

Workshop on Drivers of Change Affecting Mekong Forests: Towards formulation of GMS action plans

WORKSHOP REPORT



20 January 2015

Pullman G Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Background

At COP19 in November 2013 the Parties to the UNFCCC reaffirmed the importance of addressing drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and encouraged Parties, organizations and the private sector to take action to reduce drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. Furthermore the COP19 decision on REDD+ MRV requests developing country Parties seeking to obtain and receive payments for results-based actions, to also submit information on drivers of deforestation and forest degradation resulting in emissions and the means to address these when submitting data and information through the biennial update reports.

To help countries respond to this call, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) initiated a study on drivers of forest change in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), with specific focus on Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. FAO partnered with the USAID Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests (USAID-LEAF) program to contract and coordinate forestry experts in developing national level studies in each country. The studies take stock of existing knowledge and experience on both negative and positive drivers of forest change and outline action points to address negative drivers and enhance positive drivers. Drawing on these studies, USAID-LEAF is preparing an overview and summary focusing on cross-country comparisons and regional issues, which are imperative to take into account given the nature of factors affecting forests and forestry in the GMS.

In partnership with Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP), FAO and USAID-LEAF organized a workshop on January 20, 2015 in Bangkok to review the findings of the country studies and develop regional action points to more effectively address negative drivers and enhance positive drivers of forest change in the GMS.

Objectives

The objectives of the workshop were to:

1. Present reports on positive and negative drivers of forest change in the GMS countries;
2. Present an overview of work completed on forest cover change and drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in the GMS; and
3. Receive inputs on and plan a process to assess drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in the GMS and develop options to address drivers.

Agenda

8:00-08:30	Registration	
08:30-09:00	Opening Remarks by DNP, USAID LEAF, and FAO	Adisorn Nuchdumrong (DNP) Brian Bean (USAID LEAF) Patrick Durst (FAO)
09:00-10:40	Presentation of draft national studies (20 minutes each)	Cambodia – Chhun Delux Lao PDR – Ian Thomas Myanmar – Maung Maung Than Thailand – Preecha Ongprasert Vietnam – Do Anh Tuan
10:40-11:00	Coffee/tea	
11:00-11:20	Presentation of draft regional synthesis	John Costenbader
11:20-12:00	Discussion of regional trends in positive and negative drivers of change	Yurdi Yasmi (Facilitator)
12:00-13:00	Lunch	
13:00-14:30	Working groups outline action plans addressing drivers	Working groups
14:30-14:45	Coffee/Tea	
14:45-15:15	Presentation of working group results	Working groups
15:15-16:45	Action plan for GMS discussed and outlined	Plenary
16:45-17:00	Closing Remarks	Jeremy Broadhead (USAID LEAF) Patrick Durst (FAO)

Outputs

1. Information sharing between countries on national and regional drivers of change in forestry in the GMS;
2. Action points for a GMS plan, including priority interventions aimed at addressing negative drivers and enhancing positive drivers of forest change;
3. Ideas for new mechanisms or initiatives to assist GMS countries in tackling negative drivers and enhancing positive drivers and associated responsibilities.
4. Workshop report.

Meeting Summary

Key messages from the presentations and ensuing discussions are summarized in the following sections.

Original presentations can be downloaded at the following address:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vqtt9ag6tndxsjz/AAC13pQSha0qJ7--lgT8RwX5a?dl=0>.

Opening Remarks

The workshop began with opening remarks from Mr. Adisorn Nuchdumrong, Inspector General and Acting Deputy Director General, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Thailand (DNP); Mr. Brian Bean, Chief of Party, USAID LEAF program; and Mr. Patrick Durst, Senior Forestry Officer, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.



Figure 1: Mr. Brian Bean (USAID LEAF), Mr. Adisorn Nuchdumrong (DNP), and Mr. Patrick Durst (FAO) delivered opening remarks.

Mr. Adisorn Nuchdumrong (DNP)

Mr. Adisorn Nuchdumrong mentioned the impacts of forest loss on livelihoods and food security, especially in the context of climate change, and emphasized our common duty to protect the forests. He expressed hope that the workshop would provide a platform for participants to share experience and establish a network for future cooperation.

