

introduction: preparing for the road ahead



Montane Mainland Southeast Asia

Montane Mainland Southeast Asia – MMSEA – is defined as including all areas that lie between 0.3 and 3 km above sea level and are located within a river basin that overlaps with at least one nation state of mainland Southeast Asia. Thus MMSEA refers to both nation states and river basins. The 'Big 3' river basins of mainland Southeast Asia – the Salween, Mekong and Yangtze – all flow through this region. MMSEA spreads across six countries; it includes the uplands of Yunnan of Southwest China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia (Figure 1). Notwithstanding the political boundaries, the MMSEA areas share many characteristics, cultural approaches, challenges, and opportunities, and the people of the region can profit greatly from shared learning. The common characteristics include history, settlement patterns, land use, biodiversity and ecological landscapes, economy, livelihood activities, and associated ideological and cosmological elements. MMSEA also manifests a pattern of geographical correlation between cultural diversity and mega-biodiversity.

The MMSEA Mobile Workshop

In Southwest China, mainland Southeast Asia, and South Asia, caravans have served as market structures and created a socio-cultural network linking mountain and lowland communities for more than a millennium. Today, traditional economic corridors such as caravan routes have been replaced by modern transportation systems – transnational highways, riverways, and railway links – such as the proposed Kunming-Bangkok highway (see Figure 2).

The idea for a mobile workshop focusing on key elements of land use history within Montane Mountain Southeast Asia (MMSEA) emerged from the MMSEA Symposium III held in Lijiang, China in 2002. Symposium participants from Laos, Thailand, and China suggested organising a workshop that would travel across all three countries, much as earlier caravans did, to facilitate a better understanding of MMSEA regional land use dynamics and transboundary issues.

Emerging issues of common concern were identified as:

- the rapid pace of economic development
- cross-border trade and regionalisation

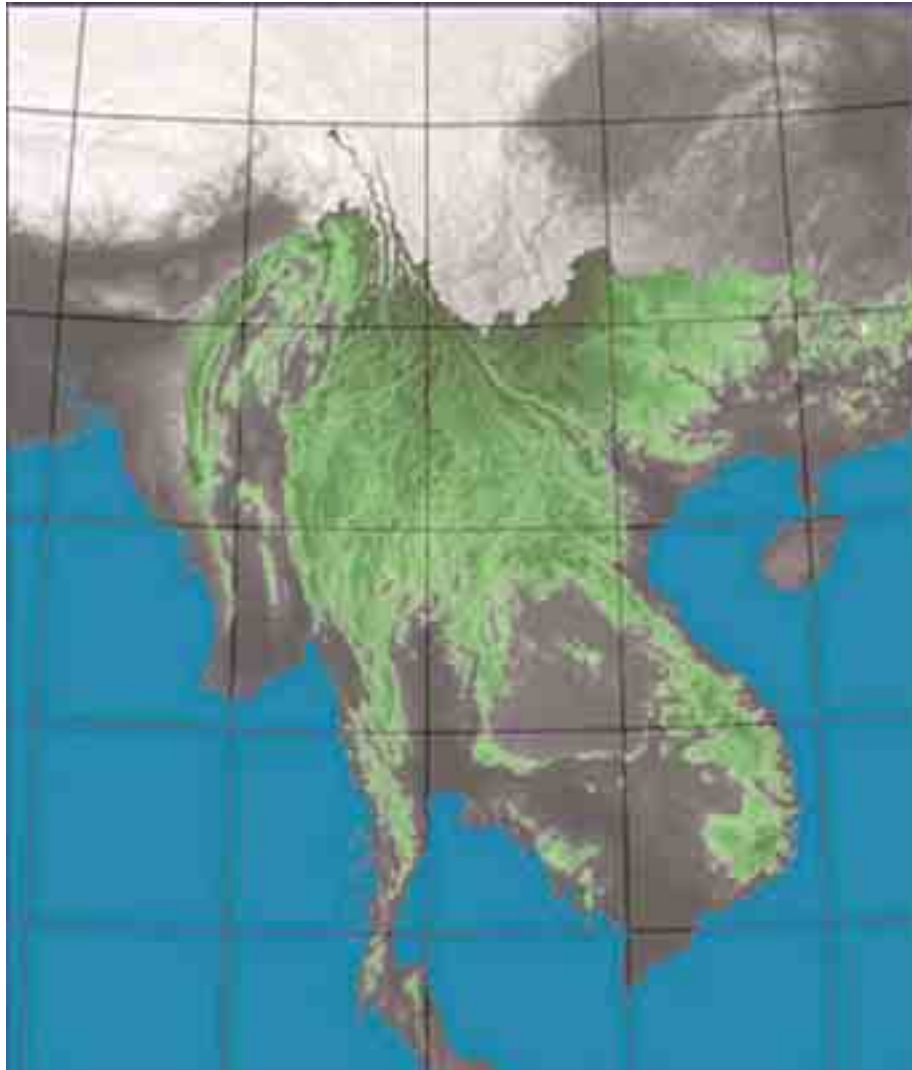


Figure 1: Map of Montane Mainland Southeast Asia (MMSEA, area highlighted in green)

