



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



UN
environment
programme

UN-REDD
PROGRAMME

Addressing forest crime through improved governance in the Lower Mekong region

The Lower Mekong basin is a globally important ecoregion that encompasses an incredibly high diversity of forest habitats. These forests are home not only to diverse and rare wildlife but are also relied upon by many communities for essential products and services.

To reduce the pressure on this valuable natural resource, and to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in the region, the Government of Norway is collaborating with the UN-REDD Programme to implement a new two-year regional initiative (2020-2022) that will support countries in the Lower Mekong region (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam). The Initiative will focus on working with key institutions in these countries, and in China, to reduce the opportunities for forest crime by strengthening forest governance, particularly by increasing the effectiveness of systems designed to ensure legal and sustainable trade in timber.



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Working to

increase national commitment to legal and sustainable trade and investment in wood products across the Lower Mekong Region and China

Working with

National Governments, regional platforms and institutions, public and private companies, civil society, and forest-dependent communities

Working thanks to

Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI)

Combatting illegal logging and trade in the Lower Mekong region

Forest crime, the illegal exploitation of the world's forests, has transformed into one of the largest transnational organised criminal activities (UNIDO). With an annual worth of USD 50-150 billion, crimes related to forests and wildlife are the fourth biggest crime sector after drugs, counterfeits and trafficking (INTERPOL-UNEP, 2016). Combating forest crime is crucial to reduce forest degradation and subsequent deforestation, which can significantly affect carbon dioxide emissions.

There is an increasing trend of investments from the expanding economies of China, Thailand and Viet Nam, to timber production and land intensive industries in the lower-income, higher forest cover countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. Given that the gap between global supply and demand of wood products is expected to widen significantly by 2050, growth in supply from the region is also predicted to increase, adding further pressure on already stressed forest resources.

Illegal logging and illegal forest conversion often stem from insecure land tenure, incomplete legal frameworks, or unclear management and enforcement responsibilities. The goal of this initiative is to improve governance, promote policy alignment and institutional inter-compatibility within the region, and boost transparency and cooperation between the Lower Mekong region countries and China.

References

INTERPOL-UNEP. 2016. *Strategic Report: Environment, Peace and Security, A Convergence of Threats*. Lyon. (also available at www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Environmental-crime/Resources);

UNEP-INTERPOL-RHIPTO. 2016. *The rise of environmental crime. A Rapid response assessment*. (also available at www.rhipto.org);

UNIDO, 2019. *Overview*. [Cited 17 April 2020]. www.unodc.org/unodc/en/wildlife-and-forest-crime/overview.html.

The initiative seeks to achieve three outcomes:

Outcome 1: Strengthened bilateral and regional cooperation in place to facilitate legal and sustainable trade in forest products across the Lower Mekong region (and China);

Outcome 2: Improved forest governance for legal and sustainable production of forest related products;

Outcome 3: Improved monitoring of forest and land use through enhanced data accessibility and management.

The new initiative will be integrated into the existing UN-REDD Programme framework, allowing it to leverage more than a decade's worth of valuable knowledge, networks and human capital accumulated since the Programme was launched in 2008. From the outset, the UN-REDD Programme has highlighted the importance of efficient, effective and equitable governance of forests and forest resources in efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation over the long term, while supporting the sustainable development of rural forest-dependent populations.

The project will support the development of national standards, systems and capacities for verification of legal and sustainable timber, including through forest certification, and will complement the support provided through the FAO-EU-FLEGT Programme for development of Timber Legality Assurance Schemes and Voluntary Partnership Agreements between Lower Mekong countries and the European Union.



More information about the UN-REDD Programme:

<https://www.un-redd.org/> <https://www.unredd.net/>



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Norad