,920	39,696,161
<b>Thailand</b>	Imports	846,914,976	259,570,925	175,139,601	426,794,138	1,433,394,772	3,621,141,614	4,667,377,907
	Exports	647,559,095	69,380,038	3,846,311	1,736,311,616	15,306,972,426	304,726,275	6,346,218,806
	Exports to EU	4,358,044	2,893,354	325,987	21,572,827	1,753,586,079	2301	127,064,017
	EU exports as % of total	0.67	4.17	8.48	1.24	11.46	0.00	2.00
<b>Viet Nam</b>	Imports	2,589,536,162	91,164,396	106,990,908	1,536,735,001	3,569,859,136	4,227,480,711	7,199,436,928
	Exports	385,320,094	31,685,979	2,952,034,941	140,557,978	4,290,734,627	212,272,326	17,730,830,000
	Exports to EU	8,205,903	11,403,685	1,428,881,177	218,554	560,270,429	22,465	897,970,036
	EU exports as % of total	2.13	35.99	48.40	0.16	13.06	0.01	5.06
<b>ASEAN Member States</b>	Imports	7,659,708,431	3,526,272,701	969,897,025	8,907,887,457	12,050,555,058	16,681,487,992	29,841,466,540
	Exports	1,194,234,945	4,059,469,125	4,298,286,745	65,794,557,145	34,896,195,020	812,126,072	52,073,418,389
	Exports to EU	15,140,986	362,829,996	1,711,128,248	8,095,889,266	4,556,875,314	97,109	2,671,112,367
	EU exports as % of total	1.27	8.94	39.81	12.30	13.06	0.01	5.13

<sup>a</sup>Trade data for all ASEAN Member States are from the ASEAN Stats Data Portal ([www.data.aseanstats.org/trade-annually](http://www.data.aseanstats.org/trade-annually)). The data for Nepal are from UNComtrade. The HS codes were sourced from Annex 1 of the EUDR.



**Table 12.** Value of imports and exports (US\$) of regionally relevant forest-risk commodities that are not covered by the EUDR, for the six focal countries and for all ASEAN Member States combined (2022)<sup>a</sup>

	Commodity	Exports to EU 27 (US\$)	Total exports (US\$)	Total imports (US\$)
<b>Cambodia</b>	Cassava	444,520	34,220,606	199,995
	Maize	0	511,097	54,853,838
	Sugar cane	0	26,227,879	35,463,552
<b>Indonesia</b>	Cassava	535,897	8,924,121	156,323,714
	Maize	0	77,256,580	505,420,944
	Sugar cane	174,392	348,207,042	2,915,082,365
<b>Lao PDR</b>	Cassava	0	720,957,212	17,559,273
	Maize	0	29,258,388	8,310,658
	Sugar cane	582,611	136,829,022	119,357,290
<b>Nepal</b>	Cassava	no data	0	583,822
	Maize	no data	5,035	140,364,665
	Sugar cane	no data	681,042	22,893,040
<b>Thailand</b>	Cassava	37,472,839	3,298,183,482	583,731,144
	Maize	5,304	105,669,910	520,954,481
	Sugar cane	1,975,645	2,882,504,317	88,945,785
<b>Viet Nam</b>	Cassava	3,060,481	1,400,259,992	1,204,764,466
	Maize	169,521	49,832,008	3,361,015,967
	Sugar cane	147,686	12,696,400	630,356,380
<b>ASEAN Member States</b>	Cassava	41,518,326	5,483,532,206	2,208,237,626
	Maize	186,269	946,176,553	6,418,544,251
	Sugar cane	7,495,586	3,652,127,397	5,265,039,330

<sup>a</sup>Trade data for all ASEAN Member States are from the ASEAN Stats Data Portal ([www.data.aseanstats.org/trade-annually](http://www.data.aseanstats.org/trade-annually)). The data for Nepal are from UNComtrade. HS codes for cassava: 11081400; 071410, for maize: 1005; 110220; 110313; 110423; 110812; 230670, and sugar cane: 121293; 170310; 170111; 170113; 170114; 17019910.

## Annex 3. Detailed findings for each country

### Cambodia

#### Institutional framework

In general, respondents felt that the legal mandates for government agencies had become clearer in recent years. For example, there is optimism that the new Environment and Natural Resources Code 2023 (ENRC) will improve coordination across the environment and natural resource management sectors (ClientEarth 2023). Cambodia has also revised its Nationally Determined Contribution for 2030, under the Paris Agreement on climate change, and has adopted a carbon neutrality plan for 2050, which were seen as positive efforts to establish governance frameworks and targets.

However, one respondent said forest loss and many forest-related conflicts in Cambodia indicated a lack of coordination among government agencies. There were mixed views about implementation, monitoring and enforcement – respondents identified limited participation by stakeholders in policymaking processes, and interference by vested interests within the government, among issues to be addressed.

Respondents raised concerns that stakeholder groups lacked the capacity, for example on technical issues, to contribute effectively to policymaking processes. They also perceived that government agencies lacked resources to facilitate these processes.

Some respondents highlighted an unwillingness of authorities to enforce laws, and not only because of limited capacities and resources. There were mixed views on the government's stance towards participatory processes. Some felt that the government has become more open, including in working with CSOs. Others were less positive, feeling that the government is not “friendly” towards CSOs: an example was the ENRC being finalized without input from civil society, which had made significant contributions to earlier drafts. The literature also presents a mixed picture. While civil society has played an important role in advocacy and providing legal support for marginalized groups in policy and decision-making processes, this is curtailed in the forest sector by the involvement of political elites in natural resource management (Schroeder and Young 2019).

The issue of a limited budget was raised by some respondents who were concerned about the sustainability of relying on donors and foreign development organizations to support participatory processes, monitoring and enforcement. A related issue was that agencies are being territorial over funds, which is undermining coordination, as had been highlighted in the 2018 Assessment. Budgetary constraints are illustrated by the fact that the net overseas development aid to Cambodia in 2021 was equivalent to 27.3 percent of central government expenditure, an increase from 22 percent in 2018 (World Bank 2023b).<sup>10</sup>

## Rights

Respondents felt that the legal and institutional foundations for IPLCs are improving. This starts from the Constitution (2008), but includes other legislation such as the Land Law (2001), Forest Law (2002),

Protected Areas Law (2008) and the Environment and Natural Resources Code (2023), as well as commitments such as its latest Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement on climate change (December 2020), in which the government states that it will seek to “promote the rights of Indigenous People, specifically concerning land ownership”.<sup>11</sup>

There was a general feeling that the government is scaling up its support for community forestry, community protected areas and community fisheries.<sup>12</sup> Parallel to this is a general commitment to the rights of IPLCs and women. Respondents said the legal foundation for addressing gender issues needed strengthening. This is important as women face stronger cultural prejudices (RECOFTC 2023b) and other barriers such as higher levels of illiteracy than men (Sen 2021b). Respondents also acknowledged that international mechanisms are increasing the visibility of gender issues. This includes the creation of a gender focal point for UNFCCC climate negotiations,<sup>13</sup> and a REDD+ Gender Working Group in 2013.<sup>14</sup> Respondents, however, pointed out that the benefits of REDD+ to communities are not clear.

The continued support for community forestry is demonstrated in the growing forest area under the management of local communities (Table 7). Respondents also emphasized the development of networks, such as national and subnational community forestry working groups, that are strengthening participation by IPLCs in policy and decision-making processes. A common feeling was that the government’s commitment to participation from national to landscape levels, with support from CSOs and donors is gradually reaping benefits. This has resulted in a growing community of practice around community forestry and community protected areas, including in the implementation of management plans.

