National Working Groups on Community Involvement in Forest Management in Mainland Southeast Asia

- Cambodia -
  - Laos -
  - Thailand -
  - Vietnam -

AN EXPLORATION OF THEIR POTENTIAL WITH A CURRENT REVIEW OF THEIR PROGRESS

Prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

-Margaret Mead

Government planners and development specialists in Asia are increasingly cognizant of the important roles communities need to play in the management of natural resources. Programs are beginning to emerge that allow increased opportunities for communities to participate in the management of state forest lands. Major policy and institutional reforms in the forestry sector, however, have been slow to take place, especially the creation of new tenure instruments that transfer formal authority to communities as resource managers. While many Asian nations are seeking ways to engage communities in resource protection and sustainable use, there are few processes or mechanisms that support forest policy transitions, bureaucratic reorientation, and new field level operating systems that encourage community management. The Philippines, Nepal, and other nations are finding that establishing national working groups that focus on community forest management (CFM) issues can provide a forum for examining, monitoring, and accelerating progress in this area.

This report explores prospects for establishing a network of national Working Groups on Community Involvement in Forest Management (WG-CIFM) in Mainland Southeast Asia. The initiative is based on a collaboration between the Asia Forest Network (AFN), the GTZ-funded Sustainable Resource Management Program of the Mekong River Commission, RECOFTC, and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The four country-level policy dialogues began in November 1998 in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam with three national Working Group (WG) meetings held. This report suggests strategies for working groups development and provides individual country reviews drawing on WG meetings, individual discussions, field visits, and background documents.

Currently, each working group is collating all available documentation related to forest management from project reports, case studies, donor assessments, sector reviews, government publications, and other literature. The literature review will be used to establish pre-existing knowledge regarding the state of traditional systems of community forest management, as well as emerging strategies being employed by local people to sustain their natural resource base. Country papers will be written over the coming year to summarize the national policy environment bearing on CFM, as well as field conditions in the major contexts presented above.

The Working Groups seek support to implement their work program over the coming five years. Funding will be utilized to support regular group meetings, the activities of facilitators and secretariats that will prepare agendas, publish and disseminate the minutes of meetings, as well as country reports, case studies, and policy recommendations. To promote exchanges within the region, the Working Groups are also seeking support to allow for cross-national exchanges, hire consultants for special policy reviews and field documentation, and the establishment of a regular newsletter.

Currently, Dr. Mark Poffenberger is acting as the Working Group Advisor for the Mainland Southeast Asia Region. National Working Group Coordinators are Dr. Hans Helmrich (Vietnam), Doug Henderson (Cambodia), and Manfred Fischer (Laos). In the coming months the organizers hope to solicit interest and identify member participation for the Working Groups (WG). If you would like additional information please contact:

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THAILAND

Not Available at this time
WORKING GROUP PROGRAM

Objectives

The primary objective of the Working Groups (WGs) is to facilitate and accelerate the establishment of national Community Forest Management (CFM) strategies. The broad agenda of each group is to assess the state of Community Forest Management (CFM), both indigenous systems and externally sponsored projects, to analyze constraints and opportunities affecting community forest management efforts, and propose policy and program recommendations to government and relevant development agencies. Working Group (WG) should be convened by an appropriate government agency, typically the national Department of Forestry, while drawing its membership from a select group of government (GO) and non-government organizations (NGO), donor agencies, and academic institutions directly engaged with CFM related programs. WG members, however, would come together as individual professionals, rather than as representatives of their respective organizations.

The most effective WGs meet regularly to discuss preliminary results and decide what policy and programmatic steps need to be taken to support developing CFM programs. It is intended that the WG would be able to sustain their interactions for at least five years to assist in guiding participatory forest management transitions. The groups would meet at least two to four times annually to progressively clarify issues and build consensus regarding strategies to strengthen CFM. The groups would also act as an informal advisory body to government planners and multi- and bi-lateral agencies seeking to invest in the forestry sector.

Formalizing the WG is important to give it greater credibility. Minimally, a formal name and logo should be created, with special letterhead stationery produced. Members could be given special cards with the WG logo and address. WGs should be structured and their functions adjusted to respond to national initiatives, institutions and needs.

This report suggest a number of strategies for organizing and operating country-level working groups on CFM, including facilitation, group structure and function. The report also briefly summarizes community forest management contexts, needs, and opportunities in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, highlighting important issues. The findings are based on preliminary meetings held in November 1998, as well as interviews and field visits.

Facilitator

Working Groups should select one or more facilitators who would act as part time coordinators for members. The facilitator would be responsible for maintaining communication with members between meetings, preparing agendas and sending invitations regarding meetings, facilitating WG meetings, writing minutes, and following-up on recommendations for action. The facilitator would also be a point person and primary dissemination point for WG reports and findings. The degree to which WGs conduct field studies, policy reviews, and other specialized primary research and assessments would depend on their priorities, time availability, and funding.

Setting the Agenda

The facilitator should consult with Working Group members to determine the agenda for each meeting. Priority issues should be identified and supportive information gathered in the form of policy analysis exercises, case studies, or development project reviews. Decide who will act as meeting moderator, present the agenda, keep the discussion on task, and who will record the minutes. Keep the agenda short enough to be completed during the normal period the WG meets. Send out the agenda at least two weeks in advance. If necessary, brief selected members about key agenda items prior to the meeting.

Meetings

Follow the agenda closely. Begin by reviewing minutes of the previous meeting. Discuss progress on issues that required follow-up to determine what progress had been made. Take one issue at a time and allow members sufficient time to discuss topics. Before proceeding to the next topic, resolve decisions required for
further action and the form that action will take, and identify who will be responsible. At the close of the meeting review all decisions to ensure the agreement of the chairman and group members. Before breaking up, it may be useful to set a date for the next WG meeting.