Mr. Brian Bean (USAID LEAF)

Mr. Brian Bean stated that USAID LEAF has been active in supporting policy and building capacity in relation to addressing drivers of deforestation and degradation, including through providing support for the development of the *ARKN-FCC Decision Support Tool on Identifying and Addressing Drivers of Deforestation and Forest Degradation*. He indicated that identifying drivers is relatively easy while addressing drivers is a difficult task, and the challenge for all workshop participants is to move from discussion to action.

Mr. Patrick Durst (FAO)

Mr. Patrick Durst noted that FAO has done a lot of analysis of drivers of forest change, including through the regional *Asia-Pacific Forestry Sector Outlook Study*, and has conducted strategic planning activities and forest policy courses to support efforts to assess and address drivers. Mr. Durst summarized that in the GMS, forest cover is currently 48%, which is relatively high compared to the rest of the world. However, many forests are being lost due to agricultural expansion and infrastructure development while also being degraded due to illegal logging, shifting cultivation and other influences. Mr. Durst suggested that while there has been much study of drivers of deforestation, more attention needs to be paid to positive drivers and the kinds of incentives that work for reforestation, forest restoration and assisted natural regeneration. There is also a need to analyze underlying policies and socioeconomic conditions resulting in trends seen in other parts of the world where rates of deforestation have been slowing. Mr. Durst also stressed the importance of collaboration and encouraged participants to take advantage of the workshop to discuss the regional aspects of negative and positive drivers.

Presentation of draft national studies

Cambodia – Mr. Chhun Delux, Forestry Administration of Cambodia

Mr. Delux presented the findings of his study on drivers of forest change in Cambodia. According to Forestry Administration data, forest cover in Cambodia decreased from 73% in 1965 to 57% in 2010, and the UN population projections suggest that forest cover will fall to 50% by 2020 under a business as usual scenario. The current negative drivers of forest change include: (i) demand for land (for large scale economic land concessions (ELC), small scale land concessions, social land concessions for poor and landless families, hydropower dam construction, mining concessions, road construction, and land speculation); (ii) demand for fuelwood and timber; and (iii) forest fire.

The Government of Cambodia is implementing a number of policies and measures to combat deforestation and forest degradation such as the National Forest Programme (2010-2029); draft Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Law; and Government Directive 001 (Order 01BB), which suspended the granting of new ELCs and called for a review of existing concessions.

Mr. Delux concluded his presentation by discussing the impacts of population growth, demand for land, and demand for fuelwood and timber on these policies and measures. If the policies and measures are not implemented in a timely and effective manner, forests will be at risk of conversion to other land uses.

Lao PDR – Mr. Ian Thomas, Mekong Maps Co Ltd

Mr. Thomas presented the findings of his study on drivers of forest change in Laos. Laos has a relatively high forest cover of 40%; however, the quality of the remaining forests is low due to widespread degradation. The Government of Laos has made efforts to tackle problems in the forestry sector by improving national laws and regulations, including drafting a new National Land Policy that is currently being debated by

the National Assembly; reducing the impacts of shifting cultivation; granting conservation or protected status to over 50% of forests; and

multiple regulations and moratoria banning the export of unprocessed logs and closing unlicensed sawmills. However, these laws, regulations and moratoria are often ignored or bypassed, resulting in increased deforestation and forest degradation. Illegal logging and conversion of forests to agriculture and tree plantations continue to be the main causes of forest loss and degradation.

Mr. Thomas provided a number of recommendations to address the negative drivers of forest change, of which he particularly emphasized the need to strengthen enforcement of existing forest-related laws and regulations.



Figure 2: Mr. Ian Thomas (Mekong Maps Co Ltd) presented on drivers of forest change in Lao PDR.

