



PROGRAM UPDATE

USAID LEAF Leadership Initiative Develops Leaders to Address Gender Equality in Climate Change



Gender champions from 21 institutions in six countries gather at a leadership initiative in Bangkok

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*Ratchada Arpornsilp
Program Officer
Centre for People and Forests*

Since November 2013, the United States Agency for International Development Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests (USAID LEAF) program has been supporting a core group of 24 gender champions from 21 institutions in six Asia-Pacific countries through its flagship activity, Asia-Pacific Leadership Initiative on Gender and Climate Change. The initiative focuses on strengthening a core group of professionals working in the field of climate change to effectively integrate gender into their work. It consists of customized regional trainings, demonstration activities at the country level and individual mentorship. The gender champions receive technical knowledge and skills, enabling them to be technically confident, visible leaders and better networked in areas of gender and climate change.

The "Training of Trainers (TOT) on Gender Integration in Climate Change and REDD+" marks the fourth training session of the program. Eighteen gender champions representing government and civil society groups from Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos and Papua New Guinea gathered in Bangkok, Thailand from 26-30 May 2015 to learn training of trainers and communication skills. Participants honed their skills in designing and delivering trainings for a range of audiences using demonstration-based TOT exercises, material development and role plays. The participants were motivated to apply their new knowledge on projects underway or planned in their respective agencies. The fifth and final event will take place in November 2015 and will focus on evaluation and lessons learned.

Ratchada Arpornsilp, Program Officer - Social Inclusion and Gender Equity, recently promoted at the Centre for People and Forests (RECOFTC), says, "Prior to joining this leadership initiative, I had no experience integrating gender into the natural resource sector. Now I have new gender skills and confidence to reach out to networks and better integrate gender into my work. Thinking back, I see that if I hadn't joined the initiative, I would not have applied for the promotion I just received."

Highly motivated and with expanding regional networks, USAID LEAF's gender champions are putting their skills to work: airing a new radio show on environmental issues in Malaysia, establishing a gender team within the Department of Forestry in Laos, strengthening a partnership with OXFAM in Vietnam, tapping into new funding for gender projects in Cambodia, gender-sensitizing climate change training materials in Thailand, and initiating capacity building of REDD+ implementing organizations such as the Office of Climate Change and Development (OCCD) in Papua New Guinea.

The gender champions' regional network offers a platform to connect these champions and consolidate their synergies on common gender issues across the Asia-Pacific region. The USAID LEAF program has provided training and helped to create a regional platform and network that will continue to drive action on gender and climate change across the Asia-Pacific region. As Malaysian gender champion Sunitha Bishan says, "This regional group of champions is a team, and we all belong to this team. This is empowering and I often reach out and strategize with the others on how to deal with resistance that comes with gender integration."

These champions continue to roll out a series of leadership demonstration activities in their own countries in 2015 and beyond, ensuring that their work continues to affect greater gender equality in climate change.

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