**Minutes**

Write-up WG minutes as soon after meeting as possible. Keep minutes short. They should follow the order of issues raised in the meeting agenda, if possible. Review the draft minutes with the senior FD officer under whose name the minutes will be sent. Minutes should be distributed within a week after the WG meeting.

**Follow-up Actions**

The agenda setting period should meet again within a reasonable period of time to discuss progress in implementing the actions decided upon at the WG meeting. These may include resolutions, joint management agreements, instructions, training programs and materials development, new procedures, or research projects.

**Suggested Activities**

Working group facilitators have observed that effective policy dialogues need strong leadership, active members, a clear agenda, and an appropriate structure to achieve their objectives. Many WGs evolve through a series of activities of the types outlined below:

**Preparing a Policy Change Strategy**

In preparing a policy change strategy, a number of steps need to be undertaken. The following list indicates some factors that may create a context where policy change is possible. WGs should be aware of these factors and consciously track their status.

1) Create a dialogue among key actors

Policy change often requires a consensus among a variety of stakeholders. It is the role of the facilitator to set this process in motion. The facilitator may begin by taking the following steps:

- discuss CFM issues with them individually
- organize an initial meeting to share CFM experiences
- establish a CFM working group

2) Assess targets of opportunity and their characteristics

Change is easier when social pressures are building to modify existing policies and practices. It is important for the WG to identify where opportunities are emerging to reform laws, plans, or programs that impact community forest management. Such opportunities may be reflected in such conditions as:

- increased public attention to policy failures
- political changes (ie. new leadership)
- growing grassroots action
- changes in funding flows
- interest in collaboration by other agencies/staff

3) Identify policy issues

It is important for WGs to develop a clear understanding of the types of policies that should be targeted for change. These vary according to history and past approaches to public lands policy formulation. Policies may be formal instruments, or less formal operating guidelines used by agencies. Some policies are very influential while others have little impact, so it is important to identify policies that will effect behavior if they are changed.

The following activities can help the group to identify policy targets:
• review forest history and macro trends
• understand the legal and policy framework affecting state forest lands (ie. laws, 5 year plan goals, etc.)
• analyze forestry sector achievements and failures emerging from government policies and donor supported programs
• identify constraints
• explore alternative policy and programmatic strategies for success
• formulate recommendations for action

Implementing a Policy Change Strategy

For a WG to be effective in changing policy strategy it needs to maintain the commitment of its members and a clear sense of mission. The following are important elements in effective operations:

• meet regularly - create a sense of group identity
• develop a consensus-driven action agenda
• assign roles and responsibilities
• record agenda and minutes of meetings and distribute to key actors

1) Activities

The WG needs to have activities that allow members to synthesize a broad range of information. The following activities may facilitate the learning process:

• identify experiences, projects, and areas where relevant knowledge exists
• organize diagnostic studies, cross-visits, and other activities that bring attention to important learning
• continue to design and adapt the action strategy to reinforce efforts to see that working group recommendations are implemented
• identify indicators and benchmarks of change to reflect the adoption of working group recommendations
• monitor the sector for second generation problems and achievements

2) Communication

Learning among WG members is an important step towards policy change, but it must be followed by communication of findings. Multiple channels should be developed to feed ideas to policy makers.

• develop a documentation program, publish and disseminate findings to strategic audiences
• carry the message to planners and policy makers and enlist their support
• publish periodic reports to assess where progress is occurring and to identify constraints

Research

It is important that the WG develop a list of major issues effecting CFM systems through in-depth discussions with rural people, field staff, forest administrators, and planners. Based on these issues research teams may develop study programs. Research should be coordinated with forest department staff and villagers using rapid assessment techniques:

• group interviews,
• key informant interviews,
• meeting documentation,
• triangulation,
• village records,
• visual observation,
• map-based discussions

During the course of information collection the researchers should allow time to assess research progress, redesigning the study and research issues while in the field. Each day the team will need to discuss their findings. Data should be written-up as soon as possible after debriefing, describing the primary objectives of the study, listing key issues and findings and discussing recommended follow-up actions. Research reports should be distributed to all WG members.

Mainland Southeast Asia Work Plan
In the fall of 1998, national working group on community forest management were formed in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. This initiative was facilitated cooperatively by the Asia Forest Network, the World Conservation Union, the Sustainable Resource Management Program (SRMP) of GTZ, and the Mekong River Commission. The objective of each Working Group is to explore policy and operational strategies to strengthen the role of communities in managing forest resources and upland watershed. The groups are convened by the national forestry agencies, but have members from relevant NGOs, academic institutions, research centers, and donor agencies. WG members participate as individual professionals, rather than as agency representatives, however the recommendations of the groups will be conveyed to their relevant government and nongovernmental organizations.

The initial assignment for the 1998-1999 time period is to develop clear definitions of the CFM within each country context. Due to the diversity present in each nation, Working Groups will also attempt to develop an analytic framework for examining major contexts within which CFM policies and programs are or maybe implemented. During initial meetings the following contexts have been identified for study:

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<tr>
<th>Vietnam</th>
<th>Laos</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>North and Eastern</td>
<td>Upland Hill Tracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
<td>Western and Southern</td>
<td>Lowland Flood Plain</td>
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<td>Midlands</td>
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Each WG clearly needs to delineate a sequential work plan if it is to maintain momentum and a sense of direction. During our November meetings, a number of WGs suggested creating analytic frameworks to sort out issues at the policy and program level. Below are examples of the types of activities each group may want to pursue, both in the short term and in the long term. They are listed within an approximate time frame. Each WG will need to further identify its own priorities and adopt a work schedule appropriate for its human and financial resources.

