



Thailand Kicking the CO2 Habit

Bangkok, Thailand (5 June 2008) – To celebrate the World Environment Day 2008, The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Working Group on Environment, supported by Asian Development Bank- GMS Environment Operations Center, have produced the documentary “ Forest for the Future” . The documentary aims to provide each of us with an important platform for stimulating awareness of climate change and environment issues including greenhouse gas emissions and how to reduce them through the slogan” Kick the CO2 Habit-towards a low carbon economy”, initiated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Carbon is burnt in the form of fossil fuels but that is not the only way it is released. Valuable forests are being felled for timber and making paper, for grazing and farming and for plantations to supply a growing demand for energy. This expression of human carbon practice not only releases massive amounts of carbon dioxide; it also destroys a valuable resource for absorbing atmospheric carbon, further contributing to climate change.

Protecting forests is an important carbon storing initiative. The forests act as lungs for our planet and can store the carbon that is emitted into the atmosphere today. Forests also protect wildlife and provide both home, food and life support for the people who live in them and depend on them.

“Climate change is not a quick passing trend – it is a defining issue of our time. When the Nobel Peace Prize was given last year to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, this was a clear message that global warming is a fact, and we know that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that we emit are the cause”, says Urooj Malik, Director, Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, SEA, ADB.

In recent years, forest landscapes of Mekong countries have been changing. In the decade from 1990 to 2000, the region lost more than 68,000 square kilometers of forest, and the condition of remaining woodlands has declined because of overuse, land conversion and development pressures.

Widespread deforestation threatens biodiversity as habitats of animals and plants disappear, or fragment into smaller isolated patches. It harms the livelihood of local people who rely on forest products for subsistence. Deforestation affects the quantity and quality of water resources and increases soil erosion. Clearing and burning of the forest is also a major driver of climate change, releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming.

The decline of the forests and biodiversity has prompted a regional response. In 2006, Thailand together with the other five countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion launched the Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative, known as the BCI. The BCI is a key element of the GMS Core Environment Program coordinated by ADB, a joint action plan to improve environmental management across the region. Working with government agencies, NGO partners and local communities, the Biodiversity conservation project is underway in six forest landscapes in five Mekong countries.



One of the six biodiversity sites is located in the Tenasserim Range in Western Thailand. Situated between the Western Forest Complex and the Kaeng Krachan area, four income generating village nurseries have been established for growing saplings for forest restoration and fruit tree seedlings.

In addition a review of land-use changes and their appropriate use has been accomplished in four clusters, and a study on ecological and agricultural tourism development possibilities is being undertaken this year. Communities are being encouraged to participate in the development through co-management agreements, local committees and expert training of skills and knowledge.

“Plans for next year include work on a joint eco-cultural and tourism site on the border with Cambodia, with cooperation links expected to connect the Khao Yai, Taplan National Park complex with the protected areas on the Cambodian border”, says Dr. Songtam Suksawang, Director, National Park Research Division.

The activities in Tennasserim do not stand alone. In order to reap the benefits of a subregional commitment to a better environment and protecting the unique landscapes and biodiversities, the BCI carries out activities at five other pilot sites in five of the GMS countries. Each forest is important but by uniting all possible GMS conservation forces there is an opportunity for the GMS countries to develop a strong united response to the risks that economic development and climate change can pose for biodiversity.

In this manner, the GMS countries are sending out a collective message that the impact of climate change can be challenged and that forests play an important part in this challenge. Environment knows no borders and by combining a national response with a sub regional body of experiences and practices, the unique environment that is shared by all GMS countries and epitomized by the Mekong River that connects these countries can only benefit.

The 25-minute documentary takes the viewer to the rich forests of the Mekong countries including Cambodia, Lao PDR, P.R. China, Thailand and Viet Nam where we meet the people that live in the forests and depend on them for food and life support. With compelling footage, the viewer is introduced to the forests of the subregion, representing some of the most unique biodiversities on the planet. We learn about how challenges are being met to reduce the damage that is being made to the unique biodiversities – damage that has immense consequences for the region and its economic welfare.

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