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LMI: Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests Program

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Community foresters measure the diameter of a tree to calculate the amount of carbon stored. The LEAF program trains people in forest management across the Lower Mekong region.

About 15 percent of all global greenhouse gas emissions comes from forest loss and degradation. Approximately half of this loss comes from Asian forests.

BACKGROUND

Forests cover over 50 percent of the Lower Mekong region[1], providing a wide array of benefits to millions of people. Trees are one of nature's most efficient ways of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing carbon. The region's forests, with their unique flora and fauna, are also important sources of income and employment and contribute significantly to people's health and the economic growth of the surrounding countryside. Yet despite the benefits, forests in the Mekong region continue to be destroyed at an alarming rate (nearly 1% per year, or more than 500,000 hectares per year), as land is converted for crops, grazing or other uses. Unsustainable and illegal logging, urbanization, and climate change also add significantly to their rapid decline. The loss and degradation of forests are important factors in global climate change, representing about 15 percent of total global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions annually. Roughly half of this amount comes from deforestation and forest degradation in Asia[2].

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) recognizes that Asia's forests contribute greatly to the region and the communities that depend on them and is constantly seeking innovative ways to encourage better forest management. One set of ideas in our strategy centers around creating incentives that encourage communities to manage their forest lands more effectively. Such approaches work for their benefit, while contributing to global efforts to address climate change. This is consistent with international strategies to promote REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation) policies which create financial value for protecting forests and the carbon they store.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES IN THE LOWER MEKONG

Target Countries: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam

As part of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), the LEAF (Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests) program is a five-year regional effort which was started in early 2011 to promote regional collaboration on forest management. Implemented by Winrock International, LEAF's regional approach is to strengthen the technical capacity of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as other countries, to manage their forests better through:

- Sharing effective approaches to common challenges;
- Replicating and scaling up innovations in other Asian countries;
- Developing regional models, methodologies and standards; and
- Addressing trans-boundary issues and causes of deforestation.

Working regionally means that the LMI countries can learn directly from each other – and U.S. experts – what works and what does not, as each balances competing demands on forests and land, while working to enhance forest carbon storage. Through these efforts, LEAF also helps prepare them for an emerging international REDD+ framework.

[1] FAO, State of the World's Forests, 2010.
[2] World Resource Institute Climate Analysis Indicator Tool, 2000.

The LEAF program hosts technical workshops like these to engage a wide range of stakeholders in discussion of policy innovations, field-based programs, and market incentives to reduce GHG emissions.
(Photos: Winrock International)

LEAF is implemented by:

WINROCK
INTERNATIONAL

SNV Netherlands Development Organisation

CLIMATEFOCUS

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ACTIVITIES

Replicating success through regional platforms and partnerships.
LEAF helps the Lower Mekong countries identify the most economical and effective ways to manage their land and forests and works through regional partnerships to replicate successful approaches. These partnerships focus on developing common scientific standards and protocols and preparing countries for potential REDD+ activities. In addition, the program puts a major emphasis on strengthening national and provincial government agencies and existing organizations, as these are often instrumental in sustaining momentum on forest and land management issues.

Improving policies, establishing incentives for GHG reductions.
LEAF's goal is to improve policies that govern forest and land use in order to achieve long-term emissions reductions. One way to encourage this is through market incentives that reward local communities and private sector companies for managing forests responsibly. Another way is to address impediments to proper forest management. For example, many people in rural Asia lack clear titles to their property. Without these titles, people often lack the incentive to manage land for long-term sustainability or plant trees that might take a generation to reach maturity. LEAF will study issues like this and work with governments and the private sector to promote responsible forest management and land use.

Monitoring forest carbon. It requires considerable scientific and technical ability to monitor changes in forest cover and calculate the amount of carbon a forest actually contains. LEAF works to strengthen each country's technical capability through specialized trainings in REDD+ implementation and the development of university-level educational curricula on climate change and REDD+ issues.

Using pilot projects to demonstrate innovation. Many good ideas have proven to show results when they are well tested, monitored, and evaluated in order to introduce modifications that make the program more effective. As good stewards of U.S. taxpayers' funds, USAID specifically designed the LEAF program around pilot projects to test and then demonstrate the effectiveness of specific approaches to low carbon development, inform policies, and support national REDD+ strategies. The models that prove effective can then be scaled up and replicated elsewhere in the LMI region through regional platforms and partnerships.

PARTNERS

Winrock International is the prime implementing partner for the LEAF program. Winrock is a world leader in forest carbon and ecosystem science, providing training and capacity building services across the globe.

SNV–Netherlands Development Organization and Climate Focus are partners of Winrock. SNV is recognized for its expertise in community forestry, rural development, and local renewable energy. Climate Focus is a leader in climate policy development.