Community Forestry and Opportunities for REDD+ in the ASEAN Region

Key Messages:

- REDD+ comes with several risks and challenges. This is particularly true for the 300 million forest-dependent people in the ASEAN region. The participation of local and indigenous people living in and around forests will be critical to the success of REDD+ planning, implementation, and decision making.

- Community forestry, already established with strong policy framework in many ASEAN countries, may provide a useful entry point for engaging local people in REDD+. It puts sustainable forest management into the hands of local people to enhance local and global benefits. When well designed and monitored, community forestry has the potential to contribute to equitable development, improved governance, and management of forests.

- In moving forward, community forestry needs to be strengthened by scaling up and developing the capacity to implement supportive policies, legislation, and institutional frameworks, and by introducing reforms in countries where these supportive mechanisms do not exist.

- The ASEAN Social Forestry Network (ASFN) is playing an important role in supporting these processes, identifying best practices emerging from the region, and sharing the growing body of knowledge and experience.

The ASEAN Region

Climate Change Vulnerability

The ASEAN region is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Many ASEAN countries have long coastlines, numerous islands, low-lying river deltas, and mountainous areas that are susceptible to the impacts of climate change, such as rising sea levels, flooding, landslides, and more frequent storms and droughts. Furthermore, many ASEAN economies are dependent on sectors vulnerable to climate change such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, hydropower, and tourism.
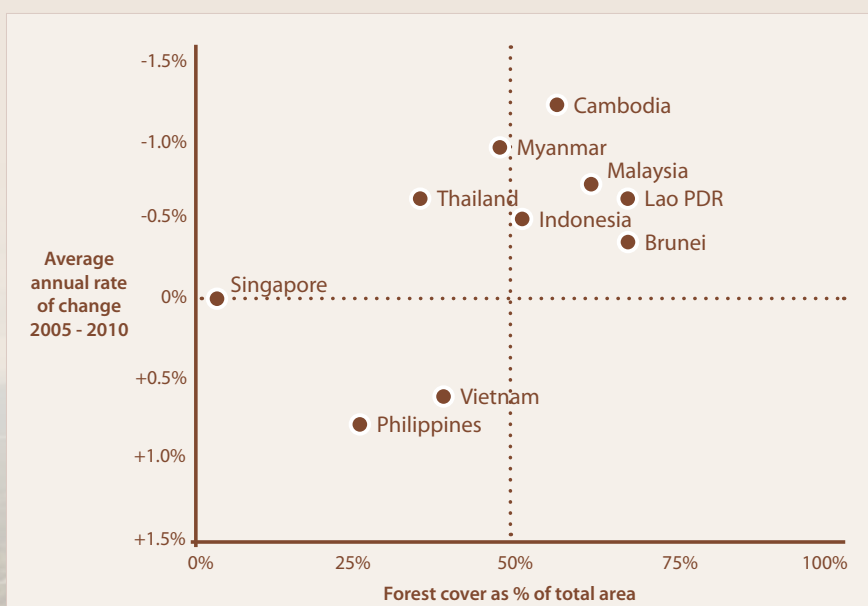
The Importance of Forests in Mitigation and Adaptation

Forests play an important role as they store large amounts of carbon and absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Forest resources help increase the resilience and adaptive abilities of people, infrastructure, and ecosystems to climate change. Accordingly, forest sector strategies throughout the ASEAN region must be an integral part of global action on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Deforestation

The ASEAN region is one of the world's most densely forested areas, with 213 million hectares of forest covering approximately 50% of the total land area. Between 2000 and 2007, the region lost around 18.5 million hectares of forest cover – at an average of around of 1.3% per year. As illustrated in Figure 1, the countries of Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, and Brunei Darussalam have both large amounts of forest cover and high rates of deforestation.

