Biomass trainings improve management of Papua New Guinea forests

As the sun sets over the rugged green slopes high in the Adelbert Mountain Range of Papua New Guinea’s (PNG) Madang Province, Kelly Basebas, Chief of Urumarave Village, explains why the country’s first-ever forest biomass measurement training is important to his community. “The forest is our life! In the past, trees and wildlife were disappearing because of over hunting, poor planting and harvesting habits and excessive logging. Now, new species are growing and wildlife is coming back. Seeing these changes has lifted the spirits of the entire village.”

The United States Agency for International Development Lowering Emissions in Asia’s Forest program (USAID LEAF) conducted the first ever forest biomass measurement training in PNG in Urumarave, where residents were taught to measure trees to determine the amount of carbon sequestered in the forests. Estimating the amount of carbon stored is essential to understanding how much carbon dioxide will be released into the atmosphere when the forest is disturbed or destroyed through fire, logging or clearing for agriculture. Urumarave and the nearby village of Wagedave hosted the USAID LEAF training after an extensive consultation process focused on community needs and sustainable development. The two villages welcomed more than 30 participants from government agencies, universities and NGOs for the training. The skills and methods introduced will be integrated with emerging standards and protocols for improved forest management being developed by the PNG Forest Authority.

Less than six months after the training, rather than idly watching their forest being destroyed, villagers have new knowledge and are managing the forest’s rebirth. With USAID LEAF support, they have begun planting trees to repopulate the forest, which in turn stabilizes the landscape and prevents flooding and erosion during heavy rains. They are using improved agricultural practices and monitoring to prevent excessive harvesting of non-timber forest products. The training also benefited young villagers, the next generation of stewards of the lands, with skills they can pass on to others in the area. The inhabitants of Urumarave and Wagedave will be a valuable local resource for Papua New Guinea’s first ever National Forest Inventory, scheduled for 2015. The PNG Forest Authority has been mandated to conduct the inventory and will use the Standard Operating Procedures for determining biomass developed by USAID LEAF.

The training uses a “Ridges-to-Reef” approach to managing Madang’s natural resources, which considers the connectivity between management in the mountains and on the coasts, across all forest types. It is built on ten years of conservation efforts in Adelberts communities by USAID LEAF partner The Nature Conservancy. USAID LEAF has also completed biomass trainings in Laos, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, furthering its regional approach to capacity building for key stakeholders who manage forests and natural resources.

For More information:
USAID Asia: info-rdma@usaid.gov USAID LEAF: leaf_info@leafasia.org