Myanmar – Mr. Maung Maung Than, Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (Retired)

Mr. Maung Maung Than, presented the findings of his study on drivers of forest change in Myanmar. According to the draft 2015 Myanmar report for the FAO Forest Resources Assessment, forest cover in Myanmar decreased from 58% in 1990 to 43% in 2015. The main drivers of deforestation from within the forestry sector include over-exploitation of timber, shifting cultivation, overharvesting of wood for fuelwood and charcoal production, over-grazing, forest fires, storms and pests. The main drivers of deforestation outside the forestry sector include agricultural expansion, mining, hydropower development, infrastructure construction, establishment of military settlements, urbanization and resettlement, and aquaculture development. Underlying drivers include poverty, economic growth and increasing consumption, capacity constraints, lack of environmental safeguards, lack of comprehensive land-use policies and planning, undervaluation of biodiversity, and lack of a conservation ethic.

The Government of Myanmar is implementing several policies and measures to combat deforestation and forest degradation including FLEGT, REDD+, land use policy formulation, community forestry, responsible tourism policy, and energy master plan. In addition, Mr. Maung Maung Than suggested that all sectors should be required to carry out Strategic Environmental Assessments to help tackle the negative drivers of forest change.

Thailand – Mr. Preecha Ongprasert, Royal Forestry Department.

Mr. Ongprasert presented on drivers of forest change in Thailand. Thailand's deforestation rate is low but the overall forest area is also low – the current forest cover of 31.57%, which falls short of the national target of 40%. The main drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in Thailand are expansion of urban areas; infrastructure development; land requirements for tourist accommodation and for palm oil and rubber plantations, and other agricultural crops; forest fires; and natural disasters.

National policy has evolved from emphasizing growth and industrialization during the 1960s-1980s to focusing more on environmental considerations and sustainable development since the late 1980s up until the present. Thailand experienced a reduction and subsequent gradual increase in forest cover as a result. Mr. Ongprasert mentioned several mechanisms currently employed in Thailand to combat deforestation and forest degradation and increase forest cover such as policy support, law enforcement, forest land management, community forestry, engagement of religious institutions in forest conservation, corporate social responsibility (CSR), eco-tourism, and urban forestry.

Vietnam – Dr. Do Anh Tuan, Vietnam Forestry University

Dr. Tuan presented the findings of his study on drivers of forest change in Vietnam. There has been an increase in forest cover in Vietnam in recent decades. Most of the increase has, however, come from plantation establishment while the natural forest area has fluctuated. The direct drivers of



Figure 3: Mr. Preecha Ongprasert (Royal Forestry Department) presented on drivers of forest change in Thailand.

deforestation and forest degradation in Vietnam are land conversion for subsistence and commercial agriculture, hydropower development, overharvesting of forests, forest fires, and illegal logging. The underlying causes can be classified into three categories: (i) increasing demand for timber and agricultural products, (ii) insufficient recognition of local people's rights to forests and forest land, and (iii) ineffective governance.

Dr. Tuan compared forest ownership and forestry institutions in Vietnam and the United States, indicating that forest ownership in the U.S. is decentralized and the U.S. Forest Service focuses on providing services such as technical assistance to forest owners. In Vietnam forest ownership is centralized and the focus of governmental forestry agencies is on management. In addition, Dr. Tuan commented that many natural resource management policies in Vietnam were initiated by foreign NGOs with no clear national road map, and were thus not implemented. He discussed the shortcomings of several policies and measures such as forest land use policies (forest and forest land allocation, lease, and contracting), afforestation and reforestation, payment for forest environmental services, and FSC certification. Dr. Tuan emphasized the need for further decentralization in Vietnam, since land allocation cannot be effective without administrative authority decentralization. He also called for development of clear benefit sharing from forestry activities and the need to focus on user values (such as timber and NTFP) rather indirect values (such as ecosystem services) in designing incentive mechanisms for local people.



Figure 4: Mr. Do Anh Tuan (Vietnam Forest University) presented on drivers of forest change in Vietnam.

Presentation of draft regional synthesis – Mr. John Costenbader, USAID LEAF

Mr. Costenbader presented a brief regional synthesis of drivers of forest change in the GMS. Overall, there is a loss of forest area throughout the region. Common negative direct drivers include land conversion for agriculture, infrastructure development, mining, dam construction, logging and forest fire. Indirect drivers include population and economic growth and increased regional and global demand for agricultural land. On the other hand, there are positive drivers of forest change including demand for environmental services and sustainably produced timber, community forestry and increased public awareness. Mr. Costenbader then identified significant policies and measures affecting drivers in the region and discussed challenges in implementing them.

