

**PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS:  
THE ASEAN EXPERIENCE IN FORESTRY COOPERATION**

by

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**INTRODUCTION**

**A**SEAN Member Countries have a total land area amounting to 4,195,398 sq km in which more than 60% is covered by forest. It is a region well endowed with relatively large tracts of rich and diverse tropical forests known to be amongst the most complex ecosystem in the world.

The forest is a very important natural resource for the region in terms of economical, ecological and socio-cultural aspects. The forestry sector plays a major role in the development of the region. The capacity of the forests to supply relevant ecological, economic and social services (e.g. timber production, conservation of biodiversity, protection of watershed areas and climate and the maintenance of soil fertility) to society is becoming increasingly challenged.

As one of the major tropical forest regions in the world, ASEAN Member Countries are important suppliers of tropical timber and non-timber products to the world market.

The rapid pace of development, dwindling of resource base, increasing population and economic demands has caused tremendous pressure to tropical forest in most ASEAN Member Countries.

The challenge now facing the Member Countries is to further increase production, both in terms of quantity and quality, and increase exports using methods that are economically and environmentally sustainable.

Forest resources in many areas are gradually depleting due to improper forest management practices and lack of control. Economic, or more specifically timber, was clearly the main motivation in utilizing forest resource during the last three decades. Excessive burden has been put upon forests beyond their capacity to replenish. Hence the forest management systems and practices need to be developed further and refined to keep abreast with the latest scenario towards a multi – functional and sustainable forest ecosystem management.

The consequences in the field have shown that natural forest ecosystems have become fragmented and could not function optimally as a life support system. Some of the underlying causes of deforestation in Southeast Asia are increasing populations, competing land-uses, unfavourable opportunity cost of forestry without taking account of its national and global environmental functions, land tenure arrangements often neglecting customary rights of rural people as well as fragmented decision-making. Forest fires and haze, illegal logging and the associated illicit trade with forest produce as well as poverty are some of its symptoms.

ASEAN Member Countries have always recognized the benefits of taking a regional approach in addressing forestry issues and concerns. Through the years, ASEAN efforts towards forging common positions in forestry matters have extended beyond ASEAN borders. Today, discussion of sustainable forest management is in the context of global trade and a clean environment. ASEAN Member Countries have recognised the problems and are actively involved in relevant institutions (e.g. UNFF, ITTO, CIFOR, WWF, TFF) where international political dialogue concerning sustainable forest management takes place.

## **ASEAN Cooperation in Forestry**

ASEAN cooperation in the area of forestry started in the early 1970's, not long after the founding of ASEAN in 1968, following the establishment of cooperation in food and agriculture. Cooperation in forestry began because ASEAN recognises the importance of creating a balance between continually enjoying the benefits of the region's natural resources and maintaining a healthy environment. The cooperation is guided by the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) and supported by the ASEAN Senior Officials (ASOF) together with the various working groups that implement regional forestry activities and programmes.

The Strategic Plan of Action for the ASEAN Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry (1999 – 2004) was formulated to implement regional cooperation activities to enhance the international competitiveness of ASEAN's forestry products as well as to further strengthen joint positions in international fora and adopted by the 20<sup>th</sup> AMAF Meeting in Hanoi in September 1998.

In the Strategic Plan for forestry, the strategic thrusts are:

- i. Sustainable forestry management;
- ii. Strengthening ASEAN cooperation and joint approaches in addressing international and regional forestry issues;
- iii. Promotion of intra- and extra-ASEAN trade in forest products and private sector participation;
- iv. Increasing productivity and efficient utilization of forest products; and
- v. Capacity building and human resources development.

Under the established strategic thrusts, ASEAN implements numerous cooperation projects covering a wide spectrum of activities ranging from exchange of information; research and development; technology generation, transfer and adoption; food production; enhancement of human resources development and information

exchange; strengthening of institutional capacities; promotion of ASEAN common stand and collective efforts; and enhancement of economic inter-linkages and complementarity in the region. Most of the programmes and projects are implemented under the networking arrangements where focal points in each Member Country are established and funded on a cost sharing basis.

