Village Livelihood Development in Attapeu

Introduction

The biodiversity corridor in Sanamxay District, Attapeu province is under threat. Land clearing for agriculture, infrastructure development, and unsustained timber extraction is leading to deforestation and degradation of forest resources. The USAID-funded Lowering Emissions in Asia’s Forests (USAID LEAF) project, implemented by SNV in Laos, sought to ease some of these pressures on forest areas by strengthening the management and resilience of the area’s stakeholders. The project targeted local farmers and communities as the main beneficiaries to improve livelihoods and forest management.

In Attapeu province, the project worked in Sanamxay district and after a livelihood assessment and socio-economic survey, 223 households elected to explore coffee processing and 448 households elected to improve forest management to strengthen their livelihood options and outcomes.

Why coffee?

In Attapeu province, an important agricultural crop and source of income is the cultivation of Robusta coffee for the two project villages of Nonghin and Xaydonekhong. Villagers reported about 50 tons of coffee are processed per year in each village and that improving the processing system would be the most valuable way to enhance the income generating potential of their harvest.

Improving coffee processing

To improve coffee quality and therefore prices received by the farmers, the USAID LEAF project supported the purchase of a coffee dehusking machine for the two villages. Previously, villagers used rice mills to remove coffee bean husks, which significantly reduced the quality of the beans. Using the dehusking machine and improving the processing techniques retains the bean quality and ensures a higher sales price.

In addition, the project set up a coffee huller management committee in each village and trained five committee members on using the machines and on basic accounting and bookkeeping. Each committee member was assigned a single responsibility according to rules and regulations approved by the village, district, and provincial authorities. Among these regulations is a set hulling price of 200 kip per kilo of beans, which is lower than the current price of 300 kip per kilo that villagers pay to use the rice mills. It is hoped the revenue generated by charging for machine use will buy additional coffee huller machines as more and more farmers see the benefits and increased incomes from selling high quality coffee beans.
Community Forest Management to Support Livelihood Activities

Coffee expansion has traditionally been a driver of deforestation. To stop this pattern, USAID LEAF helped three villages reforest degraded forests and established community forestry guidelines. Villages identified degraded forest areas, demarcated restoration zones, established sample plots to conduct a tree species inventory and planted seedlings. One thousand seventy two hectares were defined by the communities as forest restoration zones, seven hectares for enrichment planting, and 1,065 hectares for natural regeneration. Three thousand five hundred seedlings were provided by the project for the enrichment planting and planted by the local communities at the start of the 2015 wet season. Some of the species planted are valuable fruit and timber species with a high local market value, helping to create future income opportunities for the villages.

To protect the new plantings and regenerate forest areas, as well as better manage remaining village forests, villagers and members of the Village Forestry Unit completed a Community Forest Management training program to strengthen their understanding and knowledge on forest conservation guidelines and national regulations. This activity encouraged villagers to truly become stewards of the land, so that their natural resources will continue to provide income and ecosystem services for future generations.

Local Viewpoints
Community Members Share Thoughts about PLUP

“The forest restoration activities from the USAID LEAF program, especially the provision of tree seedlings, has greatly contributed to the objective of the village authorities and local community to preserve the surrounding forest area.”
-Mr. Khamcheng, Head of Hat-Oudomxay village

“As a result of USAID LEAF action, the degraded forest land and other forest areas that were encroached upon are now officially under the restoration process. This situation will result in the rehabilitation of the forest cover, which will afterwards lead to improved eco-system services allowing the local community based in Sompoy village to sustainably benefit from the use of timber and non-timber forest products.”
-Mr Simeuang, Head of Sompoy village

“Following the establishment of the 904 hectare area that is now classified as under restoration, and also with the provision and planting of suitable tree seedlings, the USAID LEAF project will contribute to a better future by increasing the forest canopy in the restored area and thus enhancing the future provision of forest and non-forest products. As a member of the village forestry unit, we will regularly patrol the restoration zone and prevent any encroachment activity that could negatively impact the restoration process.”
- Mr Sithad, Head of the village forestry unit, Tagao village