(Source: ICRAF-Chiang Mai)

- maintenance of cultural and biological diversity
- poverty alleviation and alternative livelihoods for upland communities

A group of partner organisations decided to work together to organise this mobile workshop including: Kunming Institute of Botany (KIB), Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK), National University of Laos (NUoL), National Agricultural and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), Chiang Mai University (CMU), World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), and East-West Center (EWC).

On behalf of the partner organisations, CBIK developed and submitted a proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation who kindly agreed to sponsor the workshop.

Workshop participants and programme

The mobile workshop was held from 15 to 27 January 2005. It transected three regions: Xishuangbanna in the southern Yunnan Province of China; Oudomxay and Luang Prabang Provinces in northern Laos; and Chiang Mai Province in northern



Figure 2: The proposed Kunming-Bangkok R3 highway: an economic corridor linking China, Laos, and Thailand

(source: workshop paper presented by Vongphosy and Rattana)

Thailand. Sixty participants from China, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam took part in the workshop (see Annex 1 for a list of participants). Participants travelled overland from Xishuangbanna to Luang Prabang, then flew to Chiang Mai for the final leg of the workshop (see Annex 2 for details).

Start the engine: opening the mobile workshop

The mobile workshop was opened on 16 January 2004, at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden (XTBG), Yunnan Province. Professor Xu Jianchu, Water, Hazards and Environmental Management Programme Manager, ICIMOD, welcomed the participants and gave a brief introduction and background to the workshop. He described the workshop as a regional forum for the exchange of information and experiences on land use history and dynamics.

The workshop was designed to be informal and interactive to enable active participation and learning by those involved. The mobility of the workshop was an added advantage as it:

- facilitated participatory learning among actors from different countries and disciplines
- enabled field-based assessments across multiple countries and scales
- bridged different knowledge systems
- accommodated and appreciated a wide range of diverse perspectives

Professor Xu Jianchu introduced Professor Chen Jin, Deputy Director of XTBG, who participated in some of the sessions held at XTBG and shared his valuable perspectives and experiences on transboundary exchanges between Yunnan Province and Laos.

Workshop process, objectives and themes

Mr Chun Lai facilitated the workshop. He introduced the participants and gave an overview of the programme and process. He stressed that the mobile workshop was an informal, interactive, and unique learning opportunity to explore key ideas within the MMSEA region.

From the perspective of the workshop organisers, the main objectives of the workshop were to

- better understand the land use dynamics and drivers of change within MMSEA;
- assess the impacts of development, particularly road infrastructure, as well as linkages between transportation corridors, marketing networks, and trade policies;
- build the capacity of younger researchers to conduct interdisciplinary research related to land use in MMSEA; and
- provide a forum to facilitate policy dialogue and produce recommendations in relation to land use.

Contributions from the participants included draft case studies and abstracts, as well as information market displays. Selected case studies were presented by participants in Chiang Mai. During the course of the mobile workshop there were three information markets allowing direct interaction between participants and featuring

relevant work in China (on 17 January in Xishuangbanna), Laos (on 21 January in Luang Prabang), and Thailand (on 25 January in Chiang Mai).

The workshop focused on three major, interlinked working themes:

1. Land use change
2. Local livelihoods, markets and trade
3. Resource governance

The participants made the following comments on the themes.

- The three themes should be interlinked because the idea is to capture crosscutting issues. For example, during the field visits in Xishuangbanna, rubber-based systems will be studied to probe the history of land use changes as well as the present expansion of rubber production into northern Laos.
- Participants noted that resource governance was linked to land use changes in China. In particular, government policy changes and instability have led to deforestation. Participants identified a need for a broad and stable land use policy to encourage sustainable land use. It was suggested that the interactions and policy recommendations from this workshop could help identify and address some pertinent issues.

