

# Seeing the Forests and the Farms Together: **Promoting the Rights and Livelihoods of Forest and Farm Producers in Asia**



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**ASK. ANALYZE. ADVOCATE. ACT!**



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**T**here is a very close relationship between forestry and farming. Both forests and farms are source of food (both from plants and animals), nutrition, health, and livelihoods for family farmers. Besides, forests provide sources for fuel, energy, water and medicines. Forests beautify and contribute to biodiversity in a particular landscape.

Many women and men farmers in Asia live inside or near forest areas and as such, are also engaged in gathering and producing food, wood and other products from the forests. Moreover, they plant their crops near forests, and often strive to augment their incomes by engaging in farm as well as forest-based production and services. Many people who live inside forests are also into farming. Out of 17 member organizations in 13 countries of the Asian Farmers' Association (AFA), 10 member organizations in nine (9) countries have members or partner farmer groups living inside or near forests.

This issue paper looks at the situation of farmers living inside or near forest areas, i.e. in forested landscapes. It examines the challenges confronting forest and farm producers in Asia, and presents their initiatives and recommendations on how to address these challenges. The content of this paper is drawn from the output of nine national consultation workshops (done by AFA members



in Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Nepal, Mongolia, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan) participated by 250 persons, as well as from a regional sharing and learning session wherein 52 representatives from 15 AFA member organizations and partners in 12 countries participated.

According to FAO, "farm and forest producers are women and men, smallholder families, indigenous peoples and local communities who have strong relationships with forests and farms in forested landscapes. Such producers grow, manage, harvest and process a wide range of natural-resource-based goods and services for subsistence use and for sale in local, national or international markets."<sup>i</sup>

### How important is the forestry sector in Asia?

Economically, the forestry sector is crucial to the economy and society of many countries in Asia. In 2011, the sector provided 62 million tons of food, including animal-based and plant-based non-wood forest products (NWFP) – the highest among the major regions in the world.<sup>ii</sup> Also in the same year, the sector provided employment to 6.9 million people.<sup>iii</sup>

Asia's forest is a key supplier of wood-based products. In 2011, the gross value from forestry and logging activities and the production of sawn wood, wood based panels and paper and pulp products, was at USD 260 billion. It is also a key source of wood energy and wood fuel, enabling millions of families, especially in poor communities, to cook their food and sterilize their water.

The importance of the sector in Asia is due to the fact that a large percentage of land resources in many countries in the region is covered by forests. In Southeast Asia alone, forest areas cover





twenty-five percent (25%) to as much as seventy two percent (72%) of total land resources in all countries, with the exception of Singapore. One of the biggest mangrove forests in the world is the Sundarbans forest in Bangladesh.

### What are the issues faced by forest and farm producers?

**Lack of access to, control over, and use of forest resources.** Forest and farm producers generally do not own forestlands, though some are given rights by governments to use and manage forest resources. Many farmers who live in forested landscapes do not have rights to use, manage, and sell timber and non-timber forest products.



Most forests are publicly owned on account of their significance as a key natural resource as is the case in Brunei, Cambodia, Myanmar and Singapore, to name a few. The security of tenure and land rights of farm and forest producers varies from one country to another, depending on the quality and consistency of forest related laws and policies, as well as governments' capacity and commitment to implement them. In some countries, such as the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, private ownership of forestlands is allowed, although this represents a small percentage of total forest areas.

In Indonesia, there is a joint resolution by four government agencies – those on agriculture, forestry, agrarian reform and population – that aims to help poor communities have access to land rights. However, many forest and farm producers find it difficult to secure administrative proof of ownership of lands. Because they do not have proof of ownership, they are sometimes considered trouble-makers by local police when they stay in forest areas.<sup>vi</sup>

In Bangladesh, the country's Social Forestry Program has yet to recognize the tenure rights of the people in areas declared as forest reserves. In its social forestry program, villagers are mainly involved as caretakers of the trees supposedly as part of their one-third partnership.

**Eviction and displacement.** Many farmers in forested landscapes face eviction and displacement due to (1) land grabbing by both companies and government officials, (2) large scale projects such as dams, coal plants, mining, and economic zones that marginalize farmers and indigenous peoples, or (3) laws on protected areas that do not consider the people already living inside. For instance, in Cambodia, there are 420 laws, decrees, administrative orders and policies designed to protect forests and support poor communities. However, community members from Monduliri, Preah Vihear, Puset, Kampong Speu and Kampong Chhnang provinces reported that government's implementation of land concession policies, which gives big companies rights over farm and forestlands for 50 years, has led to land grabbing, fish depletion and forest degradation.<sup>vii</sup> In Thailand, farmers and forest producers are being displaced from their lands, as many forest areas are converted into tourist destinations. In the Philippines, a planned construction of a mega-dam is threatening the homes and livelihoods of at least 1, 465 families of mostly Agta-Remontado indigenous peoples.



