

Press Release  
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## Lower Mekong region forges path as a future hub of sustainable forestry and trade

- Exports of primary wood products from natural forests in the Lower Mekong region to China have declined in recent years due to limited supply caused by historical over-exploitation and government measures to regulate harvesting levels.
- Overwhelmingly, consumers in the region remain indifferent to the severity of forest crime and are unaware of its detrimental consequences.
- Transboundary efforts, innovative forest monitoring technologies and implementation of government measures to limit harvest from natural forests are indicating effectiveness in combatting transboundary forest crime.
- The important role forests can play in climate change mitigation increases the value of forests towards conservation and sustainable forest management.

**May 23, 2023, Bangkok, Thailand:** The Lower Mekong region is currently undergoing a transformation, shifting from a hotbed of illegal logging and rampant deforestation to a promising era of sustainable forest trade practices. This transition signifies a milestone in the conservation of forest ecosystems, protection of endangered species, and the fight against climate change.

Historically, the trade of forest products with China has played a pivotal role in the region. However, recent years have witnessed a decline in exports to China due to stricter regulations and dwindling supply. Estimates suggest that only a third of the region's forest remain standing. Meanwhile, Thailand and Viet Nam are marking their place as hubs of global forest products trade.

“These developments are changing the landscape of forest trade in the region and offer an opportunity for the region to transform its forestry sector,” said **AKIKO INOBUCHI**, Forestry Officer, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

She added: “Yet challenges are abound, including better preparing the forest trade industry’s traceability and engaging with smallholders who source the dominant regional timber and fiber supply”.

Another one of the major challenges lies in the public's perception of illegal logging and forest crime. According to the [Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice \(KAP\) survey](#), about 50% of respondents remain indifferent to the severity of this crime and are unaware of its detrimental consequences.

“This lack of awareness hampers people’s ability to actively participate in combating illegal logging and protecting forests”, said **KATRINA BORROMEO**, Programme and Communications Officer at the United Nations Environment Programme. Consequently, there is a consistent increase in the demand for forest products from 70% to 90%, adding more pressure to the region's forests.

Behavior change campaigns in [China](#) and Thailand, in collaboration with the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and the Royal Forest Department respectively, have been kickstarted to raise on the importance of forests and empower individuals to contribute to the protection of crucial forest ecosystems.

To complement these efforts, the implementation of strict policies and regulations and advanced forest monitoring technologies, such as state-of-the-art camera traps and drones, has demonstrated promising results.

Thailand has led the way by utilizing these innovative tools to combat illegal logging effectively, such as:

- **Pitak Prai** is an application that sent notification on suspected illegal encroachment area and updated on the forest fire.
- **e-TREE** is a digital platform to enhance traceability solutions and forest management.
- **NCAPS** is a remote sensing tool using mobile network to assist forest rangers on patrolling activities to detect movement of illegal logging in the forest.

Since forest crime often transcends national borders, cross-country cooperation is needed. Encouraging examples of bilateral cooperation can be seen in the collaborative efforts of Cambodia and Thailand, as well as of Cambodia and Lao PDR.

“The bilateral cooperation between Thailand and Cambodia has proven effective in strengthening timber trade requirements and near real-time monitoring of forests, especially of high-value and endangered tree species such as rosewood”, said **DANY CHHEANY**, Deputy Director General, Forestry Administration in Cambodia.

**AOMJITR SENA**, Forestry Officer, Royal Forest Department of Thailand said that the cooperation between the two countries has led to the integration of technology into transboundary conservation approaches. “Now we can share information databases

that provide real-time data on forest monitoring and various types of illegal activities. These could greatly help our forest patrollers to catch poachers and crack down transboundary forest crime”, said Sena.

Substantial financial investments are furthermore required to protect forests and promote sustainable trade. Lower Mekong countries are tapping into a range of upfront and results-based financing through multilateral agreements and carbon markets. Banks and financial institutions can contribute to this cause by aligning their financial flows with sustainability goals.

Overall, combating illegal logging and timber trade demands a comprehensive approach encompassing the whole supply chain: from forest management, transportation, certification, markets, to changing consumer behavior. Lower Mekong countries are at the forefront of implementing these approaches, paving its path as a future hub of sustainable forestry and trade.

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## NOTE TO EDITORS

### About UN-REDD

The [United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries \(UN-REDD\)](#) is the flagship UN knowledge and advisory platform on forest solutions to the climate crisis. Building on the convening capacity and technical expertise of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNEP, UN-REDD is the largest international provider of REDD+ assistance, helping its 65 partner countries protect their forests and achieve their climate goals.

### About the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

The [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030](#), led by the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and partners covers terrestrial as well as coastal and marine ecosystems. A global call to action, it will draw together political support, scientific research and financial muscle to massively scale up restoration. **The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the UN-REDD programme jointly lead the “[Forest for Life](#)” campaign.**

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