

Workshop Title: Forest carbon initiatives and community rights in the Mekong region

Lead Organizer: Thai Working Group for Climate Justice and Focus on the Global South

Date: 18 October 2012

Time: 14.00 – 17.30 hr.

Summary:

Progress on REDD at the UN level has been slow. Safeguards agreed in Cancun are weak and are to be “promoted” and “supported” rather than upheld. Safeguards only note that the UN has adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples rather than insisting that REDD complies to UNDRIPs.

After Cancun, the main issues to be resolved on REDD are the following:

- Drivers of deforestation;
- Reference levels and forest monitoring systems;
- Safeguard information systems; and
- Measuring, reporting and verification of forest-related emissions.

Decisions on all four have been postponed to COP 18, as has a decision on REDD financing.

The workshop heard about REDD projects in Cambodia (Oddar Meanchey), Indonesia (Harapan) and Thailand (Kaeng Krachan National Park). In Cambodia, a community forestry project was converted to a REDD project in 2008. So far, there is no funding to implement the REDD strategy. “The policy is strong, but soldiers have guns”. When soldiers move into areas of community forest, villagers cannot stop them. Large areas around the community forests have been allocated as economic land concessions and forest cleared. No carbon credits have so far been sold from the project and therefore no money has reached the communities involved. Under the community forestry REDD project, villagers can access the forest and have customary use rights.

In Jambi Province, Sumatra, Indonesia the situation is very different. The first that villagers new about the Harapan project was when researchers started working in the area in 2007. Not long after that, the project started evicting people from their farmland inside this former logging concession. In November 2008, Prince Charles visited the project. In December 2008, members of SPI (Indonesian Farmers Union) travelled to Poznan for the UN climate negotiations to protest at the international level. There have been many protests about the project. Two community leaders are in jail. More than 6,000 households have been evicted. Villagers in Jambi have never heard of any proposals about benefit sharing in the REDD context.

In Thailand there are proposals from a REDD pilot project in Kaeng Krachan National Park near the Burmese border. Karen people live inside the national park and have faced evictions and repression from the Royal Forestry Department for many years. Karen houses are deep in the forest. From the national park headquarters it's a two or three day walk. Many Karen only come out of the forest once

a year to buy goods like salt. The Karen do not want REDD, they want their rights to live in the forest to be upheld.

Back to the international level, the billions of dollars of REDD finance that was promised six years ago has not materialized. The price of carbon has collapsed. The global economy is in crisis (the current focus is Europe). On a purely economic level, without meaningful emissions reduction targets there will be no demand for REDD carbon credits. Current targets are pathetically weak. No community in the Mekong Region has received REDD payments from the sale of REDD credits.

Local communities do not need REDD! They can manage the forest. Large scale oil palm concessions are destroying the forest – the government should stop that. REDD finance is irrelevant. Communities want rights not REDD.

REDD will not address climate change. It is a distraction from finding ways of leaving fossil fuels in the ground – the only way to address climate change.

Key Recommendations:

1. Tackling climate change should focus on the real causes of climate change, therefore offsetting and market mechanism is deviation from genuine solution.
2. Rights of people and communities in forest area should be recognized before any development or conservation scheme are considered.
3. Ability and capacity of communities to sustainable use and management of forest should be recognized and promoted over any forest-carbon scheme.

Rapporteur name:

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Time 20.00hr

Date 18 October 2012