There were, however, various concerns about implementation and enforcement in relation to the rights of IPLCs. One example is continued land grabbing, which has decreased since the moratorium on new economic land concessions in 2012, but still represents a risk for many rural communities (Loughlin and Milne 2021). Another focus area was the need to support communities to get tangible benefits from their tenure rights, including from commercializing non-timber forest products and timber. The literature acknowledges this concern (Gritten et al. 2015; Hing and Riggs 2021), but also highlights how important tenure is as a safety net for communities in difficult times, including for subsistence needs (RECOFTC 2021a).

A further concern was the ability of IPLCs to participate in policy and decision-making processes, which respondents linked to the capacities of government staff, CSOs and IPLCs themselves. Some said this was causing women to be sidelined (see also Nhem and Lee 2019) or that the government favoured some ethnic groups over others. There was also concern that participation by CSOs and IPLCs is not systematic, is often donor led, especially in terms of funding, and is sometimes resisted by government agencies (Grant and Le Billion 2019; Turreira-Garcia et al. 2018).

## Forest management

Many respondents said that regulations regarding forest management have improved in recent years. But they said more work is needed. One area they highlighted was a need to ensure the legal framework is clearer on the importance of achieving ecological, economic and social sustainability. There was concern that the focus is on profit, especially by companies, at the cost of ecological integrity and human well-being. This was seen to be partly due to weak implementation and enforcement, as reflected by continued forest loss and degradation (Table 5), and partly due to the design of laws. For example, some respondents said the Environment and Natural Resources Code focuses more on profit than sustainability.

Respondents said issues with implementation and enforcement stem from a lack of resources and capacity – as recognized in the National REDD+ Strategy of Cambodia for 2017-2026 (Ministry of Environment 2017). A lack of human resources is illustrated by the fact that only 1,200 forest rangers patrol 7.3 million hectares of protected land (Sen 2021a). Respondents also linked weak implementation of laws and regulations on forest management to a lack of willingness and commitment among officials to enforce laws and to the absence of a forest management monitoring system. Weak law enforcement encourages crime. For example, illegal loggers view the absence of forest rangers as an opportunity to harvest timber illegally (Ken et al. 2020).

Respondents felt that IPLCs, companies and the state were equally challenged when it came to managing their forests. For IPLCs, challenges include their limited abilities to benefit from short-term tenure (15 years for community forests and 25 years for community protected areas). This can prevent IPLCs from exercising rights to sell timber as trees take a long time to grow. There is also a perceived lack of opportunities for communities to develop alternative or improved livelihoods.

The government's Circular Strategy on Environment (2023-2028) appears to commit to addressing this in community protected areas through "[attracting] investment in the cultivation, production and processing of forest and non-timber forest products, to increase green cover as well as increase the income of the local communities". The Strategy also emphasizes communities generating income from ecotourism (Ministry of Environment 2017).

Some respondents also perceived there to be a limited understanding among IPLCs of their responsibilities with regards to forest management rights. This was compounded by their capacity gaps, including for developing and implementing a forest management plan, which is also linked to the perceived lack of benefits from having such a plan (Gritten et al. 2015). Another concern was that government agencies lack the necessary capacities, budget and personnel to manage their forests and to monitor management by the other rights holders (UNDP 2022).

## Forest-risk commodities

Many respondents highlighted the improving legal foundations for the legal and sustainable production and trade in forest-risk commodities, linking this with the stronger legal frameworks for the other three lenses (Institutional Framework, Rights and Forest Management). However, as with the other lenses, the experts noted challenges regarding implementation and enforcement of the laws. This includes capacity gaps, such as with accessing and using technology for monitoring.

One concern is the Cambodian government's position towards monitoring by civil society. For example, the government has questioned the legality of civil society monitors' activities and the credibility of the data collected (Blomberg 2020). At the same time, the government's enforcement agencies lack personnel and access to monitoring technologies. Investment, through REDD+ projects for example, is helping to address capacity gaps, including those relating to technology (NASA 2023; Pauly et al. 2022; UNDP 2022).

Respondents raised concerns about the operating practices of holders of economic land concessions (ELCs), which are seen to be causing significant deforestation (see also Pauly et al. 2022). Some said that ELCs are used to launder timber. Since 2000, Cambodia allocated 2.28 million hectares of ELCs (Magliocca et al. 2020) – roughly 16 percent of the country's land area. Following growing concerns about ELCs, in 2012, the Prime Minister introduced a moratorium on granting new ones. However, large-scale forest conversion is still a significant concern, even if it has declined (Pauly et al. 2022). The impacts of the ELCs are still felt by many local communities who lost access to land (Flynn 2023).

A recent concern is the conversion of forests for cassava production (Beban and Gironde 2023; Brook and Narim 2023). The National Cassava Policy (2020-2025) sets out the government's commitment to Cambodia becoming a global production hub for this commodity.<sup>15</sup> The policy's risk management text, which focuses on soil erosion and quality, fails to acknowledge potential forest loss and land grabbing due to the expansion of cassava production.

One respondent noted the importance of the international market and regulations in supporting the sustainable and legal production of forest-risk commodities. An example given was Cambodian exports of sugarcane products to the EU, which declined from over US\$28 million in 2017 to zero in 2021.<sup>16</sup> This was the result of a perceived association with human rights abuses and deforestation (Davies 2017). It should also be noted that the export market of Cambodia for sugarcane shifted to other countries including Thailand (Table 12 in Annex 2). This is significant in the context of efforts by some consumer markets, such as the EU with the EUDR, to reduce their deforestation and carbon footprints. Of the commodities exported from Cambodia that are covered by the EUDR,<sup>17</sup> only approximately 1.1 percent are exported to the EU (Table 11 in Annex 2).

## Indonesia

### Institutional framework

Respondents had mixed perspectives about the clarity of roles and responsibilities of government agencies – with views often framed around the recentralization of power from subnational levels to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) in Jakarta (see also Myers et al. 2022). This process is gradually reversing some of the decentralization that occurred since the fall of President Suharto in 1998 (for example, through the Law on Regional Government No. 22/1999). Recentralization was partly in response to continued deforestation (Suwarno et al. 2015). It has created a degree of flux, with subnational agencies competing over the management of land and funds controlled by the Ministry in Jakarta.

The situation is compounded by a variety of visions, objectives and strategies among different agencies within the Ministry of Environment and Forestry; between that ministry and the Ministry of Agrarian and Spatial Planning; and between national and provincial levels – for example, between Jakarta and Papua. Both recentralization and the lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities were seen as leading to coordination issues among government agencies that are hampering delivery across various forest-related initiatives. Coordination issues exist in relation to the management of plantations and devolved forest management programs (Riggs et al. 2018), as well as progress towards emission reduction targets (Dwisatrio et al. 2021).

There were also concerns about the government's commitment and capacity to facilitate multi-stakeholder participation in policymaking processes (see also Rahayu et al. 2023). An example given was that IPLCs lack formal spaces to share their views. Respondents also highlighted capacity gaps limiting participation by non-state actors – particularly for organizations representing women. Additional concerns were that NGOs are not participating constructively and that the government is trying to 'tick the box' regarding participation, rather than getting meaningful input and even consent.

The centralization of decision-making is seen in other areas of forest management, including in the monitoring of implementation and enforcement of laws. This includes researchers and CSOs facing challenges through, for example, limited access to funds. There were also concerns that an increasingly restrictive environment limits the ability of these groups to support monitoring (see also Setiawan and Tomsa 2023).

