

This is the main objective of the recently initiated project “Making forestry work for the poor: Adapting forest policies to poverty alleviation strategies in Asia and the Pacific.” The project is supported by the Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet) and will be implemented by the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in collaboration with respective government agencies and civil society from the participating countries (Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam).

The project will be implemented over a one year period with a total budget of US\$ 340,000, with a strong focus on compiling and disseminating existing experiences, strengthening the capacities of government agencies and raising awareness. As

a first activity, the project supported the third executive forest policy short course which took place in Bangkok, 8 to 19 March, 2010, and enabled the participation of four forestry professionals from Laos and Myanmar to this two-week training. The activities will continue by conducting the forestry-poverty country studies, organizing regional and national workshops for strategic planning in forestry and developing policy briefs for supporting forest policy adaptation to reduce poverty in target countries.

This is the first official collaboration between FAO and APFNet and it should pave the road for new innovative activities to support sustainable forest management in the Asia-Pacific region, both under the umbrella of the Asia-Pacific Forest Policy Think Tank as well as through the expanding the APFNet network.

Increasing agricultural productivity: The key to Thailand's biofuel future

Prepared by Beau Damen, FAO Consultant, Bioenergy

Substantial increases in agricultural yields and production will be required to meet Thailand's future biofuel targets, which could result in a drop in the country's exports of key biofuel feedstock crops in the near future. This was one of the key messages that emerged from the FAO Bioenergy and Food Security (BEFS) Project Thailand Technical Consultation, which took place on 11 March 2010 in Bangkok. Around 50 agriculture and bioenergy experts from around Thailand came together at the FAO Regional Office to discuss the preliminary findings of research work undertaken as part of the FAO BEFS Thailand project.

Participants also found that while there are a number of challenges in terms of meeting Thailand's biofuel targets, biofuels production in Thailand is economically competitive and offers measurable greenhouse benefits over fossil transport fuels. But Thailand's agricultural productivity, and how to boost it, was the key issue

of the day's discussions. Participants agreed that improving the Thai farmer's productivity will not only help meet Thailand's biofuel targets as outlined in the country's 15-year Alternative Energy Development Plan, but also benefit farmers, industry and the environment. It was heard that higher yields will reduce greenhouse gas emissions per unit of production of biofuel feedstock and reduce feedstock costs.

The need for improved productivity prompted participants to cast their attention to Thailand's agricultural extension services and systems for educating farmers with good agricultural practices. While participants concurred that the Thai Government was producing good quality information regarding land suitability and agriculture practices, there was debate about whether this material is reaching farmers. Participants considered that if farmers were to use this information to guide planting decisions and

practices rather than rely solely on market prices, substantial yield increases would be possible – improving farmers’ returns per area of land, optimizing the use scarce resources and reducing harmful emissions. Participants felt that empowering Thai farmers with better agricultural practices could thus also deliver a “double dividend” for Thailand by promoting rural development and helping to combat the onset of climate change.

To resolve some of the issues identified and ensure future challenges can be met and overcome, participants highlighted the importance of being proactive by maintaining and reassessing data on bioenergy developments as circumstances change. The BEFS project has helped build the capacity of Thai Partner Organizations to analyze the interplay between natural resource availability, bioenergy production potential, rural development and food security and assess different *sustainable*

bioenergy pathways. The BEFS tools can now be adopted and used by the Thai Government in the future to assess new developments and guide or support changes in biofuel policy.

The meeting was the second BEFS Thailand event to be organized this year by the FAO Regional Office, following a smaller meeting of the BEFS Thailand Partner Organizations in January. The final BEFS Thailand event will be held 1-2 June 2010, incorporating a high-level Thai Government Policy Forum hosted by the FAO Regional Representative, and a BEFS Regional Forum to coincide with *Renewable Energy Asia 2010*.

More details on the BEFS Thailand project, including presentations, final meeting summaries and upcoming events, are available at the following website:

www.fao.org/bioenergy/foodsecurity/befs/thailand

Participation of tree plantation farmers in sustainable forest management

Prepared by Marija Spirovska-Kono, FAO Forestry Consultant

Growing long-rotation, indigenous species can bring a variety of socio-economic and environmental benefits as they provide high quality timber materials, improve soil protective functions, and enhance local biodiversity. However, utilization of long-rotation tree species in Thailand has witnessed a steady decline, particularly since the ban on logging in natural forests in 1989. Efforts to promote tree planting of selected indigenous species in reforestation projects during the 1990s have not yielded sustained results, primarily due to constraining regulations and lack of supportive mechanisms. Fast-growing tree species and annual crops appeared far more attractive due to a variety of incentives, readily available markets and less risk involved. This continues to be the case to date, and the true potentials of promoting and growing

long-rotation, indigenous species are yet to be realized.

As part of the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) of the Food and Agriculture Organization, a new two-year project was launched at the beginning of 2010. The project will be executed by the Royal Forest Department (RFD) with the main objective to contribute to the diversification of livelihood options, improve environmental sustainability and increase domestically available wood supply through creating enabling environments for planting, harvesting, and processing long-rotation tree species.

The project will put specific emphasis on reviewing the current regulations and incentive systems and