

Villagers urged to regenerate forests

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The Asian Development Bank (ADB) marked World Environment Day yesterday with the launch of a documentary which raises the issue of deforestation and how villagers in pilot areas in five GMS countries are helping to regenerate forests.

The documentary, titled *Forests for the Future*, shows the setting up of pilot sites through the Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (BCI), which is training villagers to use and maintain resources sustainably.

ADB Lao Resident Mission Country Director, Mr Gil-Hong Kim, said World Environment Day helped to raise awareness of environmental issues among countries, governments and communities. Each year the day takes a specific environmental theme; this year it is greenhouse gas emissions and how to reduce them.

The Greater Mekong Sub-region countries launched the BCI in 2006. The BCI is a key element of the GMS Core Environment Programme, a joint action plan devised to improve environmental management across the region.

Working with government



Mr Gil-Hong Kim.

agencies, NGO partners and local communities, the biodiversity conservation project is underway in six forest areas in five Mekong countries.

One of these areas is in Champassak province and straddles the borders of southern Laos, northeastern Cambodia, and central western Vietnam. The long term goal of the project is to maintain linear forest links between all three countries and revitalise important transboundary ecosystems.

In the Xe Pian-Dong Hua Sao Corridor, there are 5,553 people in 10 villages, living in 918 households. The corridor is home to three different indigenous groups, including the Lao Loum, Youane and Brao.

BCI scientists and staff are training the villagers to survey

the condition of the forests and local biodiversity. In the next phase the team will follow up the change in ecosystems and the progress of the forest.

The team has found evidence of logging in the area.

“Valuable trees in this forest attract investors. A sawmill producing hardwood floorboards has set up business near the Xe Pian national protected area,” the documentary said.

New government regulations governing the inspection, survey and felling of trees have enabled forest management plans to delay logging in conservation areas. But forests are under threat because many are being turned into rubber plantations and the number of rubber palms has increased significantly.

Many rural communities rely on the collection of forest products such as traditional herbs, seeds and rattan as their main source of livelihood, but these resources are getting harder to find.

To reduce the threat to forests and boost villagers’ livelihood, the BCI is encouraging people to grow fruit trees and rattan on their own land. Villagers have built nurseries to grow saplings, after receiving training from the project’s agricultural staff.