### Rights

Some respondents said that the many communities that have received tenure over their forests in recent years indicated a strengthening of the rights of IPLCs (Table 7). This is especially since the Constitutional Court decision (MK35/2013), which ruled that customary forests should no longer be classified as state forest areas and should be granted to communities able to demonstrate their indigenous status. Regulations were also adopted to support the decision. Laws such as the Forestry Law (1999) and the Environment Law (2009) also recognize indigenous rights.



The judiciary is playing an increasingly important role in protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples by, among other things, upholding their rights in conflicts with companies. For example, the Jakarta State Administrative Court upheld a Decree by the Minister of Environment and Forestry ruling against the establishment of 280,000 hectares of oil palm plantations on indigenous territories, including 65,415 hectares of primary forest, in South Papua.

The climate change policies of Indonesia can also support the recognition of rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the national social forestry program.<sup>18</sup> They include the updated (September 2022) Nationally Determined Contribution<sup>19</sup> under the Paris Agreement and related climate change mitigation and adaptation plans, such as the FOLU Net Sink Operational Plan (2021-2030).

However, there are still numerous bottlenecks in the handing over of tenure, with many of the interviewees saying that recentralization was hindering decision-making at provincial, district and landscape levels. They also highlighted gaps, especially at subnational levels, in capacities needed to support the process. One result of this is that social forestry is having uneven impacts across the country, though there is a lack of research on these impacts in some provinces, especially those in Papua (Rakatama and Pandit 2020). Examples of the more challenged provinces include Aceh, whose government had, as of November 2023, formally recognized only 15 percent of the forests claimed by Indigenous Peoples there (Jong 2023b). Some issues in Aceh, including the use of maps not recognized by local communities, are relevant to other provinces. There was also unease about government agencies favouring companies over local communities when land claims clash (see Berenschot & Dhiaulhaq, 2023).

Many respondents raised concerns about the recognition of women's rights. A failure to recognize women's rights is deeply embedded, even in the social forestry program that is supposed to be built on rights (Anugrah et al. 2022). Respondents said women are still not recognized as primary forest users and are seen as secondary members of communities when it comes to accessing benefits, joining capacity development programs, and contributing to decision-making (Anugrah et al. 2022).

## Forest management

Respondents emphasized progress on sustainable forest management, as reflected in the decreased rate of forest loss (Table 5). Some said this progress was the result of the improving legal framework, and commitment from government agencies including MoEF and the Presidential Office. Timber certification has also promoted sustainable forest management — by 2018, nearly 7 million hectares of forest, including timber plantations had Forest Stewardship Council or Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (Kartika et al. 2020). Respondents also credited the Indonesian timber legality assurance system (SVLK) and its supporting monitoring. Although the SVLK's focus is on legality, it is seen to benefit sustainable forest management. Respondents also noted improved efforts by many companies, including in seeking certification and meeting legality requirements.

To a certain extent, the progress in Indonesia masks some underlying concerns including about negative impacts of recentralization. One example is the situation with the country's 600 Forest Management Units (FMU/KPH)<sup>20</sup> that cover 120.6 million hectares. The FMU model was formalized in the Forestry Law (1999) to help address deforestation and improve forest management practices. FMUs were originally designed to be highly autonomous but are increasingly under the control of the central government (Ramadhan et al. 2023). This is undermining commitment and capacity for implementation and enforcement and resulting in different impacts between and within provinces (Wahyudi et al. 2021).

There was also concern that in Indonesia, the focus is still on economic returns from forest land, at the expense of ecological and social sustainability. It appears that concession holders, under the Hak Pengusahaan Hutan (HPH) program, often fail to adhere to guidelines but remain unpunished. Respondents said the social forestry program of Indonesia is helping IPLCs to sustainably manage their forests, including through livelihood development programs such as support for Social Forestry Business Groups (Box 3). However, the social forestry program's overall outcomes are still mixed in terms of livelihood development, biodiversity and forest protection (Gunawan et al. 2022; Kraus et al. 2022).

### Forest-risk commodities

Respondents felt that the legal foundations for ensuring sustainability and legality of production and trade of forest-risk commodities were getting stronger. However, there was concern that progress was being undermined by poor implementation, corruption and failures to address infringements. Regarding the latter issue, in 2021, the government said it had identified 3.37 million hectares (more than the area of Belgium) of illegal oil palm plantations in forest areas.<sup>21</sup> As of May 2023, over 230,000 hectares of these illegal plantations had been legalized under an amnesty program launched in 2020 (Jong 2023a). The deadline for the amnesty was November 2023. The government also announced that it would restore up to 200,000 hectares of plantations that did not receive the amnesty (Christina 2023).

The amnesty period coincided with the government's vocal opposition to the EUDR (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2023). This opposition is partly due to concern that the EUDR will harm smallholders (Barahamin 2023; see also Box 5). Indonesia, like the other countries covered in this assessment, has many smallholders who play crucial roles at the start of agricultural supply chains (Table 9). There is growing reporting on the challenges they could face to meet the EUDR requirements, such as providing the necessary documentation and geolocation for their land (RECOFTC 2023a).

The illegal plantations illustrate a concern raised by some respondents about the varying levels of implementation, enforcement and monitoring among Indonesian provinces – with Riau as well as all provinces in Kalimantan and Papua described as facing more challenges. For example, Riau has 75 percent (2.52 million hectares) of the total area of illegal plantations (EoF 2023). In Papua, authorities were said to be significantly constrained by a lack of resources needed to perform their work. One expert gave the example of Lorentz National Park, which is overseen by very few staff despite its area exceeding 2.5 million hectares. It faces significant threats including from the Trans-Papuan Highway, which crosses two parts of the national park, as well as risks of conversion to oil palm plantations (Rochmyaningsih 2021; UNESCO 2023).



Respondents were also keen to highlight the impact of a moratorium on new forest peatland concessions, which the government introduced in 2011 and made permanent in 2019. However, nobody mentioned zero-deforestation commitments made by the private sector in Indonesia. By contrast, when the Forest Declaration Assessment highlighted the recent progress in reducing forest loss in Indonesia, which peaked in 2016, it gave much credit to zero-deforestation commitments by palm oil producers – 85 percent of palm oil exports are linked to companies with such commitments (Forest Declaration Assessment Partners 2023).

The Forest Declaration Assessment also touched on the moratorium's limited impacts, which resulted from a lack of consequences for violations, among other things. One conclusion here is that private sector initiatives do play a role, but that the implementation and enforcement challenges need to be considered. However, we must also consider the 2020 Job Creation Law. By aiming to attract increased investment through improving the ease of doing business, it has watered down the requirements on companies to conduct environmental and social impact assessments (see Table 6; and Hadi et al. 2023).

There were mixed views about whether and how the legal foundations in Indonesia aligned with requirements in overseas markets. Some felt that certification schemes, such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, can act as a bridge to help meet these requirements. There was also optimism based on Indonesia being the first VPA country to issue FLEGT licences, and because there are many lessons to be learned from the VPA process.

Several respondents also emphasized the importance of CSOs in supporting monitoring, including in relation to meeting EUDR requirements. There were, however, concerns about the activities of CSOs and their operating environment. The concerns included the government questioning the reliability of data shared by CSOs. Possibly linked to this was the CSOs' reliance on foreign funds for their work. This has also been covered in the press, with some government officials saying that some "foreign NGOs" are hostile to the state and creating conflicts to raise funds (Antara News 2022; Setiawan and Tomsa 2023).

Foreign researchers are also under greater scrutiny now, as illustrated by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry subjecting all work by foreign researchers to its oversight. This followed five foreign researchers being denied entry to the country after they questioned the veracity of data shared by the Ministry (Scholars at Risk 2022).