**Degradation, deforestation and forests' vulnerability to climate change.** The increasing demand for forest products, both for food, shelter, raw materials, and other commodities is exerting great pressure on forest resources. Deforestation and degradation are undermining Asia's forests, and are endangering the sustainability of farm



and forest people's livelihoods. Climate change impacts, which include increases in temperature, seasonal change in rainfall patterns and extreme weather events, are exerting a heavy toll on many communities in forested landscapes.<sup>viii</sup> Without proper adaptation support, farmer and forest producers are in danger of being further marginalized by climate change impacts.

In Mongolia, around 1.2M hectares of forests suffered from wildfires due to very dry climate, while around 96,000 hectares of forests were infested by worms and insects and 900 hectares suffered from natural disaster.

In Bangladesh, the government, under the Social Forestry Program, asked villagers to plant alien and exotic species of trees, but these were proving harmful to farmlands. The trees consumed so much water, thus causing water scarcity. Residents of Khodadatpur preferred to plant local fruit trees and medicinal plants which could serve as sources of fruits and lumber. Unfortunately, they had never been consulted on development programs that affected them.

In recent years, there has been a great interest in the potential of forests to contribute to greenhouse gas emission reductions. Discussions on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) and REDD plus have sparked debate on how these initiatives can impact on forest and farm producers.

**Poor incomes and unstable markets.** Poverty is prevalent in forested areas.<sup>ix</sup> People living in areas with high forest cover can be characterized as the poorest among the poor.<sup>x</sup> Many forest and farm producers are not able to earn enough to meet essential needs, such as food and nutrition, proper shelter, and health and education services.

Many still lack skills in marketing and developing enterprises for forest-based products. In Yen Do commune in Vietnam, villagers combine farming and livestock under the forest canopy. There is demand for wood-based products, but farmers in the commune are not able to meet product specifications because of lack of technical support, market information and capital. Since they are not able to secure credit and capital, they have very little resources to expand and diversify their

products. They also cannot command higher prices for their produce, because they have limited or no access to technology for processing and adding value to their products. Because of poverty in farms in forested landscapes, young people are discouraged from working in the agro-forestry sector, and instead seek off-farm employment opportunities. In Vietnam, farm and forest producers from Dai So and Yen Do report that only 20% and 31% of young people choose to continue in farm and forest-related production and services.

### **Poor physical and social infrastructure in forested landscapes.**

Many forested areas are also remote places, where there is poor electricity, connectivity and bad roads, thereby making these areas difficult to access and basic support services such as schools, health centers and markets harder to reach. In Nepal, farmers and forest producers note the lack of

basic infrastructure, like roads, and transportation, to connect them to markets. All these limitations have gravely undermined their capability to increase production, engage markets and improve their incomes and livelihoods.

**Damages from wildlife.** It is a reality that communities of people may live inside or near natural forest parks. In the Nayabelani village near







Chitwan National Park in Nepal, farmers complain that wild animals, particularly rhinos, tigers, snakes, monkeys and wild birds get to their farms and destroy their crops. The authorities of the national park have provided electric wires for fencing but they are not enough to surround the whole fields. Furthermore, there is voltage fluctuation. In Japan, forests are so dense that no grass grows under the trees, so wild animals like deers go out of the forests and then feed on nearby farms. About 12 billion yen (\$98M) of farm products are lost due to wildlife every year.

### What are key challenges faced by farm and forest producers?

There are four major challenges – areas that test the governments' and the peoples' abilities and resolve to address the issues besetting farmers in forested landscapes.

**Creating an enabling framework for effective implementation of community/social forestry, promoting all 5 rights.** Although many countries in the region have many policies on farm and forestlands, most of these are not effectively implemented. Moreover, some are contradictory, and in many cases its interpretation is biased against the poor, and in favor of big companies.