**Short Term**

**January:** A regional Southeast Asia Report on WG groups will be distributed to all WG members. Follow-up WG meetings will be convened. Some WG purpose to use the next round of meetings to further clarify social and environmental contexts where CFM strategies exist or may be implemented, including major human-forest use systems, tenurial relations, conflicts, opportunities, program and policy support needs.

**February:** WG members will review background literature regarding each context. What studies have already been done, particularly field level research? What type of issues have been raised? The WG could divide into sub-groups, each responsible for one type of context.

**March:** Sub-groups conduct short, PRA studies to fill in missing data. *(Note: the groups should use the same methodological approach.)* Working group field visits will help illuminate operational issues and build member relations.

**April:** The WG would meet with each sub-group presenting its findings. Then, a series of analyses to compare and contrast patterns, issues, and problems could be conducted.

**May:** Prepare a report on the outcome of the CFM diagnostic as a national overview with implications for policy and programming clearly delineated. This report should include a variety of definitions for CFM contexts.

**May-June:** Hold discussions with development agencies and government. Organize special meetings to present WG-CFM findings. The WG could target specific projects, programs, loan development processes, and training activities where its materials could be applied.

**Long Term**

The long-term goal of the WG-CFM should be to continue to provide a framework for CFM professionals to work collaboratively and share experience and information. With larger multi-
lateral and bi-lateral projects pulling in different directions there is danger of further fragmentation of efforts and scattering of learning. Competition and jealousy can also pull the professional community apart. It is important that an attempt be made to sustain the group as individuals committed to improving the position of communities in relation to the forest base and the sequential expansion of understanding regarding strategies and policies that work. A stronger consensus among the local professional community can help guard against outside consulting teams making poor recommendation.

Long-term outputs of the WG should include high quality country reports, policy assessment papers, and other documents that can be read by policy makers and development agency staff. The AFN has found such documents are powerful tools for influencing thinking, but require significant time investment and budgets. Nonetheless, such publications can put the WG-CIFM on the map. The feasibility of this long-term effort will likely be determined by the effectiveness of the group over the next six months.

INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY REVIEWS

This section briefly reviews forestry contexts in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. Current trends in forest use and conservation, policy environments, threats and opportunities affecting community management are considered. Finally, operational strategies and issues for the newly establishing country-level working groups are reviewed. The material presented here is taken from the November working group meetings, interviews with working group members, field trips, and secondary documents and reports.

Mainland Southeast Asian countries have a long and rich tradition of community-based forest management. These traditions, however, have been disrupted by the colonial policies of the French-Indochina government, as well as by the social disruption occurring during wars of independence, and subsequent socialist governance structures. Since the mid-1980s, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have all embarked on economic restructuring strategies (known as Doi Moi in Vietnam). While responsive to the needs of small farmers and creating new opportunities for foreign investors, these new policy strategies have not provided a framework to restore effective community-based resource management, especially in upland watersheds. With the exception of Laos, no community forest management policies exist within the region. There is a need to explore how both traditional systems of communal resource use can be strengthened, as well as newly emerging local initiatives to sustain the natural resource base. Since most upland communities are highly dependent on natural resources for subsistence needs and as a source of cash income, creating a supportive policy and programmatic environment to allow sustainable use, encourage labor and capital investment by local people, and enhance productivity, remain important goals.

CAMBODIA

Background

The rapid exploitation of Cambodia’s forests has received growing attention by the outside world over the past decade. Logging bans in Thailand put increasing pressure on Cambodian forests as Thai generals made alliances with both Khmer Rouge leaders and with the Vietnamese backed government to exploit forests resources that covered nearly 70 percent of the land area. Knowledge of the unregulated, high volumes of logs being transported across the Thai and Vietnamese borders received international attention based on reports of illicit logging activities within Cambodia.

During the 1997-98 dry season, it is estimated that between 200,000 to 400,000 cubic meters of logs were exported from Rattanakiri Province to Vietnam. On the other side of the country, in Battambang Province, 125,000 cubic meters went across the border to Thailand. Nationwide, it is estimated that some 4 million cubic meters of timber is being exported from the country, reflecting at least four times the level of sustainable harvest. A World Bank report concludes that 94 percent of timber exports are illegal because of illicit felling and transport practices, failure to pay government fees, or other causes.

Forest cover has fallen to an estimated 40 to 58 percent of total land cover, depending on the definition used. This is a decline from the 73 percent level that prevailed in the 1960s. Thirty-nine percent of the land area has been allocated to larger timber concessions, many of which are joint ventures with Malaysian Chinese firms.
Thousands of communities are located within the concession areas and hold usufruct rights to that land under customary law and are heavily dependent on it for their cash income, agricultural land, and subsistence needs. Forty percent of Cambodian’s live in absolute poverty and much of their income is derived from common property resources like forests and fisheries. Government policies that allocate large parts of the resource base to outside commercial interests directly cut into the income available for a large segment of the population.

The strongest argument for CFM in Cambodia should stress the economic importance of forests to most rural communities, both directly through forest product flows and by sustaining farming and fishery systems. At the same time, given the demonstrated failure of government to impose sustainable systems of industrial forest utilization, locally resident communities have both the incentive and proximity to control access, if legally empowered to do so. Given that the population of 10 million will likely double in the next 25 years, conserving the resource base for what will probably continue to be a rural resource-dependent nation is a reasonable strategy.