In this mechanism, the ASEAN Secretariat acts as the overall coordinator and provides the necessary assistance in all aspects to ensure successful undertaking of the cooperation programmes and projects in collaboration with the working groups, national focal points and relevant institutions.

With the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992, ASEAN cooperation in forestry was directed to facilitate the realization of intra-ASEAN trade in forest products. As such, progress in the implementation of cooperation activities in this sector is informed to the ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM).

In 1997, the ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Vision 2020, which called for ASEAN Partnership in Dynamic Development aimed at forging closer economic integration within the region and resolved to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN Economic Region.

The Hanoi Plan of Action, adopted in 1998, serves as the first in a series of plans of action leading up to the realization of the ASEAN vision. The ASEAN Vision 2020 Statement for the Food, Agriculture and Forestry sector, which was agreed to at the Second Informal ASEAN Summit, held on 15 December 1997 in Kuala Lumpur strives to “enhance food security and international competitiveness of food, agriculture and forest products to make ASEAN a leading producer of these products and to promote the forestry sector as a model in forest management, conservation and sustainable development”.

Sustainable forest management is reflected in the Ha Noi Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN Vision 2002 in the forestry sector.

The promotion of SFM is of the utmost interest and priority to ASEAN Member Countries. This has led to the formulation of the *ASEAN Regional Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management*, where it is used as a guide for the Member Countries in developing their respective country-specific national criteria and indicators (C&I) for sustainable forest management (SFM). Another reference used as a guide is the FAO Code of Practice for Forest Harvesting in Asia Pacific endorsed by ASEAN to develop specific national codes and / or guidelines.

ASEAN cooperation in forestry also involves working with Dialogue Partners, international organizations and third-parties. Recent collaborations have included:

- The ASEAN – Germany Regional Forest Programme for Southeast Asia (ReFoP) where the focus is to implement international forest-related agreements, to develop national forest programmes (NFP) and a common regional communication strategy.
- The ASEAN – Australia project on Eco-labels and Certification in Forestry is to develop a common approach towards the use in ASEAN and Towards Global Standards to promote trade in forest products.
- The proposal for the ASEAN-China Joint Efforts to Curb Illegal Trade in Wildlife is to enhance education, training, research and monitoring to improve efforts to curb illegal trafficking.
- The ASEAN - FAO initiative to propose a mechanism to monitor and report the progress of the implementation of the Code of Practice for Forest Harvesting in Asia-Pacific.
- The ASEAN-Korea Environmental Cooperation Project on Restoration of Degraded Forest Ecosystems in Tropical Southeast Asian Countries.

## **Lessons in Cooperation**

As a regional organization, ASEAN faces numerous challenges when managing its cooperation affairs with its Members and with third party countries and organizations. ASEAN always strives to undertake cooperation activities that are of interest to all Member Countries. As a dynamic organisation, the process of how ASEAN conducts its business is continually evolving. A review of the activities in the various sectors is undertaken each year for the purpose of finding ways and means to improve the current structure and modalities of cooperation. The review is also to determine which activities are consistent with prevailing ASEAN priorities and international concerns.

Previous reviews have revealed that due to the region's increasing integration and cohesiveness, collaborative efforts among the Member Countries and with the international forest community in the forestry sector have escalated. As this trend is expected to continue in the future, the overlap in the scope of activities covered by ASEAN bodies and the international forestry movements requires strengthening in the coordination and working relation among the concerned bodies in addressing certain cross-border or inter-related issues.

Delays in the implementation of projects are due to various reasons such as sensitivities of issues, differing priorities, the varying degrees of infrastructure, qualified personnel and available resources to fulfil the commitments agreed upon and the timelines scheduled being not realistic or too ambitious. The inadequacy of funds to support the planned activities also remains the main limiting factor for the delayed in the implementation of projects.

