

Forest communities, indigenous people key to sustainable forests

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FOREST COMMUNITIES and indigenous peoples from various Asian countries, including Thailand, have presented themselves as the key to sustainable forests.

"If you want your country to be green, you need to invest in local communities," said Krirk Meemungkit, a forest farm "small-holder" from Thailand.

He attended a recent Bangkok meeting to discuss forest issues that are priorities for forest community members in the region and to prepare for the XIV World Forestry Congress in South Africa in September. The meeting was also attended by forest community representatives from Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Nepal. "I make my livelihood from a sustainable forest plantation, and I'm using my knowledge to benefit other local people so they can also develop sustainable forest plantations, and in turn they are teaching other local people how to do this," Krirk said.

Theya Chaw, an indigenous community member from PeinNeiKone, a remote area of Myanmar, travelled more than seven days to attend the Bangkok meeting.

"Local people can and want to protect forests, especially because climate change is already making our lives more difficult. But to do this effectively we need resources," Theya Chaw said.

At the meeting, participants identified five priority areas from local perspectives that forest decision-makers must invest in to manage forests more sustainably.

They are participatory processes for policy and enabling regulatory framework development; formalising tenure rights and establishing community forests; funds and resources for community forest implementation; livelihood/enterprise development; and capacity development for leadership empowerment, information access and network advocacy. Under the five areas, solutions and best practices were identified along with specific actions and investments that need to be scaled up. They will be shared with forest decision-makers at the World Forestry Congress.

At the Bangkok meeting, four people were selected to represent the forest communities at the congress. They are Em Sohorn (Cambodia), Hoang Thi Chuyen (Vietnam), Krirk and Theya Chaw. RECOFTC - The Centre for People and Forests, an international non-profit organisation that focuses on empowering local people through participatory processes and promoting forestry from local peoples' perspectives in Asia, hosted the meeting with simultaneous translations in seven languages. The process enabled locals, who are often not directly included in regional meetings as they are frequently conducted in English, to participate fully. "When we have the capacity, we can do anything," said Em Sohorn, manager of a sustainable bamboo enterprise in the Chrous Svay community forest in Cambodia.

Source: <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Forest-communities-indigenous-people-key-to-sustain-30264388.html>