## Lao PDR

### Institutional framework

There were mixed responses regarding how laws define roles and responsibilities, and on coordination among government agencies. The positive perspectives were that the recent legislative developments, especially the Land (2019) and Forestry (2019) Laws, had been conducted in a coordinated manner. These laws support effective collaboration among line agencies from national to district levels and horizontally across ministries. However, a recent assessment of these two laws found that different ministries have overlapping mandates and conflicting interests (LEI and RECOFTC 2023).<sup>22</sup> There is concern that this could undermine tenure reform and facilitate land grabbing. In addition, the Land and Forestry laws also overlap in terms of scope, and respondents highlighted some inconsistencies between them.

Respondents said the process of developing legislation had become increasingly participatory in recent years, with donor support. Examples included the above-mentioned laws and non-legislative documents such as the Forest Strategy (2035). Two respondents said increased participation was a benefit of the FLEGT VPA process. However, some pointed out that it is unclear how much the contributions of CSOs could be integrated.

Efforts still need to be made, including to improve access to information in the forest and land sectors. This was also raised in the 2018 Assessment (RECOFTC 2018b) – specifically relating to the location and agreement of forest boundaries. Both assessments also highlighted the communication needs of local communities, including the need for information in local languages and awareness-raising tools on various topics such as free, prior and informed consent. There is also a need to consider how some ethnic groups may not feel motivated to participate in external decision-making as these processes often ignore their world views and customary practices (Ramcilovic-Suominen et al. 2021).

Concerns were raised, however, about power struggles between ministries and departments from national to landscape levels (see also Hiedanpää et al. 2023). An example provided was that land-use and tenure arrangements are assigned to both the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, creating overlapping mandates, a lack of clarity and competition for resources.<sup>23</sup> There were related concerns about incoherence among regulations – starting from their objectives and feeding into challenges regarding implementation and enforcement. The implementation and enforcement gaps were also linked to government staff lacking capacities, including in their ability to engage with local communities to, for example, raise their awareness. Another issue here was that government agencies lack access to technology to support their work, including for monitoring and enforcement.

Respondents highlighted a reliance on donors and development organizations — for example, regarding facilitation of participatory processes. A relatively common perception was that such processes were used to meet donor requirements, which raises the question of their sustainability. The challenge is to mobilize funding to promote good governance. An additional concern related to donor reliance was an apparent power struggle – between government and western oriented donors and NGOs (Hiedanpää et al. 2023). This creates

challenges for national and international NGOs operating in the country, as they will face risks if they are overly critical of the government. This is also seen in the 2017 Decree on Associations (Decree 238) which has resulted in “further restrictions, control and limitations to civil society” (Hiedanpää et al. 2023).

## Rights

The respondents acknowledged the improving legal foundations for the recognition of the rights of IPLCs, and referred to the Forestry Law (2019), Land Law (2019) and the Law on Resettlement and Vocation (2018). For example, the Land Law (Article 44) recognizes the rights of those that have been living in a forest before it was classified as forest land, while the Forestry Law (Article 64) recognizes customary use of forest products. The Forestry Law (Article 120) also lays out how district authorities allocate state forests and forestland to village administration authorities for long-term sustainable use in line with village forest management plans, village forest management and protection contracts and relevant laws.

The government is also developing a database called LaoLandReg and an action plan to support the registration and issuance of land titles (MONRE and MAF no date). It aims to issue a land-use certificate to all of the estimated 3,167 villages in forestland by 2030, following a participatory land-use planning process. By 2022, it had issued 1,366 certificates (Table 7).

However, many improvements to the legal framework are still needed. There are still concerns about the legal protections of IPLCs against land grabbing (LEI and RECOFTC 2023), and about the process for IPLCs to get their tenure certificate (MONRE and MAF no date). Respondents also raised issues about the legal framework for addressing gender issues. For example, the revised Land Law (2019) and Forestry Law (2019) do not mention women’s rights. The new Land Law removed a requirement, that was in the 2003 version, that both members of a married couple must be named on the land title (LIWG 2020).

This may undermine women’s participation in decision-making and giving consent and affect their access to compensation relating to external projects (LEI and RECOFTC 2023). The legal framework is particularly important considering the embedded barriers facing women, especially in rural areas (ADB 2020; LIWG 2020). Some respondents also highlighted the effectiveness of women’s groups, particularly the Lao Women’s Union, in advocating for women’s rights. This includes the Lao Women’s Union’s formal participation in policy and decision-making processes, such as the Technical Working Group on Climate Change at national levels and the Village Disaster Management Committees at subnational levels (ADB 2022).

The respondents also flagged that IPLCs often lack awareness of their rights and that government officials have mixed capacities and commitment to support them to use their rights. Other concerns were that the process to safeguard the rights of IPLCs is often donor driven, and that requirements for IPLCs to provide consent are still sidelined – it is consultation rather than consent-seeking. The issue of consent is clearly illustrated in the Law on Resettlement and Vocation (2018).

In theory, this law gives local communities the opportunity to agree to an external project. But such a project cannot be contested if the government is backing it. This reflects the concern that local communities are often consulted on incoming projects but have no ability

to give or deny their consent (Ramcilovic-Suominen and Mustalahti 2022). As one of the respondents put it — development and profit-making take precedence over the rights of local communities.

It should also be added that some companies use their procedures for obtaining free, prior and informed consent when working with IPLCs, but this is “the exception, rather than the norm” (LEI and RECOFTC 2023). The scale of the issue is seen in the estimate that, in 2017, concessions for plantations, mines and hydropower projects affected nearly a quarter of all villages in the country (Hett et al. 2020).

## Forest management

Respondents highlighted improving legal foundations, especially through the Forestry Law (2019). Prime Minister’s Order 11 (2023)<sup>24</sup>, which was issued during the interview period, also highlights that authorities recognize the need to improve forest management and set out general directions to achieve this. However, respondents raised concerns about implementation, enforcement and monitoring, including for village forestry (MONRE and MAF no date) despite Lao PDR having a national forest monitoring system in place. Similar concerns were raised in the 2018 Assessment (RECOFTC 2018b).

According to the respondents, gaps in implementation and enforcement stem from the lack of resources, with competition over funds undermining inter-agency coordination. The gaps are also related to other capacity shortfalls among national and subnational agencies, including capacities for meeting international guidelines and requirements, such as carbon accounting (FCPF 2022). This is further hampered by high levels of staff turnover. Such constraints have led to concern about relying on donors to support monitoring, and abrupt changes to government programs as they fail to achieve their desired results (Lu and Smith 2023). One implication of the lack of resources is that the Department of Forestry and its line agencies take a project approach rather than a programmatic one in their efforts to achieve sustainable forest management. This was seen as an indirect result of reliance on donors.

Respondents felt that IPLCs, companies and the state were managing their forests with roughly equal effectiveness, on average, but they noted that each group faced different challenges. Examples included concerns that people with tenure through village forestry lacked the capacity to develop and implement their forest management plan. This was seen to be linked to the limited potential benefits of village forestry (Ramcilovic-Suominen et al. 2021). Smallholders also face challenges including costly bureaucracy and limited access to market information (Keenan et al. 2021), leading them to sell their products to intermediaries. There were mixed perspectives about the forest management practices of the private sector. Companies that were diligently adhering to the law, meeting their social and environmental responsibilities, and striving for certification, were being undercut by companies that were far less diligent. This was also raised in the 2018 Assessment (RECOFTC 2018b).

Respondents’ concerns about monitoring were linked to resources of government agencies, including access to technology and the role of CSOs. Some said CSOs must be able to better contribute to law enforcement and monitoring, but indicated either that CSO input is not welcomed or that CSOs are reliant on donor support. This was raised for all the Southeast Asian countries to varying degrees, as was the concern that CSOs often rely on remote

sensing instead of visiting sites. This has consequences for accountability and transparency and leads to CSO reporting that does not align with government systems.