Discussion of regional trends in positive and negative drivers of change

In this session, participants discussed common positive and negative drivers included in the country presentations and identified other important drivers that had not been mentioned. This was followed by a discussion of how to more effectively tackle negative drivers and enhance positive drivers.

Common direct negative drivers mentioned in the presentations included land conversion for agriculture, urban expansion, infrastructure, mining, and hydropower; forest fires, natural disaster and climate change; unsustainable and illegal logging, and unsustainable collection of wood for fuelwood and charcoal production. Indirect negative drivers that were mentioned included

population growth; national, regional, and global demand for timber and agricultural products; lack of forest sector funding, lack of MRV, lack of law enforcement, ineffective governance, centralized management and top down policy approaches. Additionally, participants identified other important negative drivers that had not been mentioned such as globalization (leading to increased local needs and demands as well as increased pressure from outside); funding cycles being too short; low capacity and lack of skilled workers; conflicting mandates and unclear allocation of rights and responsibilities; weak inter-sectoral coordination, lack of transparency, and weak political commitment.



Figure 5: Dr. Suchitra Changtragoon (Thailand DNP) raised a point during the discussion.

Common direct positive drivers mentioned in the presentations included timber certification; FLEGT initiatives and the US Lacey Act; REDD+ and PES; policies on forest conservation, regeneration, restoration, afforestation, and reforestation; logging bans, community forestry promotion, EIA/SEA requirement, increased focus on NTFP and other ecosystem services; and transboundary haze regulations. The presentations also mentioned some common underlying positive drivers such as technology and innovation (e.g., remote sensing), food security concerns, growing awareness of the link between natural disasters and unsustainable forestry practices, increased Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and improved tenure/land use rights. Participants added several other positive drivers such as migration of rural people to urban areas, family planning, strong public and private sector champions, value chain policies and measures, and buffer zones along international boundaries for security reason.

Participants suggested a number of actions to more effectively address negative drivers while enhancing positive drivers. These include:

- Strengthen and harmonize Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) across the GMS for infrastructure, mining, and other projects;
- Develop and enhance incentive and disincentive mechanisms, including promoting REDD+ and PES programs and ensuring that benefits accrue to local forest managers;
- Improve regional and bilateral cooperation to address illegal logging trade (through joint border patrols, strengthened international police, strengthened enforcement systems with substantial fines across the region, and prosecute big players involved in forest crimes);
- Improve governance (strengthen law enforcement, transparency, monitoring & evaluation, and anti-corruption); apply REDD+ principles in national plans and actions; implement guidance given under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD);
- Enhance stakeholder engagement (establish public database on forestland, empower local organizations and communities);
- Further decentralize forest management;
- Implement climate smart agriculture;
- Enhance reforestation and plantation establishment to sustain timber supply from outside natural forest;

- Implement comprehensive land use planning with proper implementation, monitoring and evaluation and harmonization between different policies, objectives and sectors;
- Develop alternative livelihoods (especially if local people lose access to forests);
- Increase knowledge sharing between countries;
- Promote sustainable forest practices and financing; promote market and value added network for NTFP; increase support for sustainable NTFP enterprises; scale up Voluntary Partnership Agreement to improve timber certification; further engage the private sector (beyond CSR) as well as wealthy individuals;
- Secure donor funds and support for R&D for technology and innovation;
- Enhance communication to increase environmental awareness and law dissemination;
- Celebrate champions and allocate resources to successful strategies, which can lead to more governmental budget for the forest sector;
- Increase financial commitment for the forestry sector;
- Improve the use of scientific information for decision making;
- Improve political will and regional policy coherence; increase subnational will and capacity for policy implementation and enforcement.

Participants also discussed the pros and cons of logging bans. The main points raised were: (i) that national logging bans can result in logging activities being displaced to neighboring countries; (ii) that logging bans can discourage the use of wood, which when produced sustainably is considered a more environmentally friendly material than steel, aluminum, bricks or concrete; (iii) that logging bans can be effective but should be reviewed and not applied for long periods; (iv) that logging should be banned in certain areas only (e.g., in protection but not production forests).