As ASEAN becomes more active in the international arena, the number of issues that Member Countries will tackle will also increase. This will definitely call for more orderly organization and more responsibility from each of the Members. Such exercise will require processes that are transparent and that ensure Member Countries' interests are served.

ASEAN continues to enhance cooperation from the Member Countries as well as from the international community. There is importance in strengthening partnerships beyond ASEAN as international linkages will provide opportunities to better achieve international goals.

## **Conclusion**

ASEAN plays an important role in advancing sustainable forest management in the region. ASEAN strongly encourages building relations with other countries and international organisations interested in expending resources to implement regional activities. Applying the regional approach through partnerships to address the region's problems streamlines the utilisation of resources and provides a broader support for the activities undertaken. Furthermore, it will allow ASEAN to fulfil the conditions set up in international conventions and improve the conditions for the expansion of sustainable tropical forest management within the national and regional context.

ASEAN could also serve as a platform for generating substantive inputs to expand existing third party cooperation activities.

## **Proposed Collaboration in Forest Harvesting**

It would therefore be a good opportunity for all institutional parties and technical experts gathered at this meeting to discuss ways and means how to collectively move forward activities in forest harvesting.

Taking this opportunity, a possible cooperation activity that would be of interest to ASEAN is in the area of *Capacity Building & Regional Networking on the Implementation of Reduced Impact Logging in ASEAN*.

The topic of forest harvesting has a long legacy, comprehensive documentation and a multitude of proponents. Combating the underlying causes of deforestation requires enabling environments in addition to optimizing forest harvesting operations. Certification and national forest programmes (nfp) are some of the internationally recognized instruments to this end.

Forests, as a national development resource, have a very real function for human life, helping to achieve a dynamic balance of ecological, economic and socio-cultural benefits. For this reason, forests must be managed, protected and utilized in a sustainable manner.

Logging is one means of utilizing forest located in production forest zones. In practical terms, logging still entails many problems, such as damage to residual stands and the environment from field activities that focus on logging and pay insufficient attention to regeneration and rehabilitation. Environmental damage caused by logging activities includes land clearing, soil erosion, residual stand damage and logging waste.

Despite the negative impacts of logging on forests, logging is necessary in order to realize the full economic value of forests; it also provides a source of funding for forest management. What is needed is a logging method that has a low negative impact. One such method is Reduced Impact Logging (RIL). The implementation of RIL techniques will promote sustainable forest management vis – a – vis minimizing soil disturbance, impact on wildlife, and damage to the residual stand.

In many ASEAN Member Countries, forest management and logging operations are regulated under specific silviculture regime (system), e.g. the Indonesian Selective Cutting and Planting System (TPTI), the Malaysian Uniform System (MUS), etc.

There is general recognition, however, that existing logging practices need to be improved to ensure a viable residual stand for the successive cutting cycles. To improve logging practices, taking into account RIL techniques, a capacity building in terms of upgrading technical skills and understanding of costs-benefits to implement RIL, is very important for ASEAN member countries.

The overall goal is to promote sustainable forest management in the region. The specific objectives are:

- i) to improve understanding on sustainable forest harvesting;



- ii) to upgrade technical skills on RIL techniques; and
- iii) to establish information sharing and networking on the implementation of Forest Harvesting Practices in member countries.

The proposed outputs are:

- i) An ASEAN regional guideline on Reduced Impact Logging (RIL);
- ii) Skilled operators to implement RIL techniques; and
- iii) Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system on the progress of RIL implementation;

The activity would include:

- i) Development of ASEAN regional guidelines on Reduced Impact Logging (RIL)
- ii) Review and compilation of the Code of Practice for Forest Harvesting and Guidelines on RIL techniques that have already available in member countries
- iii) Technical workshop on the development of guidelines
- iv) Upgrading skills and understanding
- v) Training courses on costs-benefits analysis of RIL for forest middle-managers/supervisors
- vi) Training courses on RIL techniques for logging operators
- vii) Development of Monitoring and evaluation system
- viii) Establishment of website and mailing list for networking

ASEAN could further develop the proposal if deemed of interest.