

The Grassroots Equity Newsletter

Working with local people in the Mekong region to promote effective initiatives on equity in climate change mitigation

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About the GREEN Mekong Program

This newsletter is produced by the USAID-funded Grassroots Equity and Enhanced Networks in the Mekong Program (GREEN Mekong), which aims to improve capacities of policymakers and grassroots stakeholders in the Lower Mekong region to promote equity in forest-based climate change mitigation policy and practice.

The program is based on the fact that local people's needs, aspirations, knowledge and participation are critical during decision-making processes concerning forest governance and management. In the Lower Mekong region, where millions of people remain highly dependent on forest resources, policies and strategies developed to protect forests, reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change will only succeed if actively involving local communities.

The GREEN Mekong Program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) and implemented by RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests.

Welcome to the Grassroots Equity Newsletter.

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Regional learning groups continuing to strengthen engagement with forest communities

USAID's Grassroots Equity and Enhanced Networks in the Mekong (GREEN Mekong) and RECOFTC (The Center for People and Forests) organized the 2nd Regional Learning Group on Equitable Forest Governance from September 9 to 12 in Hue, Vietnam for 20 local government officials in the forestry sector from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.



A group from Vietnam presents on a forest equity and community engagement approach.

The four-day event gathered subnational officials from across the region and exposed them to the different dimensions of equity and governance through hands-on experience and field visits. As the second phase of their training, participants came away with real skills to develop questions and approach forest communities and forest community members.

Specifically, they explored methods to address equity issues using different communication tools and identify primary equity issues to focus on in their existing project sites. The group visited Huong Loc Commune in Nam Dong District to meet with villagers where they learned about their equity and meaningful participation in community forest management that enables benefit sharing for livelihood development of community members.

Equity is a new concept for many officials, making it essential that they understand the implications in the region. The RLG workshops have targeted these needs, facilitating both learning and important experience exchanges from the different national contexts. The Equity Assessment exercise that included the participants visiting Huong Loc Commune was one of these knowledge exchanges. During this exercise, the officials asked questions they developed on their own to better understand the equity level of forest management in the commune. This included comparisons between their own community forest management and Huong Loc Commune with the other groups noting that, "benefit sharing in Vietnam is a well-established process which includes community level participation," while the consensus was that this needs to happen in other countries as well. One official commented on the visible role women played and saw its importance. Other observations covered the process itself where participants suggested "community members and state officials should be interviewed separately so they can speak freely

The Regional Learning Group has been a direct response to the gap in capacity in the region. Most of the forestry officials are on the front line engaging with the communities and implementing forest law enforcement and policies. However, they lack skills to engage with the forest communities and understand concepts important to protect them. This gap was the motivation to create the RLG and what has made it a success with members learning how to engage with the local communities.

While the second RLG focused on capacity development needs for research as a result of group identification for this skill development, participants voiced the need for development of facilitation and discussion abilities for the next workshop. This group identification ensures GREEN Mekong prioritizes needs in a more effective way.

While participants developed their own questions in Vietnam, they put them to use upon return home. They have been using their new tools in between workshops to develop their own case studies and gather information on equity.

For an inside look at the 2nd Regional Learning Group, watch our new video from the event, featuring interviews with participants about their experiences. Available at: <http://youtu.be/7WBEVCJXcVs>

The third RLG will take place in early March in Siem Reap, Cambodia, where members will share ideas on what they can do with the data and further develop their capacity for facilitating discussions.

The GREEN Mekong Regional Learning Group is a series of four workshops for the same members to attend in order to strengthen their individual capacity and respective agencies through exchange of social equity information, experiences and lessons learned within their countries and across the Lower Mekong region.

The concept of equity and its benefits understood through field practice: a testament from Lao PDR

After attending a series of trainings in Lao PDR in November, 2014, Mr. Bounchanh Lattanavongkot, Deputy Director of the Provincial Forestry Section in Luang Prabang Province, had an opportunity to put his knowledge into practice and gain a concrete impression of the benefits of promoting equity in forest governance. Mr. Bounchanh was one of the provincial government officers participating as facilitators in the focus group discussion on 'Equity in Forest Governance with a Gender Focus' organized in Lao PDR.

The Lao facilitators were the members of the GREEN Mekong Regional Learning Group (RLG). Through this experience as facilitators, they were given opportunity and exposure to put the knowledge and skills from their previous training to practice.

The experience of being facilitators helped the members in their learning about equity. The Regional Learning Group Members say they now better understand the subject matter and delivery process in forest governance as well as the equity elements, which help them to assess progress and set goals within a local context.



