

MEKONG BASIN SYMPOSIUM ON FOREST LAW ENFORCEMENT

Introduction

East Asia has significant natural resources, but also has the highest rate of deforestation and forest degradation in the world. Illegal logging and other forest crimes contribute to this destruction and are therefore a major concern, especially in the Mekong Basin countries. Numerous studies, including reports from environmental groups, have documented the extent of forest crime and its associated negative social, environmental, and economic impacts. These include, for example, the economic failure in Cambodia to capture \$77 (US million) revenue on illegally exported logs and lumber. Environmental impacts include destruction in protected forest areas, and the corresponding loss and threat to the preservation of plant and wildlife biodiversity in these reserves. Social impacts include adversely affecting forest dependent people whose local community forest rights have been largely ignored. These impacts are felt in all countries in the region and the chances of containing this illegal trade and its corresponding impacts could be greatly improved by strengthening the technical basis for forest law enforcement in individual countries. In some cases a multi-country regional approach could make a positive contribution.

Policies and approaches for reducing forest destruction need to address governance, policies, institutions, investments, and the relatively neglected area of forest law enforcement. Law enforcement needs to be much more sensitive than in the past to social and environmental concerns, and needs to be strengthened perhaps foremost through the development of professionalism and management capacity. Forest crimes of highest concern include illegal logging, encroachment, endangered species trade, arson, archaeological and cultural resource theft, and non-timber extraction. An international symposium on forest law enforcement is being organized to help more fully integrate enforcement into the forest management programs in the Mekong Basin region of Southeast Asia. This Symposium is being developed in cooperation with the Royal Government of Cambodia. Senior level government officials in Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand have expressed interest in participating, and the World Bank, and other organizations are supporting this initiative. At this time, the location and tentative timeframe for the symposium is Phnom Penh in mid 1999.

Purpose: Bringing awareness to the problem through discussions, presentations, and break-out sessions to develop dialogue on the extent of the problem, formulate alternative solutions and country and regional approaches for action. Successful forest law enforcement programs are built around the principles of prevention, detection and suppression. Therefore, the Symposium will place emphasis on these principles in guiding attendees in formulating suggestions for action.

Objectives

The objectives of this symposium are:

- To review the social, environmental, and economic costs of illegal logging and forest product trade in the Mekong Basin countries.
- To identify the underlying causes of illegal logging and forest related crimes.
- To engage representatives of national governments, business interests, local communities, non-government agencies and international experts, in a review of alternative law enforcement strategies and to develop recommendations both for national and collaborative regional action.
- To fully integrate law enforcement into the planning process and forest management program in ways that:
 - Consider the entire forest environment and its resources and their known or potential value as commercial products when designing a law enforcement program.
 - Carefully analyze all violations to determine vulnerabilities and opportunities so that proper prevention measures can be taken.
 - Prioritize enforcement actions against serious offenders, and develop administrative alternatives and options for minor infractions.

Agenda Components

Part I - This session of the Symposium will be devoted to the analysis of the underlying causes of illegal logging and other forest crimes. For Cambodia most of this information will come from earlier studies commissioned by Government with World Bank support. For the other Mekong Basin countries teams of national experts will develop the necessary background material from their experiences and studies of managing their forests and protected areas. Issues such as weaknesses in forest law, inappropriate forest land classification, lack of transparency and accountability in managing commercial forest products, failure to adhere to sustainable annual cuts or removal of other forest products, failure to involve local communities, weakness in revenue collection, inadequate log tracking and accountability, weaknesses in forest harvesting and management monitoring, failure to restrict logging in protected areas, illegal export of round logs and sawn timber will be reviewed and discussed in detail. Presentations by each Mekong Basin country team will involve reviewing background papers prepared for discussion at the Symposium on the social, environmental, and economic costs. Some of the key sections that each country will address in their background paper include:

(i) social costs

- land use conflicts
- restricted access
- sustainable yield
- sources of subsistence and income for rural households

(ii) environmental cost

- encroachment into Protected Areas
- deforestation
- loss of biodiversity and wildlife
- illegal trade in endangered wild life species

(iii) economic cost

- revenue loss
- collapse of the timber industry
- dependence on import of forest products for domestic needs

Part II - This part of the Symposium will be devoted to presentations by experts from around the world on examples of successes in controlling illegal logging, other forest products, cultural resources or rare and endangered wildlife species.

Part III - Another aspect to this part of the Symposium will focus on strategies and policy options for a more effective forests and protected area law enforcement program in each of the Mekong Basin countries. Conclusions and recommendations of various studies of forest policy and harvesting practices carried out between 1996 and 1998 will be debated. Recommendations for actions can then be prepared that can be transmitted to the regional governments for their consideration.

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