Expected outcomes

The mobile workshop brought together many participants from various countries, working in various fields. As a result of their interactions and diverse contributions the following outcomes were expected:

- a snapshot of current eco-regional and country perspectives on land use history and dynamics within MMSEA
- enhanced capacity and cross-learning among participants, especially younger colleagues who are contributing to research and leadership within the region
- a list of research questions and development of a future agenda for land use and sustainable development in MMSEA
- development of a set of uniformed policy recommendations for the region and for each country on specific issues
- concrete ideas for follow-up actions, collaborative work and networking
- a workshop report
- a journal issue or other publication based on selected workshop case studies, papers and outputs

Overarching framework

The workshop adopted the overarching framework of conditions-drivers-responses in relation to land use dynamics in MMSEA, as used in the Millennium Assessment (MA) (see Figure 3). Accordingly, the mobile workshop was divided into three major segments.

Conditions: Thematic working groups and field visits in Xishuangbanna probed the current land use conditions in various MMSEA countries.

Drivers: A science-policy interface workshop and field visits in Luang Prabang examined the drivers of change, such as land use policies.

Responses: Field visits and synthesis work in Chiang Mai highlighted some of the responses of communities and local actors, for example, with regard to livelihood and cross-border trade.

In order to keep the big picture in mind, one of the participants suggested that the following *overarching question* be retained, referred to, and refined during the course of the workshop.

What have been, are, or will be the impacts of road building and trade liberalisation on land use, livelihoods, and governance in MMSEA?