### Forest-risk commodities

Respondents felt that progress was being made through legal reforms. This was especially the case for wood, thanks in part to the development of the VPA as well as legal reforms such as Prime Minister's Order 15 (Table 6). One example was the development of monitoring systems to ensure legality compliance.

The government is also committed to developing systems to support the sustainable management of agricultural land, including the Land Administration (DALAM) supporting registration and titling. However, some respondents expressed unease about the scale of issues still to be addressed, especially for non-wood commodities such as cassava, which is not covered by the EU Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (Laotian Times 2023). The importance of cassava for the economy is seen in its export value of over US\$720 million in 2022,<sup>25</sup> with plantations covering over 100,000 hectares (Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT 2021).

The government's efforts to increase state revenues are leading to increased monitoring of farmers' and companies' activities, and this may also support tenure reform processes to ensure appropriate taxes are paid (LEI and RECOFTC 2023). An associated concern, however, was that the pursuit of revenue from national to district government levels may lead to an increased number of concessions. This is compounded by the presence of strong vested interests in these levels of government, which may allow for illicit forest clearing, and by a regulatory framework that could encourage unsustainable land investments in less economically developed areas (LEI and RECOFTC 2023).

In parallel with the government's pursuit, there has been an apparent weakening of requirements on environmental and social impact assessments (ESIA). This was reflected in a 2023 announcement by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment<sup>26</sup> that many forestry and agribusiness investments, including those for cassava, maize, and sugarcane, are exempt from conducting the assessments (LEI and RECOFTC 2023). This contradicts the Decree on Environmental Assessment (2019). It requires the completion of an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) before a concession holder can start operations if the holding is between 20-400 hectares, and a more comprehensive ESIA if the area is larger than 400 hectares (MAF 2023). The National Assembly Resolution (03/2021) on the use of land concessions as a source of national income also reflects this (Kenney-Lazar et al. 2023), highlighting the importance of the ESIA, and of ensuring appropriate support for free, prior and informed consent.

One of the key challenges in Lao PDR is at the subnational level, with authorities in different provinces giving mixed messages about the production of agricultural commodities. Authorities in some provinces are enforcing a ban on forest conversion to produce certain commodities that was introduced in 2023 in Prime Minister's Order 11. In other provinces, agencies seem to be making few efforts to address forest conversion. For instance, villagers in Champasak, Salavan and Xayabury provinces, where law enforcement is weak, have been clearing forests and their coffee plantations to grow cassava, in response to the high prices

for the cash crop. In Luang Namtha Province, a partial ban on new rubber plantations has failed to address conversion for plantations (Lu and Smith 2023).

The mixed messages are a possible reflection of contradictions at national levels – on one hand making statements about the pursuit of “green growth” while on the other providing large areas of land for concessions and failing to mitigate the associated risks (Forest Declaration Assessment Partners 2023). Practical examples include the government introducing, in 2012, a moratorium on approving new eucalyptus and rubber plantations or mining concessions<sup>27</sup> following programs to promote these concessions in the preceding years. It also appears that numerous licenses have been granted since the introduction of the moratorium (Lu and Smith 2023).



# Nepal

## Institutional framework

Many respondents were concerned with how the laws set out roles and responsibilities for government agencies. Some gave the example of the Local Government Operation Act (2017) devolving power to local government for natural resource management, while the Forest Act (2019) centralizes control of forest management to the Federal Government (see Basnyat et al. 2020). Respondents provided numerous examples of the consequences of the complexity of roles and responsibilities, as well as general contradictions in the laws – including reporting mechanisms. For example, the Federal Government’s Department of Forests and Soil Conservation lacks the authority to directly request data from the Divisional Forest Office to support its national monitoring of forest fires, plantation management and the status of the community forest user groups. This creates inefficiencies.

While Nepal has been praised for its efforts to develop participatory processes in forest management, there were concerns raised that the foundations for participation are weakening, with no process to ensure that government agencies systematically respond to stakeholder inputs. One example was the development of the Forest Regulation (2022), whose final version agreed with the Federation of Community Forestry Users – Nepal (FECOFUN) differed from the version the Ministry of Community Forest and Environment approved, and seemingly ignoring numerous concerns of FECOFUN and other NGOs (Joshi 2022). A few respondents emphasized the role of community forest user groups, and associated organizations such as FECOFUN, in facilitating participation and in the implementation of laws and the monitoring of their impacts (Cadman et al. 2023).

## Rights

Many respondents said that community forestry is seen nationally and globally as a successful model of inclusivity that is effective in safeguarding the rights of IPLCs and marginalized groups (ICIMOD 2021; Paudel et al. 2022; Gautam et al. 2023). The importance of community forestry is shown by the fact that about 40 percent of the country’s population are using it to manage roughly a third of the nation’s forests.<sup>28</sup>

Many respondents said that, despite progress, there are many challenges still to be addressed in how national laws and strategies recognize the rights of IPLCs. One common example given was the representation of women in community forestry — the Community Forestry Development Programme Guidelines (2014) state that women must fill at least two of the four key decision-making positions in a community forest users group’s executive committee. Data from 2021 showed that only 6 percent of the committees’ chairpersons were women (ICIMOD 2021).

Gender discrimination is deeply embedded in Nepal, starting from the Constitution (Mishra 2023) through to property and tenure rights (Pradhan et al. 2019). Respondents also raised the issue of deeply embedded prejudices against Indigenous Peoples and Dalits (Cadman et al. 2023). These challenges are even more prominent outside community forest areas.

A common concern, in any area or system of forest governance, was the government's apparent failure to recognize the importance of understanding the different interests and needs of IPLCs, women and Dalits, instead of treating them as homogeneous groups.

## Forest management

The starting point for Nepal is its apparent success in addressing deforestation, with devolved forest management including the community forestry program paying off (Ning et al. 2023; and see Table 5). There was a feeling that IPLCs, specifically community forest user groups, were more effective in managing their forests compared to companies and the state. One concern that cut across the three rights holder groups was the failure of laws to give due consideration to economic benefits from forest management, which is undermining sustainable forest management.

The sense was that the regulations are too complex and prohibitive and may in fact be a vehicle for control by the Ministry in Kathmandu (Myers et al. 2022). For example, the legal framework governing community forestry is still focused on forest protection and restoration, and it is failing to give appropriate consideration and support to commercialization of forest products. This has been reinforced by the Forest Regulation (2022). Previous research has raised this point (Gritten et al. 2015). The issue is exacerbated by the government's capacity gaps, including a lack of guidelines to translate the laws and programs into effective forest management on the ground. This is further hampered by the limited extent of monitoring, so there is little understanding of what is working or not. This challenge feeds into the monitoring of community forestry, including monitoring the implementation of forest management plans (operational plans).

## Forest-risk commodities

Nearly all the respondents felt that the production and trade of forest-risk commodities was not particularly relevant, reflecting the country's limited forest loss. They also felt that the main causes of forest loss are not linked to conversion to agriculture and that there are very limited exports of agricultural and wood products. However, one of the respondents felt that the government is failing to consider that Nepal is contributing to deforestation of tropical forests due to its relatively high levels of imports of forest-risk commodities (Table 11 in Annex 2). The most prominent examples of this are the approximately US\$260 million of imports of palm oil and nearly US\$570 million of soya in 2021. Imports from Brazil account for nearly US\$83 million of soya imported by Nepal, while approximately US\$205 million of oil palm imported by Nepal comes from Indonesia. Nepal processes and exports large amounts of both commodities, mostly to India.



