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LMI: Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests

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Thai foresters exchange innovative approaches to forest management with Vietnamese foresters in Lam Dong province, Vietnam. The LEAF program works to build technical ability in the forestry and land-use sector while fostering collaboration across the Lower Mekong region.

Photo: Winrock International

Nearly 15 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from forest loss and degradation. Approximately half of this loss comes from Asia's forests. World Resource Institute Climate Analysis Indicator

BACKGROUND

Forests cover more than 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. The region's forests, with their unique flora and fauna, are also important sources of income and contribute significantly to public health and economic growth.

Yet despite many benefits, forest areas in the region are destroyed at the alarming rate of more than 500,000 hectares per year, the equivalent of one million soccer fields annually. Crop farms and overgrazing have led to deforestation and land degradation. Unsustainable and illegal logging, urbanization, and climate change also add substantially to the rapid decrease of valuable forest area.

USAID recognizes the benefits of forests to the Asia region and its communities, and is committed to driving innovative ways to encourage better forest management. One approach is to create incentives that encourage communities to effectively manage forest lands. This is consistent with international strategies to promote Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+), policies which create financial value and incentive for protecting forests and carbon storage.

APPROACH
Target Countries: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam

As part of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), the USAID-supported Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests (LEAF) program is a five-year effort that started in January 2011 to promote regional collaboration in the forestry land-use sector. LEAF's approach allows the LMI countries to learn directly from each other and from U.S. experts about how to balance competing demands for timber and agricultural land, while working to enhance forest carbon storage. The program increases the ability of targeted countries to achieve sustainable reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through:

- Replicating and scaling-up innovation through regional partnerships;
- Establishing policy and market incentives for GHG reductions;
- Building technical skills in ecosystem valuation and monitoring; and
- Demonstrating innovative, sustainable land management practices.

[1] FAO, State of the World's Forests, 2010.

The LEAF program hosts technical workshops in Laos to engage a wide range of stakeholders in discussing policy approaches, field-based actions and market incentives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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ACTIVITIES

Replicating success through regional partnerships: LEAF helps the Lower Mekong countries identify the most economical and effective ways to manage their land and forests, while working through regional partnerships to expand and replicate successful approaches. Partnerships focus on both developing common scientific standards and protocols, and preparing countries for potential REDD+ activities. Strengthening national and provincial government agencies and existing organizations is a major concentration, as they are often instrumental in sustaining momentum on forest and land management issues.

Creating policy incentives for GHG reductions: The LEAF program encourages improved forest and land use through incentives that reward local communities and private companies for responsibly managing them. Better policies, such as those supporting stronger community rights to forests, can promote sustainable use of forest resources and achieve long-term reduction in GHG emissions.

Monitoring forest carbon: The LEAF program strengthens the technical capabilities of each country to monitor changes in forest cover and to estimate the amount of forest carbon storage through specialized trainings and the development of university curricula. Together with the U.S. Forest Service, LEAF initiated a Mekong regional assessment on options for monitoring forest degradation. To build a future cadre of climate experts in the region, LEAF established a network of seven Mekong universities in a long-term effort to strengthen climate change curricula and training.

Demonstrating innovation at the local level: The LEAF program tests the effectiveness of specific policy interventions and approaches to low carbon development at the community, district and provincial levels. For example, LEAF initiated activities in six districts across Laos and Vietnam to address forest landscape along country borders. Models that prove effective in this area can then be replicated elsewhere in the LMI region through regional partnerships. To advance knowledge-sharing, LEAF recently developed a regional REDD+ atlas providing data relevant to forest management in Asia, and this resource is accessible online at: www.forestcarbonasia.org/publications/tools/.

PARTNERS

Implementing Partner: Winrock International
Cooperating Partners: SNV–Netherlands Development Organization
Climate Focus