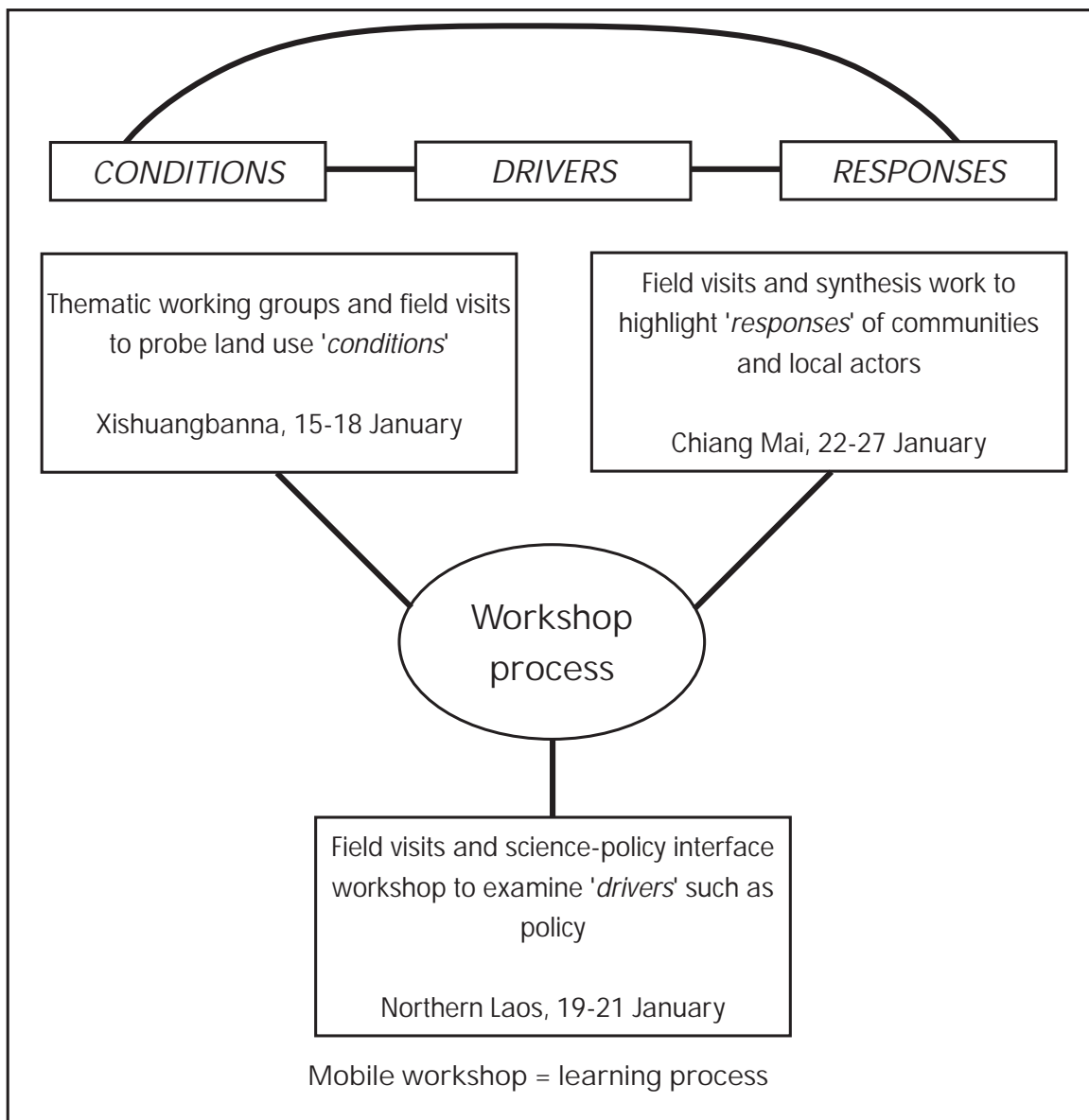


Figure 3: Overarching framework and workshop process

Capacity building focus

A strong underlying focus of the workshop was to build the capacity of the younger researchers and policy makers by bringing them together with more senior colleagues. It is hoped that this capacity building will continue through collaborative work, networking, and mentoring. Contributions made by some of the younger participants, such as case studies and other materials, were scaled up into policy dialogue and recommendations. Conceptually, this is depicted in Figure 4.

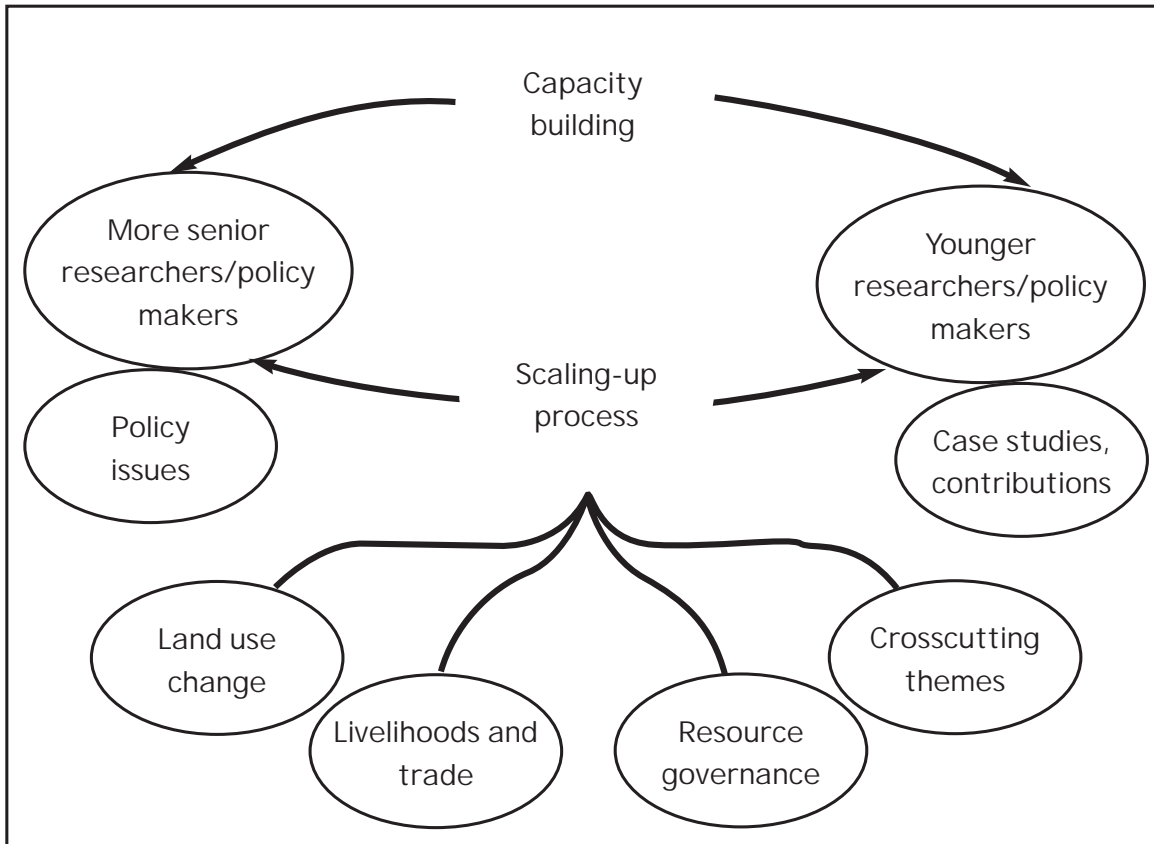


Figure 4: Capacity building and scaling-up processes