# Thailand

## Institutional framework

Several respondents said that recent legal reforms such as the Community Forest Act (2019), the National Parks Act (2019) and the Kor Tor Chor land tenure system (ratified in 2019) have helped clarify the roles and responsibilities of government ministries. The feeling was that these reforms build on long running progress including the understanding that wildlife sanctuaries fall under the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, while mangroves, island forests and beach forests are the responsibility of the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, and finally the national reserved forests and economic forests fall within the remit of the Royal Forest Department.

Some respondents pointed out that the new laws also contain ambiguities and complexities, which may affect their implementation. For example, the Kor Tor Chor system is complex and difficult to access. The same is true for community forests, which are regulated by one of four laws depending on the land category: the National Parks Act in protected forests; Community Forest Act in national reserve forests (outside of protected forests); the Mangrove Act for mangrove areas; and the Kor Thor Chor Act for community forests in Kor Thor Chor areas.

Many respondents also raised concerns about institutional arrangements – emphasizing that a great deal of work must still be done. One example was the continued fire and haze problem that affects Thailand each year. Seemingly little effective action is ever taken, in part because the legislation is unclear on who should take the lead in addressing the problem.

Several respondents said this is hampering implementation, enforcement and monitoring of the laws. One respondent expressed hope that issues would be addressed in the secondary legislation that should be developed to support the implementation of the Community Forest Act and the National Parks Act. The review of the Community Forest Act scheduled for 2024 could also address this.

Some respondents felt that the VPA process had opened doors to more effective participatory approaches, although negotiations with the EU have stalled. Several respondents mentioned the impacts of the top-down approaches that permeate many aspects of Thai society (Lewis and Bulkan 2022). Some felt this had intensified since the military coup in 2014. Among other outcomes, this affects commitment to and effectiveness of, participatory processes. Processes that should be asking communities for their consent and their input into policies in effect become, as one respondent put it, “adverts” for the policies and intervention.

Respondents said the situation is made worse by communities’ lack of access to legal information about their rights and responsibilities. This is further compounded by the government’s over-reliance on the internet for awareness-raising. Many local communities do not have internet access or know where to find information, so they become reliant on CSOs to facilitate this. The issue of access to information was also raised in the context of social media contributing to misinformation and information overload among IPLCs. There were also concerns about limited public access to information in Thailand overall.

## Rights

As stated above, many respondents were concerned with the prevailing top-down approach to policy and decision-making that affects all aspects of forest governance, including the rights of IPLCs. The legal foundations for the recognition of ethnic minorities and local communities in Thailand begin in the Constitution (2017), which emphasizes the protection of the rights of different ethnic groups to live according to their traditional customs (Article 70). However, challenges to this strong foundation exist in other legislation.

For example, the Community Forest Act fails to address the role of marginalized groups in community forestry (RECOFTC 2021b). Additionally, some legislation might not be considered a priority at subnational levels if it is low in the legal hierarchy. An example given was a Cabinet-level resolution from 2010 on recovering the livelihoods of the Karen people of Thailand, whose struggles with tenure and threats to their advocates have received domestic and international media coverage (Paskorn 2023; Readfearn 2021).

Other concerns that respondents raised included the fact that a lack of clarity in the institutional arrangements hinders the handing over of tenure for community forestry and institutionalized discrimination towards ethnic minorities. These issues often undermine efforts to engage ethnic peoples and local communities in policy and decision-making processes and ensure that the rights of these communities are respected and safeguarded. In addition, the status of communities that were living in national forest reserves and parks before the land was demarcated has never been clarified.

Nevertheless, many respondents highlighted progress in recent years, including proactive engagement by CSOs in policymaking processes, with the VPA process creating opportunities for their participation. Finally, the increasing number of ethnic peoples getting citizenship and accompanying rights was also recognized as progress, though the position of the Karen people illustrates the work to be done (Bunditdersakul 2019). While there were generally positive views towards international initiatives, like with the VPA, there were also concerns that initiatives such as REDD+ could undermine the rights of IPLCs. For example, one concern is that governments might try to exert more control over forests so that they can seek alternative funding from REDD+ or carbon trading to address budget shortfalls.

## Forest management

Respondents generally felt that the legal foundations for sustainable forest management by local communities, private companies and the government were improving. Examples included the Community Forest Act, the Kor Tor Chor land allocation scheme, and the Act on the Promotion of Marine and Coastal Resources Management (2015). These legal foundations were seen to be helping to address some of the drivers of deforestation (Gritten and Khunrattanasiri 2023; and Table 5).

Many respondents said, however, that there is a long way to go. A commonly voiced concern was that the legal foundations focus on prohibition rather than on supporting communities to use their rights to commercialize their forest products, as seems to apply to those getting tenure through community forestry and Kor Tor Chor. The Forest Act (2019) and Forest Plantation Acts (2015) are relatively new, but some of the respondents said they have not adequately balanced ecological, economic and social outcomes (see also UN-REDD 2020).

Respondents had mixed views about private companies but generally felt that there had been some progress in recent years, including in companies working with CSOs to improve their environmental and social impacts. There was also some concern that the prohibitive nature of domestic regulations facing IPLCs was also a challenge for companies. In some parts of the country, government agencies are taking a proactive approach to the private sector, for example, by supporting entrepreneurial activities for teak management in Phrae Province.

There was a feeling among respondents that emerging opportunities could support and incentivize sustainable forest management. Examples included international initiatives such as REDD+, international and domestic reporting requirements for the private sector, and national initiatives by CSOs such as Trees4all, which crowdfunds forest landscape restoration projects. These opportunities may also build on improving data collection and management for monitoring forest management, and government programs including those linked to the VPA (Gritten and Khunrattanasiri 2023).

### Forest-risk commodities

Respondents had mixed views about the legal foundations for sustainable and legal production and trade of forest-risk commodities. Some said the foundations were improving, particularly for wood, in part because of the VPA process. Alternative views were that significant legal reforms are needed as there is so much opacity embedded in the legal framework, and that government officials and company executives with vested interests still hold a great deal of power.

There was also concern that some stakeholders, including traders (intermediaries), may resist efforts to increase transparency, for fear that information could be used to exclude them from some supply chains (Gritten and Khunrattanasiri 2023). It was also assumed that some companies will also resist change, as they see regulations like the EUDR as a threat to their market access (Gritten and Khunrattanasiri, 2023). Some respondents also pointed to a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities among government agencies in relation to forest-risk commodities.

Two respondents highlighted the government's commitments, including in the National Strategy for 2018-2037, to having traceability in supply chains "to reduce forest encroachment and deforestation". However, it is unclear if this will cover imports. This is important considering the large amount of forest-risk commodities covered by the EUDR that Thailand imports, including timber (see Table 11 in Annex 2). Thailand also imports forest-risk commodities beyond the scope of the EUDR (Table 12 in Annex 2). In 2022, for example, it imported roughly US\$415 million of maize<sup>29</sup> from Myanmar, and just over US\$283 million of cassava<sup>30</sup> from Cambodia. Production of these commodities has had significant impacts on forests in Myanmar (Han and Huang 2021) and Cambodia (Kong et al. 2019), respectively.

Governmental organizations such as the Rubber Authority of Thailand are being proactive in ensuring that smallholders can meet the requirements of the EUDR, including by registering their EUDR-relevant details in a database. Other initiatives such as the National Window system, which is working to increase efficiencies in trade reporting and monitoring, may also support increased transparency in supply chains (Gritten and Khunrattanasiri 2023).

This is notable as the system complements the regional equivalent, the ASEAN Single Window.