Figure 1: Proportion of Forest Cover and Annual Rates of Change in ASEAN Countries[1]

[1] Analyzed using data from the *Global Forest Resources Assessment Country Reports* (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2010)

Status of REDD+

REDD+ currently presents one of the most promising opportunities for reducing deforestation, conserving forests, improving forest management, and contributing to climate change mitigation in the forest sector. Many ASEAN countries are moving forward with REDD+ through various schemes such as UN-REDD, Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Forest Investment Program (FIP), and a range of bi-lateral and multi-lateral programs.

Table 1: Examples of ASEAN Member States' Involvement in REDD+

Country	Involvement in REDD+ Programs			
	FCPF	UN-REDD	FIP	Others
Cambodia	Yes	Yes	No	National commitment to maintain forest cover at 60%
Indonesia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cooperation with Norway-Indonesia REDD+ Partnership, the Kalimantan Forests and Climate Partnership and other organizations. Commitment to reduce emissions by 26% by business as usual and 41% with foreign assistance
Lao PDR	Yes	No	Yes	National commitment to reforestation and forest regeneration in Forest Strategy 2020
Malaysia	No	No	No	National commitment to maintain forest cover at 50% of total land area
Myanmar	No	No	No	None, but capacity building on REDD+ began in 2011
Philippines	No	Yes (Observer)	No	National REDD+ Strategy, July 2010, potential Forest Investment Program country in next round
Thailand	Yes	No	No	10th National Economic and Social Development Plan commits to retain forest cover at 33% of land area
Vietnam	Yes	Yes	No	Bilateral support from the Norwegian government for capacity building for REDD+ at grassroots level

Community Forestry in the ASEAN Region

Extent of Locally Managed Forests

In the last two decades, many ASEAN countries have been gradually devolving forest management responsibility and authority to local communities. At present, approximately 8% of forest land in ASEAN is managed by local people, although this proportion varies from country to country due to different stages of community forestry and tenure reform (see Table 2). The Philippines, Lao PDR, and Vietnam have especially large proportions of forest under community management. Cambodia plans to increase the area of legally recognized community forest from 1% to 10% of its total forest area by 2030. In Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand, the amount of forest managed by local people is comparatively smaller, with typically 1% or less of forest land officially under community management.

Forest Rights, Policies, and Legal Frameworks

In some ASEAN countries, local people's rights to long-term ownership and access to forest land are not well-defined. In others, community forestry is established as a strategy for sustainable forest management, with the necessary legal, policy, and institutional frameworks in place to govern the engagement of local people. In most cases, however, these frameworks need to be strengthened and broadened to include other human rights' issues facing forest-dependent communities.

Strengthening Community Forestry for REDD+ in ASEAN – The Way Forward

Initial experience with subnational REDD+ pilot projects is encouraging, but there are many challenges to be addressed if REDD+ is to be effective on a broader scale. These challenges include secured recognition of land rights; more inclusive engagement of local people in forest management; development of the appropriate policies, laws, and institutional frameworks; and building the capacity of all stakeholders to participate effectively.

Promoting the Participation of Local People in REDD+

In the ASEAN region, some 300 million people live in rural areas, and over 20% of these people are highly dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods. Many communities have managed forest resources for hundreds of years using traditional forest management systems. In order for REDD+ to be a viable long-term strategy for reducing deforestation and forest degradation, these people need to be fully involved in all stages of REDD+ including consent, planning, development, implementation, monitoring, and benefit sharing. This includes having their say in the initial approval and development of REDD+ in accordance with their rights to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), as well as in local-level decision making and development of forest management plans for forest areas under REDD+.

The participation of local and indigenous peoples in REDD+ will ensure the representation of their needs and interests. The lack thereof could result in their exclusion from forest resources, as well as the potential benefits of REDD+.

In practical terms, local and indigenous people's rights to access forest land must be recognized and secure land tenure arrangements must be clarified. Likewise, benefit sharing mechanisms must be established to reward them for forest protection and compensate them for lost revenues from alternative land uses.