The bundle of rights that can be awarded to people living inside or near forests can include:

- access: right to enter a forest
- user: right to obtain forest resources (timber and non-timber)

- management: right to regulate internal use patterns or transform the resource
- exclusion: right to decide who can and who cannot use the resources
- alienation: right to own, sell, lease or use the land as collateral, including the sale of all other rights

The ASEAN member states have a commitment to grant these rights to at least 15.9 million local people. However, progress is very slow. Myanmar has only reached 4% of its target, Indonesia - 5%, Cambodia - 9%. In the Philippines, 45% has been achieved but after 2008, there is no target anymore. Vietnam has highest achievement at 95%.



On another hand, although there are legislations in many countries designed to help protect farm and forest producers' land rights, many farmers are still not able to secure legal instruments to show that they have the right to manage and use farm and forest lands.





**Promoting sustainable forest and farm management, including resiliency and adaptation to climate change.** As population and economies expand, so does the need for land and natural resources— for housing, production, mining and tourism, among others. Similarly, the growing demand for farm and forest products is exerting pressure on forest resources. Everyday, trees are cut to meet people's need for wood, housing, construction, fuel, energy and other products. In the name of development, government construct mega-dams or allow big scale mining projects in forested areas. All these lead to conversion and clearing of forestlands, contributing to deforestation, degradation, and loss of bio diversity .

How to maintain, keep or protect forest and farm resources while meeting the people's rightful needs amidst intensifying effects of climate change is indeed a big challenge. In Taiwan, forest farmers became rich because they can cut trees and sell them, but they over-used the forests – they just cut and did not replant trees. Taiwan forests is now protected by importing forest resources and stopping of lease arrangements in forestlands. In Japan, forest farming is not an occupation anymore and no one takes care of the forests nor use their forest resources, as Japan can buy forest products from other countries at cheaper prices. But this reliance on other countries' forest resources gave way to exploitation of forest resources in the Southern countries; and therefore not sustainable.

There is also the challenge to promote consistency in terms of government policies. In Bangladesh, government is implementing social forestry programs in order to support forest-based communities and to take advantage of forests' capability to function as natural protection against cyclones and tidal surges. At the same time,

government is encouraging people to plant trees by distributing fruit and timber saplings, as well as saline tolerant varieties. However, government introduced also akashoni and eucalyptus trees which villagers think are harmful to the environment and threaten the biodiversity of forests in Bangladesh. Also, even while the State is doing all these, it is also undertaking a coal project that threatens to destroy the mangroves in the Sundarbans forest. This contradictory position weakens government's net effectiveness in addressing forest and environmental degradation.

Climate change is a common concern among countries in the region. Climate change impacts and natural disasters threaten farm and forest systems. In Thailand, farmers observe that, for the first time, there is no water in dams because of droughts. This has implications on their access to water for household needs and for production. This is especially challenging for women as they try to manage households and farms with very little of this precious resource.

Climate change is also undermining key development goals such as eradicating hunger and alleviating poverty. Farmers from Nepal note that the effects of climate change on farm and forest production exacerbates food insecurity, as many are not able to produce enough food and agricultural products for household consumption and to sell to markets. In Myanmar, farmers in forest landscapes report a further drop in incomes in light of the negative effects of changing climate patterns on farm and forest production.

All these underscore the need to undertake climate adaptation initiatives, specifically for farmers in forested landscapes. Farmers from Kyrgyztan also expressed the need to raise people's awareness





about UN conventions and initiatives on climate change and how these can be tapped to promote climate adaptation in countries. Discussions on this issue are currently tackled in negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

**Increasing the market power of farmers in forested area through fair markets, and farmer-managed enterprises on value addition, processing and marketing of forest based products.** There are many forest resources and with proper entrepreneurial skills, capital, technologies, and facilities, farmers through their groups can have more incomes by adding value to these resources or by directly marketing these produce.



**Having significant involvement in decision making processes.** Farm and forest producers, especially women, rarely have voice in local and national decision making processes, particularly on matters that affect their communities' livelihoods and welfare. Their interest and position are not significantly represented and considered in developing national laws, resulting to policies that are detrimental to their welfare. For instance, farm and forest producers note that Cambodian policy on economic land concessions did not go through intensive consultation with key stakeholders, especially those most affected by this government decision. The huge economic land concessions that emerged as a result of this law prevent a generation of farmers from utilizing and exercising control over lands. Farmers from Nepal also underscored the need to ensure that they have a voice in projects designed to help them. For instance, they note that they do not always have representation in the executive committees of Community Forest (CF) projects. This limits their capability to work with government in developing farm and forest programs and initiatives that are truly responsive to their needs.