Mr. Bounchanh, Deputy Director of the Provincial Forestry Section in Luang Prabang, engaging participants to visualize the notion of equity

"To foster participation is to guarantee their rights of access to natural resources. And, as we guarantee their rights, it brings about equity. The people feel that they have rights and benefits from the work", says Mr. Bounchanh. "Participation is also about benefits sharing. So when rights and benefits are involved, the people will participate automatically. As the people, villagers and

community gain confidence, they will participate. So ensuring equity is ensuring public participation."

The GREEN Mekong Program successfully conducted its three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Bokeo, Xaysomboun and Attapeu Provinces in Lao PDR over October and November, 2014.

The objectives of the event were to 1) identify and prioritize key 'equity' related issues, including challenges, in the context of forest governance and relevant program in each of the provinces, 2) assess existing mechanisms and strengths in forestry management to build upon in order to improve equity in forest governance for local people, and 3) identify, assess and propose approaches and recommendations to address gaps in equity, particularly gender equity, in the context of forest governance and relevant program.

Updates from the GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund

The GREEN Mekong Challenge Fund (GMCF) was set up early in the program to support CSO participants in implementing the action plans produced during the regional workshop. Since then, the funds have been distributed to five CSOs across the region and have been put to use on the ground. As a way to see the direct impacts on the grassroots level, two CSOs share their experience here to demonstrate: PanNature (Vietnam) and NGO Forum (Cambodia).



A group of forest rangers and local officials discusses equity at a workshop in Vietnam

PanNature held a five-day training workshop in Dak Glej town, Kon Tum Province, Vietnam with the support of the GMCF. With 20 participants, including forest rangers, Forest Protection officials from Dak Glej, local government leaders, and village heads, PanNature was able to reach a wide audience and equip them with the practical skills

needed to promote community participation in the management of forest protection.

Also resulting from the training was a 22 minute documentary broadcast three times in December, 2014 on VTV2. Entitled Màu xanh Ng c Linh - For the Green of Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve, it can also be found on YouTube: <http://bit.ly/1BNDRWK> (in Vietnamese)

NGO Forum in Cambodia has conducted a number of activities with GMCF support, including both capacity development and awareness rising.

The training has been a key aspect of GREEN Mekong, and the training of trainers has proven to be effective for NGO Forum.

The network members, especially key community facilitators, have improved knowledge and skills in promoting grassroots equity in the context of forest management and REDD+ process. The equity training on 20-21 October provided an opportunity for 25 key community facilitators (30% women) to learn about equity. This included issues of equity in their target areas and applying the concepts in real practice through field visits to community based eco-tourism sites, so they would be able to facilitate discussions in their own communities for improving equity. Some participants remarked that knowledge, opportunity and space for engagement were the challenges of equitable participation. Participation of local communities in the decision making is essential to ensure sustainability. – Teng Rithiny, the NGO Forum, Cambodia



NGO Forum plans to hold another training for community leaders and local authorities (commune leaders) in Mondulkiri, Cambodia in 2015.

Green Mekong challenge fund recipient representative being interviewed on a radio talk show "Life and Natural Resources" broadcast live across multiple provinces

NGO Forum's use of the GMCF to support awareness raising was also impactful, reaching a wider audience via radio. With many communities unable to access the internet or English training materials, the value was clear. NGO Forum's

community representative was able to participate in a live talk-show program called "Life and Natural Resources" with the discussion topic "Biodiversity, Community and REDD+". With more than 10 callers during the show and a listenership covering at least six provinces, it was an important step toward increasing the capacities of CSOs, dependent local and indigenous communities, and local government to understand the importance of biodiversity, the role of stakeholders and community forest management.

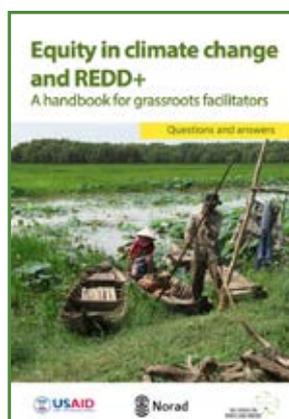
Beyond NGO Forum and PanNature activities, other GMCF project plans include conducting community level surveys to investigate and develop rules and regulations for resource management and administration, and conducting awareness-raising activities with ethnic minority journalists so that they have a better understanding of equity in forest management and can integrate these principles into their work.

A third round of applications for funding closed in December and will be distributed in 2015.

Equity in climate change and REDD+: A handbook for grassroots facilitators

Equity in climate change and REDD+: A handbook for grassroots facilitators is now available. The handbook was developed by RECOFTC and co-supported by the USAID-funded GREEN Mekong program and the NORAD funded Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ project.