Current Trends: Implications for the Working Group

In 1996, The World Bank provided an estimated $3 to $4 million loan to the Cambodian Government to conduct a series of diagnostic studies and forest management planning exercises. The program covered the following areas:

- **Forest Policy Reform Studies** - This component was contracted by ARD, Inc. of Burlington, Vermont and was managed by Jim Carle. Of the 15-20 research papers produced, most focused on a policy framework to handle revenue generation from the timber trade, though a number of studies were on CFM issues. Particularly helpful are community case studies by consultants Rebecca Butterfield and Chea Sam Ang.

- **Legal Review of Forest Concession Contracts** – This component was contracted by White & Case, Inc., a legal firm that reviewed the legal dimensions of concession contracting. It would be useful to review their findings for discussion of customary law and community forestland claims.

- **Guidelines for Forest Concession Management** – FORTECH won the contract for this work. The work included developing a Cambodian forest code of practice, monitoring systems, and regulatory framework. Their reports are quite technical and appear to have little reference to community issues.

- **Log Monitoring and Control Project** - This component went to Development Alternatives International (DAI). The studies provide some interesting information on illegal logging levels, however much of the focus of the work was placed on developing policing mechanisms for funding under the second phase of the World Bank loan.

The World Bank reviews generated at least 69 separate reports during 1997 and 1998. Project leader, Bill McGrath, was visiting Phnom Penh with a second phase project design team during November 1998. An important concern of the World Bank team appears to be transforming the Cambodian commercial logging industry into one that is regulated in terms of technical operations on the ground and fiscally, with a reasonable capture of revenues for government. Bank project leaders seek guarantees from the nearly appointed Cambodian Forest Department Director General, Ty Sokun.

The World Bank wants to know that there is a political commitment to bringing the logging industry under control. The problem is that the Department of Forestry (DOF) does have meaningful control over the allocation of forest concessions. The Prime Minister and a number of senior Generals in the Cambodian Army exercise considerable influence over forest license agreements. The DOF receives instructions after the fact. Frequently, the concessions granted are in conflict with existing forest management plans, including designated protected areas or pre-existing timber concessions. As in the Philippines and Indonesia, the granting of forest concessions is one of the most valuable “chips” on the national political poker table. And, the most powerful people in the country typically control them, while the leaders of the technical agencies, like DOF, do as they are told or lose their positions.

At the ground level, the DOF staffing levels are limited, with perhaps 5 or 6 men working out of a provincial office. According to one DOF staff person who has worked as a provincial forest officer, he was frequently turned away from entering a forest concession by the military. The senior commander in the region told him that he must receive permission from the officer each time he wanted to visit logging areas. Given this situation, it is clear that the DOFs authority is limited both in forming policy and in controlling forest management on the ground. Since illegal timber operations are the primary source of income for the military and the political parties and leadership running Cambodia, it is hard to imagine that even a large World Bank loan would have a major impact on existing practices. It was reported that the World Bank would like to see the government capture $75 million dollars annually from the logging trade, but was backing off on their
expectations and considering $35 million as a compromise position. It seems possible that some agreement with military and political leaders might be worked out. It is also a possibility the World Bank’s demand for additional funds generated for government might only intensify logging, especially since it would be justified by a multi-lateral agency. The Project Manager might be eager to work out a deal in order to package the loan, which is already running behind schedule.

The World Bank loan process is important to track, since it will be the most influential outside initiative shaping Cambodian forest policy. A number of the Cambodian WG members met with the World Bank team including Doug Henderson, Chea Sam Ang at MOF, and Ken Serey Rotha from MOE. Unfortunately, because the WG does not yet have a clear identity, mission, or consensus for action recommendations, its influence will be limited. However, this could change provided the group can focus its attention of a few specific issues. Clear, well-articulated statements for CFM strategy could be incorporated into loan agreements that could help move reforms forward. Attention will need to be made to linking specific policy reforms to program strategies.

**Forest Policy**

Under the old Forest Law (no.35) all forestland belongs to the state. After the 1993 election, the King requested that the government revise forest management systems in the country, along with the establishment of a protected area system. As part of the World Bank/FAO/UNDP strategy in Cambodia, a review of forest policy is underway. In 1996, a sub-decree was drafted concerning CFM. Interestingly, few members of the working group have actually seen the draft document. Neither Vol Vathana nor Ken Serey Rotha had seen a copy, though Doug Henderson may have one. According to Rotha, the process has been quite nontransparent, though he thinks Che Sam Ang may have written this. The original CFM subdecree was limited to extending community forest management rights to villages with degraded forest or plantation land. Primary and secondary forests are not mentioned. The sub-decree was withdrawn from the Council of Ministers along with a broader draft of the new Forestry Law. Ken Rotha feels that the new policy will likely be approved before the end of 1999. This means the WG-CIFM will need to develop policy positions over the next three to six months if it is to input its ideas into the policy development process.

The National Secretariat for Policy Reform was created by the government to review new policies. The ADB is attempting to make a loan for policy development and organizational capacity building within DOF. Ken McDicken is the program officer for this initiative based at the ADB office in Manila. CFM assessments, including a regional study tour may be supported under this program. AFN may be positioned to assist in this process, as the two countries being considered are the Philippines and Laos.

**Considerations for the Working Group**

It is important for the WG to clarify its objectives. During the WG meeting on November 19th, Mao Kosel noted that "we need to start the WG to lobby government to get CFM policy on track to address issues of sustainable use." Chea Sam Ang noted the favorable orientation of the World Bank, UNDP and Asia Development Bank regarding CFM, but noted the need for the WG to act as a center point of experience from traditional communities, NGO and donor projects, and local government. Doug Henderson stressed the need to facilitate cooperation between government agencies, donors, and NGOs, and to collect and organize existing data.