The absence of farmers' participation in decision making processes also deprives governments of the opportunity to tap farmers in indigenous knowledge about forest landscapes and systems. In Bangladesh, the government introduced akashoni and eucalyptus trees from Australia as part of the Social Forestry project. However, farm and forest producers note these tree varieties are harmful to the environment and threaten the biodiversity of forests in Bangladesh. This problem could have been avoided if governments involved stakeholders in the process of designing and implementing forestry programs.

### **What initiatives are currently being undertaken by governments to address these challenges?**

There have been initiatives by governments in the region to support forest and farm producers. There are government policies and programs aimed to help them secure their land rights, provide them with basic support services, enable them to cope with climate change impacts, and address the problems of deforestation and environmental degradation. Some governments work closely with international development organizations in developing and implementing forestry projects. For example, In Kyrgyzstan, the government has a project with the World Bank, JICA and GIZ on reforestation and sustainable forest management. In Mongolia, the State provides families with saplings as part of its campaign to encourage families to plant at least two trees. This project is being implemented with GIZ and WWF to support forest users' groups.





Farmers organizations have also undertaken some initiatives:

**In Indonesia**, farmers in Ujong Kulong organized themselves in 2009-2010 into the Ujong Kulon Honey Farmers Union or STUK (acronym in Bahasa language). They received training from the Indonesia Forest Honey Networks on sustainable honey harvesting techniques. The latter also facilitated STUK's direct marketing of honey to several retail shops. Then two other organizations, Aliansi Petani Indonesia and Indonesia Organic Alliance, also assisted STUK in marketing their honey products as well as in getting Participatory Guarantee System. In 2015, STUK received orders for 2,000-3,000 bottles of natural honey from an Indonesian company. However, STUK is facing some challenges such as (1) climate change that affects the harvest, where during longer wet season the forest flowers will fall easily, on the other hand in longer dry season there will be lesser nectar of the forest flowers; (2) the changing of top leader of the nearby Natural Park which affect the security of people to harvest and process the honey, (3) fresh cash for farmers to process their products.

**In Japan**, there is a movement now to bring back the practice of "satoyama", which means village with surrounding forests. The satoyama system was a traditional way of using forest resources while caring for it in a collective manner. In the satoyama system, a farmer plants trees with the expectation that his children will someday use the timber for their home needs. The satoyama system died 40 years ago with industrialization and subsequent importation of cheap forest products.

**In Mongolia**, forest herder groups cooperate with government's programs on forest protection and reforestation by "cleaning" the forests and planting saplings every year.

**In Nepal**, Philippines, Cambodia and Myanmar, farmers organizations conduct campaigns to secure rights to landless farmers and indigenous peoples, through awareness raising on their legal rights, para-legal training, legal services, lobby with decision makers for effective policies and direct actions (such as rallies). Tea farmers in Nepal have also started to plant trees.

**In Kyrgyzstan**, forest user groups and water user groups have organized a national forest platform which is keen on engaging the government in its forestry sector.

### What policies and programs must be put in place to help forest and farm producers overcome these challenges?

Governments, regional inter-governmental bodies, civil society groups, affected communities and development organizations play crucial roles in addressing many of the challenges confronting farm and forest producers. Below are some of the concrete steps and recommendations that these actors can take in order to improve the lives of farmers in forest landscapes:

#### Governments

1. Facilitate people's access to lands and forests. Ensure that laws are supported by clear guidelines and simple procedures on how farm and forest producers can secure land titles, certificates or forest stewardships and concessions on a longer term basis. Governments should also implement land reform programs to democratize access to land, especially in forested landscapes.
2. Effectively implement community/social forestry with forest and farm producer organizations and with appropriate policy and budget. There must also be synchronization of forest-related policy and program implementation.
3. Promote sustainable forest management, agro-forestry, agro-ecology, participatory forest inventory, land mapping, disaster risk reduction and management through various training with forest and farm producer organizations,





development of in-situ model farms and forests, and provision of incentives for agriculture innovations on these areas.



4. Enact and implement comprehensive land use policy that delineates different kinds of land, including forestlands, according to appropriate use. The land use policy should also provide guidelines for deciding on competing use of and claims on lands, taking into account key principles such as food security, environmental protection and poverty reduction. It should also contain provisions discouraging the indiscriminate conversion of farm and forestlands.