Table 2: Forestland Under Community Management[2]

Country	Hectares	% of Total Forest Area
Brunei	N/A	N/A
Cambodia	113,544	1%
Indonesia	590,000	<1%
Lao PDR	8,210,803	52%
Malaysia	N/A	N/A
Myanmar	41,000	<1%
Philippines	2,985,000	39%
Singapore	N/A	N/A
Thailand	194,000	1%
Vietnam	3,300,000	24%

Lessons from Cambodia

Emerging lessons from a REDD+ pilot project in Oddar Meanchey in Cambodia indicate that when forest-based communities have secure, long-term tenure and access to forest resources, they develop a genuine sense of forest ownership and a greater commitment to forest protection efforts. The involvement of local people in forest protection activities is proving to be an effective strategy in addressing many of the local drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. Experience also shows that with basic training, local people are able to assess changes in carbon stocks in their forests, which could provide a cost-effective alternative or an addition to resource-intensive inventories conducted by external experts.

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[2] Data derived from the country profiles in *The Role of Social Forestry in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in the ASEAN Region* (RECOFTC, ASFN, SDC, 2011).

Developing Effective Institutions

Supportive policies and legislative frameworks are necessary to advance community forestry. Yet on their own, community forestry laws and policies and the recognition and allocation of land rights are not enough to guarantee forest protection. Other factors, including governance systems and effective local institutions are also important. In the Philippines, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Myanmar, policies, laws, and guidelines for community engagement in forest management have been developed. But in some cases, the implementation of community forestry remains limited, due to a lack of capacity within both local government and forest-based communities. The legal and policy frameworks for community forestry must be updated and adapted to accommodate REDD+. Nonetheless, they provide a foundation for the participation of local people in REDD+, as well as the equitable distribution of potential benefits.

Capacity Building

The capacity to implement social forestry and the awareness of climate change mitigation schemes vary considerably from country to country, and between different stakeholder groups. Extensive capacity development at all levels will be essential in developing and implementing REDD+, particularly in a way that fosters the participatory and pro-poor principles of community forestry. Stakeholders will need to develop new knowledge, skills, and expertise in order to effectively design, develop, implement, and monitor REDD+. The capacity of government forest agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities will need to be strengthened. Local-level forest protection measures will need to be improved, along with the knowledge and capacity of national and local forest protection and law enforcement agencies, so they can effectively enforce forest protection laws. Systems for monitoring, reporting, and verifying changes in forest carbon stocks at the local level – in addition to systems for managing benefit distribution (social safeguards) – will need to be developed.

The Role of the ASFN in Knowledge Sharing and Best Practice

The ASFN will assist all ASEAN member countries in efforts to reduce deforestation and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Namely, it will help to identify emerging best practices in community forestry and REDD+ and share experience and lessons throughout the region and beyond. Furthermore, ASFN could support the capacity building of member governments in community forestry and REDD+, as well as support further research into the regional potential of community forestry to contribute to climate change adaptation.

The ASFN will promote the participation of local people in the design and planning stages of REDD+. In practical terms, local and indigenous people's rights to access forest land must be recognized, and land tenure arrangements must be clarified and secured. Likewise, benefit-sharing mechanisms must be established to reward them for forest protection and compensate them for lost revenues from alternative land uses. To advance these processes, the ASFN can facilitate communications between stakeholders at the grassroots and policy levels.

Conclusion

Forest management and community forestry have developed along different paths and at different speeds in each ASEAN country, resulting in varying degrees and stages of legal rights and effective participatory opportunities across the region. An increasing proportion of forestland is being designated for community forestry in the region. However, the legal, policy, and institutional frameworks enabling local participation in sustainable forest management can be improved. Nevertheless, they provide a useful platform for the development of national plans for REDD+.

REDD+ presents the most promising opportunity for action on climate change mitigation within the forest sector. Community forestry can provide a useful entry point to link local-level forest management with REDD+ strategies, particularly in terms of engaging local people in the design, development, implementation, and monitoring of REDD+. If appropriately designed and managed, REDD+ also has the potential to go beyond climate change mitigation and contribute to protecting forests and improving livelihoods. To promote REDD+ in the ASEAN region, the ASFN will play a critical role in knowledge sharing and promoting best practices of community forestry.

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