**Linkages**

The Cambodian WG will be most influential if it is able to form an alliance among key actors in the forestry sector that advocate for greater community involvement in management. Currently, there is a good deal of competition among the government actors, as well as foreign development agencies, NGOs, and NGIs. Young professionals from DOF and MOE need to have opportunities to work together in collaborative programs. The WG might help provide this setting. Building structural linkages or at least cooperative activities between the Community Forestry Unit at MOE and the CFU at DOF could also help create bridges.

Concern, an international NGO, has been playing an important role in developing CFM activities, while the Mennonite Project in Takeo Province is instructive. IUCN’s NTFP program in the Northeast has also been extremely productive in terms of generating a flow of case studies illuminating conditions among ethnic minorities and forest use in that part of the country.

**Membership**
The current composition of WG-CFM membership looks as follows:

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<tr>
<th>MOE</th>
<th>DOF</th>
<th>NGO/IGOs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ken Serey Rotha</td>
<td>Che Sam Ang</td>
<td>Wayne Gum</td>
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<td>Hou Kalyan</td>
<td>Lao Sethaphal</td>
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<td>Lun Kimhy</td>
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<td>Kol Vathana</td>
<td>Noah/Martha</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>David Ashwell-IGO</td>
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<td>Doug Henderson</td>
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One question is how to tie in project level people working in the field. There are a lot of Cambodians and foreigners working in Rattanakiri, Siem Riep, and other provinces. Logistics is a problem, but perhaps once the country typology emerges, it will allow the WG to set-up sub-groups for each area with links to local field staff.

**LAOS**

Laos is a country of nearly 5 million people, 90 percent of whom are dependent on subsistence use of natural resources. Resource use systems are diverse reflecting the many ethnic communities resident in the country. The majority of the population is lowland Lao (Lao Lum, 55 percent). Other groups are broadly divided between the Lao Theung (midland Lao, 30 percent) and the Lao Sung (highland Lao, 15 percent). Midland Lao tribes include the Khu and Htin, while highland Lao are comprised of Hmong, Akha and other groups. The lowland Lao largely practice rainfed-bunded rice agriculture on permanent fields, while the upland ethnic minority groups are predominantly swidden cultivators, although their long rotation fallow cycle systems vary widely. In most communities, forest dependence is high, both for subsistence goods and for NTFPs that provide a source of cash.

Most of Laos is subject to a seasonal monsoon climate. Much of the forests are evergreen, covering 70 percent of the nation’s land area, or about 17 million hectares in 1940. At present, it is estimated that forest cover has contracted to 11 million hectares. A further breakdown of forest cover indicates that 29 percent of the nation's land area may still retain closed canopy growth, while 25 percent of the country’s forest is in a degraded condition. Forest degradation is clearly a result of commercial logging operations and the agricultural practices of the growing upland populations, especially migrants from the lowland that are not familiar with upland farming practices.

**Current Trends**

The current programmatic and policy environment in Laos that affects CFM is concentrated in four broad areas: 1) land and forest use planning, 2) commercial forest exploitation, 3) protected area system development, and 4) nontimber forest products (NTFP). Since each of these thematic areas has a degree of overlapping concern that bears on CFM, it is important to examine them carefully.

**Land and Forest Use Planning**

This has strong policy support from the government including the Village Forestry Law, which is discussed later. The initiative is financed in part by the Lao-Swedish Forestry Program that retains a team of expatriate advisers tied to the Ministry of Forestry. The national objective is to implement agricultural and forestland allocation exercises in all villages by the end of the year 2000. Clearly progress is being made towards that target. The government hopes that land allocation will help to build-up the tax base and public revenue flows. Many villagers are eager to gain clearer title to their agricultural lands, as well as to have forestlands allocated to the community.
In the southern Province of Champasak, for example, landuse planning began in March 1996. Mr. Bounsoun, 1st Deputy of the Champasak District reported that he and his staff had completed all 93 villages by May 1998. His staff of district officials worked with villagers to allocated individual household farm plots, as well as to identify and map village forest lands and classify them into production, reserve, and protected areas. Bounsoun reported that his staff largely documented existing family and community boundaries, preparing large painted maps at a scale of 1:25,000 for each village. Once government teams have mapped the land, a village Community Land use Management Committee will be formed comprised of five to seven members. It is not clear how these committees will function, with no training or follow-up assistance planned in non-project areas. Nonetheless, some communities review the simple demarcation of village forest boundaries as a stabilizing action. In the village of Ban Saming, for example, the village leader (Nai Ban) stated:

> It is good that it is clear that this is our forest area and outsiders can’t come and cut the forest. We were worried about outsiders putting pressure on government to let them cut trees in our area. The businessmen would come from Pakse asking about commercially valuable species in our area.

He also noted that the process of mapping the village forestlands also allowed the community to resolve a land conflict with a neighboring village.

In Champasak District there are 13 to 14 ethnic groups, representing 34,000 people. Forestland totals 40,000 hectares, approximately one-half of the district’s land area. District forests have experienced significant commercial felling due to their proximity to Thailand. Approximately 20,000 cubic meters were felled annually during the 1991-1993 period, however this year’s logging quotas have not been released. There were 20 small private companies operating in the province until recently, when the government decided to centralize timber operations under the joint venture DAFI.

**Commercial Forest Exploitation**

Forests have been a critical source of revenue for the Lao government, generating 35 to 45 percent of export earnings in recent years. The Asian recession has created a number of problems for the forestry sector in Laos. Indonesia and other Asian nations, that had banned whole log exports, are reportedly beginning to dump increasing quantities of timber on the international markets depressing prices. Demand has also declined as timber-using industries have gone into an economic slump. According to Mr. Khamphay Manivong, Director of the Forestry Research Centre at the Department of Forestry, the country currently has 200,000 cubic meters of logs that it cannot sell. While quotas have been allocated to provincial governments for felling in 1998-99, the central government has ordered the provinces to cease logging operations until sales have been confirmed.