The handbook will help grassroots facilitators with the aim of increasing their understanding of processes and dimensions of social equity in forests and climate change, and to develop specific skills to put this learning into practice.



Read more and download the handbook at <http://www.recoftc.org/project/green-mekong/training-manuals-and-guides/equity-climate-change-and-redd-handbook-grassroots-facilitators>

To obtain hardcopies, please contact green.mekong@recoftc.org

Resources on equity

Online Sourcebook for Integrating Gender in Climate Change Adaptation Proposals

This sourcebook is intended to be used mainly by individuals and teams who prepare large-scale climate change adaptation (CCA) project proposals. The Sourcebook provides readers with tools to help answer the question, "How do we best go about incorporating gender considerations into our CCA proposal?"

Available at <http://bit.ly/1BCKJ9k>

Women and land management



What would happen if women had the same access and control of land, forests and water as men? Economic opportunities would increase; food security would increase; natural resource would be used more sustainably. RECOFTC and WOCAN have developed this infographic to highlight the discussions and recommendations of the Regional Dialogue on Women's Inclusion in Landscape Management, held in October 2014 in Thailand.

Available at <http://www.recoftc.org/policy-briefs/women-and-land-management-infographic>

Role of women to bring about changes in the forest sector

A policy brief in response to the need to identify practical entry points for women's inclusion in REDD+ was developed by the Joint Initiative of the USAID LEAF Program, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) and UN-REDD+. Entitled FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED: Barriers and Entry Points for Women's Inclusion in REDD+ in Asia-Pacific, the brief provides important regional perspectives, compiling evidence and highlighting best practices.

Available at <http://bit.ly/1wRhUlc>

RECOFTC, IIED Event Investigates Equity in Forest Governance

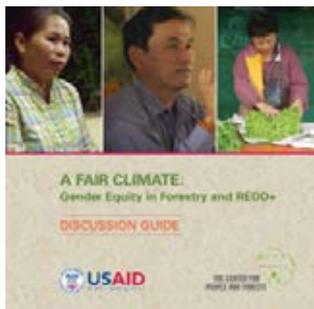


On 3 December 2014, RECOFTC and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) hosted a side event on 'Approaches to Equity in Forest Governance: Lessons for Safeguard Development.' At the event, which was convened on the margins of the Lima Climate Change Conference, panelists shared experiences on strengthening equity in forest governance and lessons learned for safeguard development in REDD+

Policy brief available at <http://www.recoftc.org/policy-briefs/community-forestry-national-approach-safeguard-information-systems-sis>

The gender lens

Discussion guide for gender equity training video launched



A Fair Climate: Gender Equity in Forestry and REDD+ - Video Discussion Guide

To accompany the training video produced by USAID-funded programs GREEN Mekong and USAID LEAF Asia, a discussion guide is now available for trainers and grassroots facilitators to delve deeper into the gender aspect of social equity in terms of forest-based climate change initiatives, including REDD+. The questions in the guide will help facilitate discussions concerning forest management practices and forest governance in the local and institutional contexts.

The discussion guide will be available in English, Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Myanmar, Khmer, Nepali and Bahasa Indonesia, while

the video is available in all of these languages as well as Malay. Download the discussion guide [here](#). Watch the video [here](#).

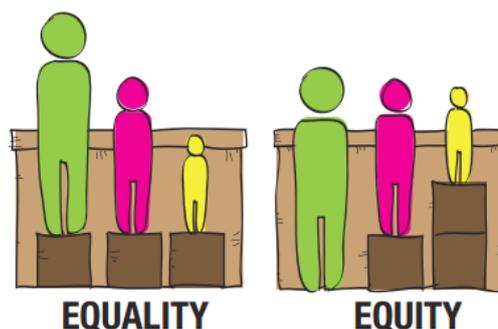
To obtain hardcopies, please contact green.mekong@recoftc.org

What is 'gender equity'?

To better understand the concept of equity, we can look first toward the principle of equality – that all people have an equal right to life.

Equity is often confused or used interchangeably with equality, but they are not the same. Equality means that all people should be treated as equals, regardless of their context, status and position

Equity, however, understands that not everyone has the same starting position and some people may be unfairly disadvantaged by factors beyond their control. Gender equity is thus the removal of avoidable and unfair circumstances that prevent people from reaching their full potential based on their gender.



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We invite you to share your feedback on the newsletter or contribute to the newsletter about your achievements or work on equity. Email us at green.mekong@recoftc.org