These opportunities and challenges must be acted upon quickly, as the new legal requirements for EU-based importers of EUDR-covered commodities will take effect from December 2024. One concern that respondents raised is that companies and certification schemes are developing their own systems, and these may not align with the incoming government systems. Some also pointed out there needs to be a fair share of responsibilities between big corporations and smallholders in response to the EUDR, to avoid putting unfair pressure on small producers.

## Viet Nam

### Institutional framework

Respondents were broadly positive regarding legal mandates and the roles and responsibilities of government agencies. They cited the Law on Planning (2017) as providing a foundation for land-use planning from national to landscape levels (Forest Declaration Assessment Partners 2022), even if there are some challenges with its implementation. Respondents felt that, on paper, government ministries have clear roles. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) oversees forest management and wildlife conservation, while the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment is responsible for land management and biodiversity conservation. In reality, challenges persist. For example, there are challenges between the Forest Protection Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development regarding the management of rubber plantations on forestry land. There are also issues with coordination between:

- Forestry officials, and police and customs, in relation to enforcement
- MARD, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of National Defence
- National and provincial levels of government

Nevertheless, respondents felt that progress had been made in recent years, in part because of the government's increased awareness of the value of multi-stakeholder participation in the development of laws and policies (see also Dang 2022). The 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy is an indicator of the government's commitment, giving clear requirements and processes for facilitating multi-stakeholder participation. The process of negotiating and implementing a Voluntary Partnership Agreement with the EU was also viewed as encouraging increasing transparency and participation in the forest sector. Respondents acknowledged that improving forest governance is an ongoing process, and that government officials still need more capacity and resources to facilitate meaningful processes. They said that one consequence is that participatory processes are often more about raising awareness than consultation or consent, and it is unclear if and how the government considers inputs it receives.

The outcome is that the government still dominates policy and decision-making processes (Gverdtsiteli 2023). This will likely continue given the continuing constraints placed on civic space (Thien 2023). An additional concern was the reliance on development organizations and NGOs to fund and facilitate stakeholder participation in these processes. The 2018 Assessment also flagged concerns about top-down decision-making, noting that participation was clear on paper, but not happening in practice (RECOFTC 2018c).

### Rights

Many of respondents said that national strategies and changes to the legal framework are boosting recognition of the rights of ethnic minorities and marginalized groups such as women (LEI 2020). They cited the Constitution (2013), the Forestry Law (2017), the Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy (2022) and the Socioeconomic Development Strategy (2021-2030). There were, however, various concerns. Respondents said there are

contradictions within and between laws regarding whether and how customary tenure is recognized (Lewis et al. 2023), and that laws tend to be restrictive. For instance, the Land Law (2013) prevents communities from transferring their land rights to other users. Another concern is about the legal foundations for communities to resist land grabs — the Civil Code does not recognize communities as legal entities, preventing them from being able to file a lawsuit (Lewis et al. 2023).

IPLCs and CSOs in Viet Nam contribute to policy and decision-making processes to varying degrees – some respondents feel the situation has improved, but others said it continues to be closed. There have been efforts to provide opportunities for IPLCs and CSOs to participate in forest-related decision-making, including linked to the VPA's development. However, challenges persist. Some respondents said the government is only 'ticking the box' of participation. Others said CSOs cannot support the VPA process as they have limited capacity or face constraints linked to their legal status.

## Forest management

Respondents were generally positive. They said the legal foundations for enabling sustainable forest management, such as the Forestry Law (2017) and Circular 28 on Sustainable Forest Management (2018), are strong and are well supported by government programs. These programs include the Forestry Development Strategy (2021-2030), which set a very ambitious target of having 3 million hectares of forest with international sustainability certification by 2030 — in 2023, the certified area was 433,247 hectares.<sup>31</sup>

The respondents identified a need for legal reforms. For example, the Forestry Law (2017) and Land Law (2013) recognize a local community as a forest owner, but the Civil Code (2015) does not recognize a community as a legal group. This means a community can 'own' a forest but cannot use the forest land certificate to access loans. Communities therefore struggle to get funds for developing livelihoods based on their forests.

Many respondents said IPLCs, companies and the state are all doing a reasonable job of managing their forests effectively, but that more progress is needed. There were some concerns that the state, companies (many of which are state-owned) and smallholders are overly focused on economic outcomes. For example, smallholders are not required to have a forest management plan for timber plantations. This could undermine efforts to ensure ecological conditions are met. It also results in poor management in terms of yield. There was a feeling that smallholders need more systematic support, including capacity development from the state.

Regarding communal forest management, communities often get tenure to poor quality forests, which is a weak starting point as it undermines incentives to invest. Regarding monitoring, the concern of respondents centred around it not being systematic, with the focus on state-owned enterprises, and limited monitoring of smallholders. Poor monitoring appears to be due to limited resources, with few field visits by government staff, who instead rely on reports written by the rights holders. There was also the concern about the limited role of CSOs in monitoring, with their focus being on legality, and them being often constrained by limits to civic freedoms.



Respondents also recognized the potential value of the national Payment for Forest Environmental Services scheme (Decree 99 on 2010, amended in 2016). An estimated 355,000 households, managing over 3.5 million hectares of forest, participate in the scheme (VNFF 2014). Though the financial benefits are often mixed, the scheme is seen to be encouraging sustainable forest management by local communities (Duong and De Groot 2020; Duc et al. 2023).

### **Forest-risk commodities**

Many respondents said there is growing consideration of the sustainability and legality of the production and trade of forest-risk commodities in Viet Nam. In recent years, thanks to the VPA, that focus was on timber. But authorities are increasingly looking at other commodities, especially coffee and rubber, as the EU Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR) covers these commodities.

They are working to get the systems in place, integrating some learning from the VPA and from REDD+ pilots, and building on an action plan to adapt to the EUDR.<sup>32</sup> This includes improving coordination across agencies and with other countries in the region (VNA 2023). This focus is reflected in a strengthening of regulations, including the Forest Law (2017), and regulations on forest management and land conversion, as well as requirements for environmental and social impact assessments under the Law on Environmental Protection (2014).

Transboundary and regional cooperation led by government agencies is continuing to grow and, along with monitoring by CSOs, is helping to address illegal trade. For example, Viet Nam took action, partly as a result of the development of the VPA and exposés by CSOs, to crack down on illegal timber imports from Cambodia (To and Mahanty 2019).

There are, however, many challenges regarding implementation and enforcement. This includes poor access to information. Respondents said stakeholders in many landscapes, and especially smallholders, lack market information and methods for improving productivity or quality (see also Nguyen et al. 2023; Mendham et al. 2020).

Respondents highlighted weak capacities of government staff, in relation to regulatory requirements and extension services for example. They also raised the issue of limited implementation and monitoring in some parts of the country, especially in the south (Dang et al. 2019). Examples in the literature include the Provincial People's Committees not adhering to the guidelines and being overly influenced by rubber and hydropower companies when allocating forest land (Hoang et al. 2017). The limited space provided to civil society for oversight was also raised. Finally, Viet Nam's deforestation footprint beyond its borders was mentioned, and is also increasingly acknowledged by the government (Forest Trends 2021a).

