



ASIA REGIONAL EXCHANGE ON FOREST SECTOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (AFMDG)



Poverty in Asia remains extreme. More than two thirds of the world's poor people live in Asia. The greater percentage of these poor are rural and of those, the greater extremity of poverty if not percentage of poverty is found amongst the poor who live in and from Asia's forests - an estimated 450 million people (ADB 2003).

The forest dependent poor of Asia remain the least integrated in national poverty reduction strategies. This is coupled with a poor understanding and awareness of the linkages between forest dependence and the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDG) – in particular those that pertain to poverty, gender, environmental sustainability, partnerships and good governance.

Local information on forest community rights and how these impact on achieving the **MDGs**, especially **Goal 1** (halving poverty by 2015) and **Goal 7** (ensuring environmental sustainability) is crucial to local governance and in ensuring their alignment with broader national policies. Identifying and raising awareness of the role of forests in poverty alleviation and to ensure this role is strengthened through improved policies, institutions and processes for community forestry to operate in the Asia region and beyond remains a key challenge.

There is a growing rise of actions and policies in the region which have positive potential impacts on human security. More than 22% of forests are under community ownership/management and this figure is set to grow dramatically with the current trend towards decentralization across the region. In the last two decades one result of decentralization initiatives has been the increasing adoption of community based forest and natural resource management. The level in the region to which national adoption of community forestry initiatives has taken place has been highly variable and largely dependent on the length of national engagement in locally oriented programs and nationally established policy frameworks.

The status of community forestry in countries across the Asia region can be crudely grouped according to the "generational" issues they face. India, Nepal, and the Philippines have the longest history of engagement with government programs dealing with community management of common property resources. The subsequent "generation" of countries includes Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam where policies and/or programs are enacted to varying degrees. Bhutan, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Pakistan and Timor Leste are at a piloting stage of engaging the participation of communities in natural resource management.

Whilst there is a growing regional consensus that local mechanisms are needed for effective natural resource governance and in particular the recognition of the roles and responsibilities of local communities, many challenges remain. Many stakeholders in the forest sector are experiencing difficulties in integrating community forestry management into local





and national planning schemes. Explicit articulation of the potential of community forest management in meeting the dual role of both poverty alleviation and sustainable use of natural resources remains weak.

Asia Forest Network (AFN) has been working on concerns with forest and forest related peoples for almost two decades. With support from the Japan Fund for Global Environment, AFN is facilitating the **Asia Regional Exchange on Forest Sector Contribution to Millennium Development Goals (AFMDG)**. The aim of this 12-month project is to foster exchange on how the forest sector is contributing to the Millennium Development Goals and human security by conducting participatory field research and an international conference among local communities, policy-makers, planners, and civil society organizations in Asia.

Under AFMDG, AFN will conduct:

- A regional meeting on Forest Sector Contribution to Millennium Development Goals in collaboration with the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and Pacific (RECOFTC)
- A field workshop on Participatory Land Use Planning for Human Security
- A review of forests and poverty reduction in three Asian countries (Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand)

Regional Meeting

The meeting on Forest Sector Contribution to Millennium Development Goals is an international conference to be organized in Bangkok, Thailand in late November 2006. The three-day meeting is being designed to accommodate approximately 30 people selected from Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam representing national and local governments and civil society organizations.

The conference will run for three days, including one day for visiting forest areas and two days for panel and workshop sessions. Sessions will focus on how forestland management can contribute to poverty reduction. Interactions will be designed in a way that participants can learn mechanisms which they can use to support community-based resource management in their own countries. Participants will discuss their roles in balancing local needs with national, regional and global interests, along with how their work can contribute to human security and the Millennium Development Goals.

Field Workshop

The field workshop on Participatory Land Use Planning for Human Security is a symposium for Asians to review facilitating and hindering factors that local government and civil society face in managing the environment. The five-day workshop will be organized in the Philippines, one of the first nations in Asia to enact policies decentralizing management authority over some natural resources to local governments, indigenous peoples and community associations. Local stakeholders in the Philippines, like several of its Southeast Asian neighbors, face challenges in developing land use plans and enacting ordinances for natural resource management in a way that also responds to human security. The field workshop is being designed to accommodate around 15-20 participants from communities, local governments and assisting organizations from Southeast Asian countries who are working in poor areas or indigenous contexts and who seek to acquire participatory land use planning and management skills.

Review of Forests and Poverty Reduction

The research review on forests for poverty reduction will review the experiences of three countries - Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand – through site visits and engagements with country partners. The paper will partly draw from the research of an Indonesian research fellow under the Asian Public Intellectuals (API) Program.