Profits from the timber industry are also falling off sharply with a decline in timber prices. Average high-grade logs sold at $130 to $140 per cubic meter in 1996 before the Asian economic crisis began, with the Lao government extracting a royalty of around $50 per cubic meter. Recently, the same quality timber has been trading as low as $50 per cubic meter, which hardly covers the logging and transportation costs ($30 per cubic meter). As the market collapses, demand is strongest only for the highest-grade commercial dipterocarp species, which results in a "high grading" of the forest. Mr. Khamphay is concerned, as these species are the key components of the forest canopy in many stands and their removal will undermine the forest structure.

**Protected Area System Development**

Not available at this time

**Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)**

Not available at this time

**Forest Policy**

Laos is very unlike its neighbors in Vietnam and Cambodia, that have no policy governing CFM, let alone consider it a national priority. While there are many problems facing the land and forest allocation initiative in Laos, the fundamental commitment to transferring formal management authority to community groups through a boundary mapping process is significant. Also, this process is a realistic approach that should help the
strategy respond to resource conflicts and enhance village rights as it largely recognizes traditional communal groupings and local land use practices. Most of the foreign development agency projects (Lao-Swede, FOMACOP, IUCN-Protect Areas and NTFP, Japanese Nam Nun Watershed etc.), are dealing with land and forest use planning components. The allocation of "public" forestlands to village management is considered a fundamental strategy of CFM in many Asian nations. Since this process is already underway in Laos, I would recommend the Working Group focus much of its attention in strengthening the Land and Forest Use Allocation initiative.

Considerations for the Working Group

There was general interest from all of the parties regarding the creation of a Working Group on Community Forestry Management. During the initial WG meeting on November 13th in Vientiane, participants also indicated a willingness to participate regularly. A number of issues remain to be resolved before the group can develop. Government authorization is needed for the SRMP project, as well as a clear home for the WG Secretariat. A clearer sense of key members and program strategy will also be required. These issues are explored below:

Linkages

Mr. Khamphay sees the role of the Forest Research Center (FRC) as a place to "pull people together." He is attempting to make FRC a documentation center, though says that his staff of four foresters is inadequate. He says, "What we really need is a librarian!" Khamphay is concerned that the direction of the forest policy and programming in the country is diffuse and driven by donors. "They compete with each other and take the best staff. Increasingly the DOF staff is getting thinner." Mr. Khamphay likes the idea of a WG, and believes that it could help bring better coordination to the forestry sector. Khamphay is articulate and committed to improving linkages and information sharing, and it will benefit the WG if he plays a significant role.

The World Bank/Finland-Forest Management and Conservation Program (FOMACOP) and the Lao-Swede Forestry Project (LSFP) are clearly the two major forces defining CFM in Laos at the present time. They are different, well-articulated approaches to joint forest management and village forestry. They are also similar in that they are time and space-bound, though FOMACOP may be more target-driven. Both are attempting to develop models and concepts. While their different approaches may create more diverse learning, it is also fragmenting government initiatives and directions for change. Most importantly, both approaches share a dependency on high outside subsidies in funding and technical assistance, and are oriented towards outside commercial forest utilization, rather than building on local strategies and technologies. Experiences from CFM in Nepal and the Philippines indicate that ultimately countries try to integrate strategies to enhance impact. Minimally, LSFP and FOMACOP would benefit from greater exchange and input from field experiences outside their project areas. The leaders of both projects seem quite interested in participating in such exchanges through a working group mechanism.

The Lao-Swede Forestry program also devotes considerable attention to developing and monitoring land allocation methods in its four pilot provinces. Peter Jones is the Land Use Adviser and with his Lao counterparts has conducted some useful assessments of the agricultural and forest resource allocation process. He and his colleagues would be useful members of the WG-CFM, and their experiences are important to include in discussions by the group.

While IUCN-NTFP is more inclined towards research, its field studies are extremely important to the functioning of the WG. In addition, Joost Foppes and Souonthone Ketphanh, who jointly coordinate the program, maintain contacts with many of the academic researchers operating in Laos and can assist in feeding that experience into the group. The IUCN-Protected area program also has considerable experience with land allocation procedures around national parks. Claus Berkmuller and his team, who are located and working in southern Laos on the IUCN Protected Area program, are an asset and should be involved wherever possible.

Membership

Ultimately, the membership of the WGs is self-selecting and based on interest. Below is a list of individuals that are interested in CFM issues and represent a range of institutions that need to be connected with the WG. Peter Jones and Joost Foppes are involved with field studies, though additional people from field level projects need to be feeding experience into the WG-CFM. Carl Mossberg or Bengt Frykman, might join Peter Jones in reflecting the Lao-Swede project experience, while Marko Katila is the key player from the FOMACOP side. Esa Puustjarvi is involved with an ADB project dealing with Environmental Management of Mekong River Watersheds. His regional program shares overlapping goals with SMRP. He is based in
Vientiane just recently and very interested in participating in the group. Manfred has a better sense of who needs to come from the DOF side. I thought Mr. Boriboun Sanasisane, the acting Director of MRC Lao, was sincerely interested in the WG. He was honest about his lack of knowledge on the topic, but interested in learning more. Bouthene Phasiboriboun is a Dean from the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Laos, with a Mater’s from AIT. While the University resources are limited, French forest economist and NTFP specialist, Catherine Aubertin, is working there and collaboration could be developed. Bouakham Soulivanh is from the Land and Forest Management Allocation Central Committee with the Lao government. It would be good to have him there to keep that element of the government in the WG dialogue.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOF</th>
<th>Other Lao Organizations</th>
<th>Development Agencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phanthong Masixonxay</td>
<td>Boriboun Sanasisane</td>
<td>Peter Jones</td>
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<td>Khamphay Manivong</td>
<td>Bouakham Soulivanh</td>
<td>Manfred Fischer</td>
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<td>Sounthone Ketphanh</td>
<td>Bounthene Phasiboriboun</td>
<td>Joost Foppes</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Carl Mossberg</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Esa Puustjarvi</td>
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<td>Marko Katila</td>
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VIETNAM