5. Institutionalize participation of forest and farm producer organizations in the development, implementation and monitoring of forestry programs and policies as well as in governance bodies on forestry at local and national levels.
6. Ensure that communities' perspectives are listened to and their issues addressed before granting land concessions to private sector and business entities. Governments should stop economic land concessions that displace farm and forest producers and communities and pose threats to their livelihoods.
7. Require private sector to respect and apply the principles of free, prior and informed consent in establishing projects before granting them the necessary permits to start operations.

8. Help strengthen forest and farm producer organizations and cooperatives by extending policy and program support. This includes providing them with the freedom of association, technology, market information, infrastructure and other necessary assistance to enable them to directly link to markets and adding value to forest based products.

#### **Regional inter-governmental bodies like ASEAN and SAARC**

1. Set standards and monitor implementation of agreed upon actions on social forestry and sustainable forest management, as well as the sustainable management and use of the "commons".
2. Facilitate cross-country technology and information exchanges among organizations of forest and farm producers. These can include sharing of information and know-how on climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction, processing and utilization of forest products, best practices on social forestry and sustainable forest management, among others.

#### **Civil Society and forest and farm producer organizations**

1. Advocate for stakeholder participation especially inclusion of representatives of forest and farm producer organizations, in key decision making processes at the local, national and regional levels. Support communities as they engage governments and other institutions (ASEAN, SAARC and relevant UN bodies) that help define policies and programs affecting the agriculture and forestry sector.
2. Work with communities in piloting and modeling best practices on sustainable forest management, agro forestry and agro ecology,







sustainable production and fair trade of forest-based products, enterprise development and climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

3. Generate public awareness on issues of the agriculture and forestry sector as well as on national and international laws, treaties, policies affecting farmers in forested landscapes. Bring the stories of forest and farm producers, especially women, to traditional and social media in order to generate public support for their advocacies and initiatives.



4. Conduct national workshops and provide training and capability building support to cooperatives and farmers' organizations as well as facilitate their access to markets.
5. Engage governments, regional inter-governmental institutions and development organizations to support forest and farm producers by adopting the recommendations articulated in this paper.

### How can I support farm and forest producers?

Everyone can show their support to forest and farm producers by undertaking the following actions:

1. Write to your governments and to ASEAN or SAARC to inquire about the actions that they are undertaking to support farmers in forested landscapes, and to endorse the recommendations in this paper.

2. Reach out to a farmers' organization in your area and volunteer your time and talent to support their work.
3. Go to the AFA website and join our initiatives to influence policymakers.

### ENDNOTES

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# Policy and Program Agenda for Farmers in Forested Landscapes

## The Issues We Face:

- Lack of access to, control over, and use of forest resources
- Eviction and displacement
- Degradation, deforestation and forests' vulnerability to climate change
- Poor incomes and unstable markets for forest products
- Poor physical and social infrastructure in the rural/forested areas
- Damages from wildlife



## The Challenges We Face and the Policies and Programs We Will Push at National and Regional Levels to Respond To These Challenges

- **Create an enabling framework for effective implementation of community/social forestry, promoting all 5 rights**
  - national land and water use policy
  - freedom of association
  - ensure access and use of land, water and forest resources to small farmers
  - prioritize interests of small farmers in forested areas over corporate interests in development projects
  - free and prior informed consent
  - full and significant involvement of women and men farmers in forested landscapes
  - simplified procedures so that farmers can enjoy and exercise their rights
- **Promote sustainable forest and farm management, including resiliency and adaptation to climate change**
  - effective implementation of community/social forestry
  - synchronization of policy and program implementation on forests, waters and agriculture
  - weather forecasting
  - agro forestry, agro ecology
  - water management (e.g. drip irrigation)
  - disaster risk reduction and management
  - participatory forest inventory and land mapping
- **Increase the market power of farmers in forested area through fair markets, and farmer-managed enterprises on value addition, processing and marketing of forest based products**
  - adequate infrastructure, support services and social services to farmers in forested landscapes
  - development of enterprises for forest products through cooperatives and associations
  - community branding and certification of sustainable forest products
  - organizing farmers in forested landscapes to achieve economies of scale
- **Significant involvement of producer organizations in decision making processes**
  - Inclusion of and full and active participation of women and vulnerable groups
  - Development program for women and young entrepreneurs
  - awareness and capacity building for organizational management, advocacy



## Our Main Actions

- Policy Advocacy: engagement with decision-makers through organized and empowered FOs
- Development of forest-based enterprises managed by local farmers' associations and cooperatives with direct link to apex national and regional organizations
- Consolidation and generation of new knowledge through sharing and learning activities and encouraging innovations





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