Working group's suggested action points to address drivers

In this session, participants discussed existing regional initiatives to address drivers and identified potential regional mechanisms to further tackle negative drivers and enhance positive drivers. Various existing regional initiatives were mentioned, including bilateral partnerships and MOUs (e.g., Cambodia and Vietnam agreement against timber smuggling); transboundary projects (e.g., Phatam protected forest complex in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand); various ASEAN initiatives (e.g., ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network, ASEAN Regional Knowledge Network on Forest and Climate Change, ASEAN Social Forestry Network, ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, ASEAN Economic Community); Asia-Pacific initiatives (Asia Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)); other regional initiatives such as Mekong River Commission's Climate Change Adaptation Initiative, USAID/NASA SERVIR Mekong project, ADB Core Environment Program – Biodiversity Conservation Corridor Initiative (CEP-BCI), Asia-Pacific Forest Policy Think Tank; and other global initiatives such as FLEGT, PES, REDD+, GEF Forest and Biodiversity Program, University of Maryland/Google Global Forest Watch, International Model Forest Network, and the Low Emission Development Strategy Global Partnership (LEDS GP).

Participants identified potential mechanisms and initiatives that GMS countries could undertake to tackle negative drivers and enhance positive drivers. These included:

- Enhance transboundary biodiversity conservation through establishment of joint management forests and protected areas. An example is given by an MOU recently signed

between Cao Bang province in Vietnam and Guangxi province in China to establish a biodiversity conservation corridor.

- Increase regional cooperation to curb illegal trade of forest products and wildlife, strengthen cross-border forest patrols, and increase dialogue between ASEAN countries and China to develop an action plan to address demand for forest products. Collaboration between ASEAN countries and China should also cover watershed management issues and should reach the ministerial level to be effective. In relation it was noted that six ASEAN countries and China are holding a meeting to discuss forest and biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, while DNP in Thailand has set up a committee to explore transboundary initiatives with four neighbouring countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Malaysia).
- Set up a GMS Timber Certification system, including public-private partnerships; set up a regional verification system for export logging licenses that can be used to monitor timber flow between GMS countries;
- Develop a web-based information hub to monitor and share information and data on forests, biodiversity and drivers among GMS countries; this information hub should be built on existing networks (e.g., APFNet to provide free satellite images);
- Scale up REDD+ networks at the regional level to address leakage between countries;
- Increase knowledge sharing between countries through workshops and trainings;
- Strengthen FLEGT and Voluntary Partnership Agreements;
- Conduct land suitability assessment (e.g., to identify areas that suitable for palm oil) and develop a Regional Master Plan;
- Synergize UNFCCC, CBD and UNCCD strategies;
- Provide regional policy support, increase stakeholder participation and support for sustainable livelihoods, PES and ecotourism
- Promote regional urban forestry programs (e.g., RFD in Thailand is collaborating with IUCN Urban Conservation Program)
- Establish a tree seedbank network
- Establish a Working Group on Forest Protection and Management and develop a Regional Action Plan or Strategy (e.g., when there is a transboundary fire who should be contacted?)
- Integrate forest and driver issues into GMS Regional Summits attended by high-ranking officials and also into discussion on the GMS East-West and North-South economic corridors.

Closing remarks

The workshop ended with closing remarks from Mr. Jeremy Broadhead of USAID LEAF and Mr. Patrick Durst of FAO. Mr. Jeremy Broadhead reflected that forest policies had often been driven by international processes but had now been taken up more by national governments, which is a positive sign, and that forest policies should be based on objective long-term analysis rather than being reactionary. Mr. Patrick Durst mentioned that the workshop was supported by the Asia-Pacific Forest Policy Think Tank, which aims to help develop innovative policy and support Asian forest policy makers and analysts to develop and hone their skills. Mr. Durst was pleased to see Asian forest policy makers articulating their knowledge and skills with an Asian voice in the workshop. He looked forward to building on the recommendations on regional collaboration that were made and would arrange meetings to discuss which ideas to move forward with. Both Mr. Broadhead and Mr. Durst

thanked all workshop participants for taking time to attend the workshop and for their active contribution.

Meeting Participants

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