Background

By the late 1980s, Vietnam’s forestry sector was in crisis. The Ministry of Forestry classified ten out of 19 million hectares of designated forestland as “barren” because of its degraded status or use for the cultivation of food crops and grazing of livestock. The Tropical Forestry Action Plan rang the alarm bells stating, "the natural forest resources of Vietnam are not able to produce the logs needed by the wood processing industry in a sustainable fashion even if managed properly."

Fifty-eight percent of the total land area of Vietnam is legally classified as forest and under the jurisdictional authority of the state Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Ecologically speaking, only part of this area actually possesses forest vegetation, with the total forest cover having declined steadily throughout the twentieth century and accelerating in recent decades. Forest cover fell from 14 million hectares in 1943 to 7.6 million hectares in 1995, with the remaining 11.4 million hectares covered by grasses, brush, or a few scattered trees. According to Mr. To Dinh Mai, from the Policy Department at MARD, only 1.5 million hectares of forests are currently classified as being in good condition.

Population expansion and increasing consumption are important factors driving forest clearing and timber utilization. Since 1921, Vietnam’s population has grown from 15.6 million to 75 million in 1998, and is projected to reach 100 million by the year 2000. Rates of growth have been disproportionately higher in the upland regions where much of the country’s forests are located due to the combined effects of natural increase and migration.

Current Trends

While massive investments in lowland and midland tree planting have begun to stabilize national forest cover statistics, natural forests in upland regions are under mounting extractive pressure. Old growth natural forest is estimated to have fallen to 2 million hectares. Recent estimates indicate that deforestation is progressing at a rate of 100,000 to 200,000 hectares annually. Growing populations and consumption patterns have driven Vietnamese policy makers to adopt an aggressive program of plantation establishment to compensate for the declining productivity of natural forests. With support from the Asian Development Bank and other donor agencies, approximately 5 million hectares of land have been targeted for reforestation, primarily through the planting of exotic species. There is concern among some professional foresters and ecologists that this strategy has not given sufficient attention to the potential for natural regeneration of degraded forests. This issue is currently being raised with policy makers and will require further scrutiny.
Forest Policy

Vietnam's existing forest policies provide limited support to community resource managers. Earlier policies extended authority for much of the country's forested lands to State Forest Enterprises (SFEs), cooperatives, and local government agencies. More recent policies supportive of economic restructuring (Doi Moi) have stressed household privatization. In the past few years, Vietnam's forest policies and programs reflect a variety of subsidies and tenure instruments to facilitate privatization, market engagement, and to encourage commercially oriented management. Most forest protection strategies sponsored by the government are limited to providing cash incentives to families to act as custodians. There is a striking absence of CFM policies in Vietnam.

In upland areas of Vietnam, regions often inhabited by ethnic minorities, local forests were frequently held in common under the authority of residential communities. Today, these hamlets are clustered into communes reflecting the lowest level of local government. There are currently no programs or policies that empower hamlets to gain authority for neighborhood forests and surrounding watersheds. As a consequence, traditional systems of resource use and control cannot be acknowledged under the existing forest policy framework. Without enabling policies that support the sustainable ecological practices of an indigenous nature, the country is failing to build on social institutional resources already present. Priority should be given to examining the potential of indigenous social mechanisms for sustainable forest management in different regions of Vietnam and exploring the nature of effective policies to reengage community institutions.

Considerations for the Working Group

On November 11, 1998 the first meeting of the WG-CIFM was held in Hanoi. There was a consensus among those present that a specialized forum CFM in Vietnam is needed. The group agreed to meet regularly to begin developing an agenda and program of activities. The group members identified a number of policy issues, management trends, and strategies for the WG-CFM to pursue in coming months. These included the following:

- Nearly one-third of the state forestland is under the management of government-run forest corporations. Much of this area was nationalized in the late 1950s and 1960s. In the early 1990s, Vietnam's forest policy changed, and began emphasizing privatization. While converting some forests to private holdings is appropriate for some land use contexts, this may be limited to several million hectares. What tenure and management units are appropriate for other land use situations? Where would CFM be appropriate? How should CFM strategies be adapted for varying social and environmental contexts?

- Forest management activities are being influenced by a number of policy instruments that can broadly be categorized as 1) Basic laws, 2) Legal documents, and 3) Development programs. While laws have tended towards long-term consistency, legal documents and programs affecting forests are diverse and dynamic. These include state-sponsored migration and resettlement, sedentarization, opium eradication, reforestation, land allocation and many others. It is important to determine how these different initiatives influence forest use behavior by local people, industry, and government and to identify where they are in conflict. What blend of laws, documents, and programs provides the most appropriate policy mechanism to enable communities to play a greater role in forest management?

- Field research indicates that CFM systems are operating informally in different parts of Vietnam, especially in upland ethnic minority areas. In some cases, local forest resource use and conservation systems continue to retain traditional leadership patterns, organizational structures, rules and regulations, while in other areas new CFM mechanisms have emerged. Many forest-dwelling communities retain spirit forests, forest gardens, and traditionally protected watersheds. In some cases, the district governments have issued usufruct certificates and protection contracts to community groups. However, there are no policies or programs designed especially to recognize the rights and responsibilities of small communal groups as public forestland managers. How could a government community forestry strategy be developed to meet this need? How could it build on existing systems of community forest conservation and sustainable utilization?

