

Rewards with Care: Enhancing Environmental Services and Alleviating Poverty

RUPES – Rewarding Upland Poor for Environmental Services they provide– is coordinated by the Southeast Asia Regional Programme of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other supporting grants from 2002 to 2012. Achievements have included: increased awareness at the grass-roots level about the RUPES concept; tens of thousands of farmers achieving greater land access security; strengthening of local institutions and multi-stakeholder networks, including the site technical working/advisory groups; and generating knowledge on environmental services as global public goods. RUPES supported the development of national independent networks as advocates for policy change.

Working at fifteen action research sites in Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal, China and India and partnering with more than twenty learning sites across Asia, the project resulted in significant achievements in pilot schemes involving rewards on a more localized basis for watershed and agro-biodiversity-related environmental services and global voluntary carbon markets, as well as in developing cost-effective tools for the rapid assessment of environmental services. The project developed a set of principles and criteria for rewards for environmental services that are summarized in four attributes (realistic, conditional, voluntary and pro-poor). In the context of the rural poverty and environmental nexus, one of the project's key findings is that reward mechanisms can address several dimensions of rural poverty. This finding is significant given that rural poverty in Asia is linked to neglect and misunderstanding of environmental services. To date, RUPES has identified eight pathways to reduce poverty through environmental services. RUPES and other initiatives have encouraged adoption of improved land and forest management practices.

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