# Endnotes

1. Community forestry has different names in different countries — such as social forestry in Indonesia and village forestry in Lao PDR. This report uses 'community forestry' to cover all these approaches.
2. Particularly those on poverty (Goal 1), hunger (Goal 2), gender equality (Goal 5), clean water (Goal 6), reduced inequalities (Goal 10), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), climate action (Goal 13), life on land (Goal 15), and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16).
3. See: [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/regulation-deforestation-free-products\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/regulation-deforestation-free-products_en)
4. NGO Forum Cambodia, Lao Biodiversity Association, Myanmar Environment Rehabilitation-conservation Network (MERN), Raks Thai Foundation, the Center for People and Nature Reconciliation (PanNature), TRAFFIC and NEPCon (now called Preferred by Nature).
5. Through the EU-funded Voices for the Mekong Forests (V4MF) project: [www.recoftc.org/projects/v4mf/about/about-v4mf](http://www.recoftc.org/projects/v4mf/about/about-v4mf)
6. Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) developed between the EU and timber-producing countries under the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan. In 2018, Lao PDR and Thailand were negotiating VPAs with the EU. Viet Nam and the EU had concluded negotiations in 2017 and they signed the VPA in October 2018.
7. For more details, see RECOFTC (2018) and Gritten et al. (2019).
8. Proportions of forest loss resulting from conversion to agriculture, in declining order: Indonesia (94.1%); Cambodia (90%); Lao PDR (80.1%); Viet Nam (70.8%); Thailand (50.6%); Nepal (4.7%).  
See: [www.globalforestwatch.org](http://www.globalforestwatch.org)
9. [www.unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/transparency-and-reporting/preparing-for-the-ETF](http://www.unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/transparency-and-reporting/preparing-for-the-ETF)
10. Data for Net ODA received as a share of central government expenditure are available for Indonesia (0.3%), Nepal (21.8%), and Thailand (0.1%) of the other focus countries.
11. [www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/20201231\\_NDC\\_Update\\_Cambodia.pdf](http://www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/20201231_NDC_Update_Cambodia.pdf)
12. For more information on these three models, see: [www.recoftc.org/recoftc-community-forestry-models-Asia-Pacific](http://www.recoftc.org/recoftc-community-forestry-models-Asia-Pacific)
13. [www.unfccc.int/topics/gender/resources/list-of-gender-focal-points-under-the-unfccc](http://www.unfccc.int/topics/gender/resources/list-of-gender-focal-points-under-the-unfccc)
14. [www.cambodia-redd.org/governance/gender-group.html](http://www.cambodia-redd.org/governance/gender-group.html)
15. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/kh/UNDPKH\\_ENG\\_Cassava-policy.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/kh/UNDPKH_ENG_Cassava-policy.pdf)
16. <https://data.aseanstats.org/trade-annually>
17. Cattle, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, rubber, soya and wood and their derivatives
18. Indonesia has various models of social forestry including some occurring on state forest land and others on non-state forest land. The different models have varying objectives, legal foundations and levels of development. For more information, see: [www.recoftc.org/recoftc-community-forestry-models-Asia-Pacific](http://www.recoftc.org/recoftc-community-forestry-models-Asia-Pacific)
19. [www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-09/23.09.2022\\_Enhanced%20NDC%20Indonesia.pdf](http://www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-09/23.09.2022_Enhanced%20NDC%20Indonesia.pdf)
20. There are three types of FMU – for Production, Protection and Conservation with clearly defined objectives, covering an area of forest that is clearly demarcated and is manageable in size.
21. In 2022, the government reported that Indonesia has over 15.3 million hectares of oil palm plantations (GoI 2023).



22. Including the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of Energy and Mines.
23. The draft Laos Country Action Plan for the Recognition and Formalization of Land Rights in Forest Areas clarifies responsibilities for these two ministries in areas such as the issuance of land use certificates (under the Land Law 2019) and village forest management and protection contracts (under the Forestry Law 2019).
24. PMO 11: Order on Strengthening Strictness on Managing, Protecting, Developing and Utilizing Forest and Forestland; Preventing and Controlling Forest Fires and Encroachment into Forest and Forestland. 21 July 2023
25. HS Codes 071410 and 11081400. Data are from <https://data.aseanstats.org/trade-annually>
26. MONRE (0358/2023) Decision on Categorization of Investment Projects and Activities Requiring Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
27. Prime Minister's Order No. 13: Moratorium on Considering and Approval of the New Concessions on Mineral Prospecting and Exploration, Rubber and Eucalyptus Plantations in the Lao PDR. 2012.
28. Different models of community forestry in Nepal have different objectives and tenure arrangements. For more information, see: [www.recoftc.org/recoftc-community-forestry-models-Asia-Pacific](http://www.recoftc.org/recoftc-community-forestry-models-Asia-Pacific)
29. HS Code 1005
30. HS Code 071410
31. <https://vfcs.org.vn/en/certification-data/>
32. (In Vietnamese) : <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fkhuyennongvn.gov.vn%2Fdata%2Fdocuments%2F0%2F2023%2F08%2F02%2Fhangweb%2Fkhung-khhd-thich-ung-voi-quy-dinh-khong-gay-mat-rung-12-7-2022.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

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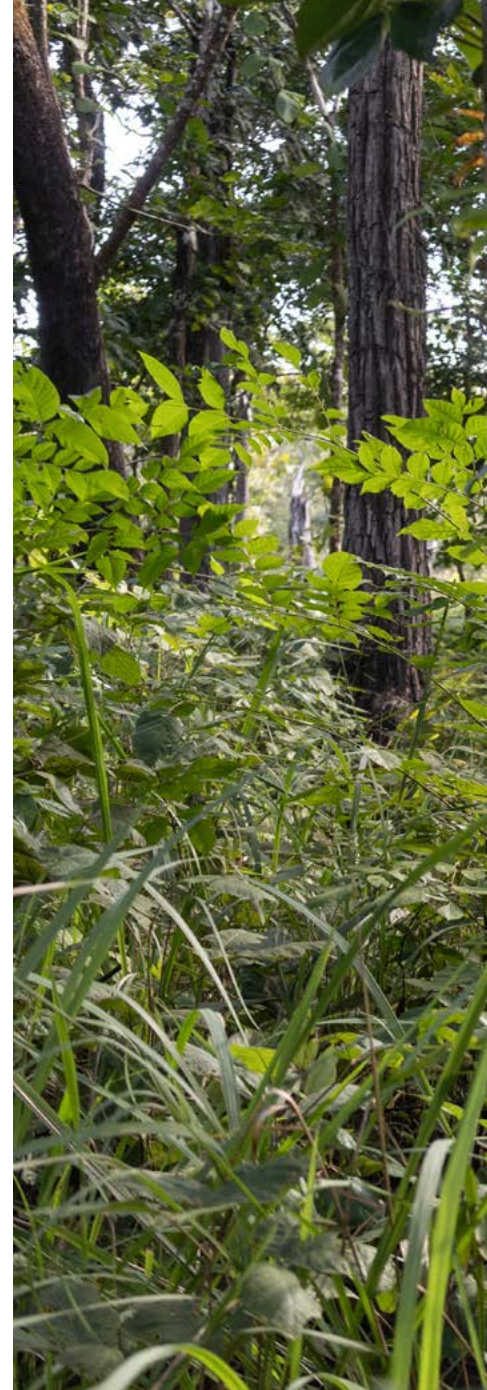
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RECOFTC is an international nonprofit organization working towards a future where resilient communities with respected rights thrive in forest landscapes that they manage sustainably and equitably. We take a long-term, landscape-based and inclusive approach in supporting local communities to secure their land and resource rights, stop deforestation, find alternative livelihoods and foster gender equality. With more than 36 years of experience, we have built trusting relationships with partners from communities, governments, businesses, academia and civil society organizations. Our innovations, knowledge and initiatives enable countries to foster good forest governance, mitigate and adapt to climate change and achieve the UN Global Goals.

We operate in the Asia-Pacific region, with country offices in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam.

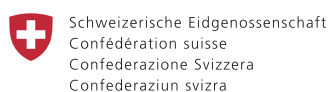


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