- International Development agencies and Government organizations are gaining increasing interest in working on forestry related issues in Vietnam. At the present time, of 136 government branches, 32 deal with forestry in some manner. By 1998, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry had 29 separate forestry projects funded by bi-lateral or multilateral agencies. In addition, there were 33 NGO projects focusing on community forestry. A broad-based Technical Working Group was formed by MARD to discuss social forestry, land allocation, and planning issues, but no special group on CFM has been operating in Vietnam.

- The group decided to distinguish three specific regions of CFM in Vietnam: the North and Northwest Region, the Central Highlands, and the Midlands. The group listed some of the features of each zone that may influence CFM strategy in that area.
Linkages

A rapidly growing number of Vietnamese institutions and foreign organizations are working on projects related to CFM. Many of these actors could benefit through interactions with the Working Group. The Sustainable Resources Management Project funded by GTZ maintains a website with a comprehensive inventory of many Vietnamese and foreign programs and staff with a description of activities, staff, contact addresses, budgets, and other relevant data.

WG members also noted that other initiatives are already ongoing to bring some coordination to upland management strategies. These include a number of technical working groups that are currently being facilitated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Mr. To Dinh Mai from the Policy Department at MARD suggested that the Working group establish a relationship with the Technical Working Group #1, in order to provide a forum on social forestry and land use planning issues. The role of the WG would be to draw together field experiences from the three regions, analyze patterns and trends, develop appropriate definitions and strategies for CFM in Vietnam, and propose recommendations to Technical WG #1 and MARD.

Membership

The WG proposed leaving membership open to all interested individuals. At the first meeting on November 11, 1998 the following individuals participated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARD</th>
<th>Other Organizations</th>
<th>Development Agencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To Dinh Mai</td>
<td>Nguyen Van San</td>
<td>Hans Helmrich</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nguyen Quoc Dung</td>
<td>Nguyen Hai Nam</td>
<td>Michael Gluck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do Dinh Sam</td>
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<td>Peter Taylor</td>
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<td>Martin Geiger</td>
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<td>Guido Broekhoven</td>
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<td>Paul van der Poel</td>
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<td>Gunter Mayer</td>
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THAILAND

In Thailand, a number of WGs dealing with CFM issues have operated over the past decade. Under the current initiatives, meetings in Thailand have yet to take place, but are scheduled during the first half of 1999. The following discussion provides a brief background on the current state of CFM practice and forest policy in Thailand.

Background and Current Trends

Since 1953, Thailand has lost over half of its forested area, declining from 60 percent of the land area to 25 percent in 1995. Quality of the remaining forest in many regions is also declining as human pressures on these natural ecosystems increase. Thailand's forests were nationalized in 1896 when the Forestry Department was established. By 1957, the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) had 1885 employees and managed 50 percent of the national territory. During the 1960s and 70s deforestation proceeded rapidly in Thailand, due to policies encouraging industrial development and because of the RFD's limited ability to control illegal loggers and migrant settlers in the North and Northeast.

Forest Policy

Over the past twenty-five years, Thailand has considered a variety of approaches to CFM. In 1975, the RFD established the Forest Village program in an attempt to establish a local source of labor for timber production. To accelerate the recognition of forest occupants' rights, a land certification (STK) program was established in 1982. Since that time, hundreds of thousands of hectares of forestland has been transferred to Thai families, however for the most part these lands have been converted to residential sites and agricultural land. During the 6th, 7th, and 8th Five Year Plans (covering a fifteen year period from 1987 to 2001), considerable stress has been placed on distributing tree seedlings to households and community groups, emphasizing capital and
Some RFD planners have struggled to develop an active Community Forestry Program emphasizing the establishment of community forest protection committees, mainly through watershed units. Up to 20,000 communities are estimated to be protecting forests nationwide, on an informal, defacto basis. Yet, at present, there are no existing policies that enable communities to act as the legal managers of state forest lands, though a policy mechanism to do this has been under consideration by the Thai government in recent years.

The proposed CFM policy has strong backing from many Thai social scientists and community development NGOs, however it has run into resistance from the environmental NGO community. Thailand currently has 117 national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, with another 42 proposed parks. The total land currently designated or proposed for conservation covers over 70 percent of Thailand’s remaining natural forests. Under the current law, communities are not allowed to reside within these conservation areas. In addition, all A1 classified watersheds do not permit human habitation within their boundaries. As a consequence, existing policies require the resettlement and disengagement of communities from much of the country’s natural forest areas. These policies discourage community involvement in forest management by dislocating resident peoples. The debate over the role of communities in forest management has also created conflicts within the NGO sector, undermining opportunities to reach a consensus regarding sustainable forest management strategies need in Thailand.

Considerations for the Working Group

Thailand would benefit from a clearer policy on the role of communities in managing state forestlands. Absence of progress in establishing a national CFM policy has resulted from conflicts among stakeholders, particularly within the NGO community. WG mechanisms could help resolve disputes regarding where and how communities can play a role in forest conservation and production management. Building on existing CFM fora and dialogue processes is an important step. A number of exchanges have taken place in the past, based in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Khen, and other centers. In some cases these have been facilitated by NGOs, in others by Chiang Mai University or other academic institutions, or by the RFD.

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ENDNOTES


2 Ibid, p.43

3 Personal communication from Carl Mossberg, Senior Forestry Advisor for the Lao Swedish Forestry Project, November 17th, 1998.

4. As quoted in Thomas Sikor and Urich Apel "The Possibilities for Community Forestry in Vietnam", AFN