

# mobile workshop wrap-up: the road goes on

The mobile workshop concluded with a wrap-up discussion, during which many interesting points and suggestions emerged. Much of the wrap-up discussion and brainstorming centred on one critical question:

*Should we sustain this group? And if yes, how and for what?*

There was a strong consensus that we should sustain this group as an informal network or 'community of practice' comprising MMSEA researchers, practitioners and policy makers. This would be an important step in further cultivating research-policy linkages.

It was also agreed that experiences and lessons learned from the workshop should be widely shared beyond the participants. The rigorous work conducted by different teams, including the articulation of possible research questions for the future, should be synthesised and used in developing a long-term agenda for collaborative work in MMSEA.

There was a suggestion to develop a 'virtual network' for information and knowledge sharing. For example, an MMSEA website or webpage could be hosted by a partner institution on a rotating basis; it could be linked to the CMU website, or could make use of the FTP facility already established on the CBIK website for the mobile workshop.

A multiple-language website would be more effective to serve as wide an audience as possible. Some participants cautioned against investing too much time and resources on developing a separate MMSEA website, which may not be easily accessible for some groups, such as communities and farmers. One alternative to explore would be to utilise existing web resources such as MekongInfo, a multi-lingual site designed to host web pages of other networks and projects working on natural resources in the Mekong region.

Another useful suggestion was to revisit the SUAN (Southeast Asia Universities Agroecosystem Network) approach employed in the past, in which multi-country teams were formed to work on location-specific issues. This was a very effective model for conducting focused work with transboundary dimensions.



It was noted that the mobile workshop itself is an innovative method for learning, which encompasses a new philosophy of stakeholder learning and participatory learning encompassing cross-country issues. There is a need to further develop, improve and use this learning workshop process in other contexts and for other purposes.

At the field level, a mobile workshop approach could be used to promote learning between Laos and China on rubber production and marketing. This type of cross-border event would not be very expensive, and could involve farmers and community-based groups in peer-to-peer exchange and learning processes.

Because the north-eastern Cambodia/Vietnam/southern Laos upland areas share politically sensitive environmental issues, it was suggested that a small group be formed to start exploring how to develop a research network to address those issues. Perhaps another mobile workshop could be organised in that cross-border region, using this event as a model.

There is also a need to focus on cross-cutting issues like indigenous knowledge, cultural identity, and culture-based development (e.g., ecotourism), which were not dealt with in depth during the mobile workshop.

Another view was that, while sustaining this group is critical, it is also important to link with existing groups working on MMSEA issues, including the group organising the MMSEA IV symposium to be held in Sapa, Vietnam, in May 2005. It was felt that a small group of national colleagues from the mobile workshop should participate in the MMSEA symposium, and form a panel to share the workshop outcomes and learning with the participants in Sapa.

It was pointed out that it is important to carefully evaluate the risks and opportunities of linking with intergovernmental mechanisms, such as ones that favour investment in large plantations.

## **Emergence of a Core Group to Advance the MMSEA Agenda**

Considerable discussion focused on the need to nurture young researchers, to enable them to evolve into future leaders to advance the MMSEA agenda and develop the next generation of MMSEA activities.

It was suggested that volunteers be elicited from MMSEA partner organisations to form a core group that could discuss these ideas further and translate them into action. Those who kindly volunteered were:

- Professor Attachai Jintrawet, Chiang Mai University
- Dr David Thomas, World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Chiang Mai
- Ms Qian Jie, Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge, Kunming
- Mr Houmchitsavath Sodarak, Northern Agricultural and Forestry Research Center, Luang Prabang
- Mr Sithong Thongmanivong, National University of Laos, Vientiane
- Mr Jeff Fox, East-West Center, Honolulu
- Mr Brett Ballard, Cambodia Development Resource Institute, Phnom Penh

## Facilitator's Feedback, Workshop Outputs and Closure

One participant asked the workshop facilitator for his reflections and feedback on the workshop, and Chun Lai kindly provided some observations from the facilitator's point of view.

- First of all, there was excellent team work and organisation to ensure that the group could traverse "as smooth as silk" from China to Laos to Thailand, with field visits and other learning activities along the way. This was quite a complicated process, and the mobile workshop itself was a good example of effective regional cooperation.
- There was not enough reflection time and 'down' time. He agreed with feedback provided by the country groups that more time should be allocated for reflection and group work.
- Although participants came from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the group interactions and dynamics were generally very good, with a high level of sustained engagement throughout the workshop.
- There were unequal levels of participation due to language and cultural factors, as well as the tendency for younger participants to defer to more senior ones. However, we should appreciate that different people have different ways of learning. Greater use of country groups for discussion in national languages may help to encourage more and wider participation.
- He concluded by mentioning that the big challenge is indeed how to sustain this type of group which can be viewed as a community of people with common interests or a community of practice that brings together researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. There is an urgent need for leadership development to identify and nurture the next generation of people who can move the MMSEA agenda forward.

Professor Xu Jianchu reminded the participants about the workshop outputs that will be generated and shared, including this workshop report; a CD containing the workshop papers, case studies, presentations, and selected photos; and, eventually, a special journal issue based on selected workshop papers and case studies.

He also reiterated the comments he made during the opening session in Xishuangbanna about the unique nature of this mobile workshop, which facilitated participatory learning among partners from different countries and disciplines, enabled us to conduct field-based assessments across multiple countries and scales, helped to bridge different knowledge systems, and provided a forum for accommodating and appreciating diverse perspectives. He expressed hope that this spirit of learning and collaboration will be actively pursued by the group in the years ahead.

During the closing ceremony, the participants first enjoyed a special humorous photo montage of the workshop highlights, compiled and presented by Professor Attachai. Next, each participant was awarded a workshop certificate acknowledging his/her valuable contribution and participation, along with a group photo and a T-shirt designed to commemorate the workshop.

In closing the mobile workshop, Professor Attachai Jintrawet of Chiang Mai University warmly thanked the organiser teams and all the participants for their warm cooperation and active participation throughout the course of this truly unique learning journey. On behalf of all the participants, he extended heartfelt thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation – via their consultant Dr Apichai Thirathon who joined the final two days of the workshop – for their generous sponsorship and support. Finally, he expressed the sincere hope that our collective journey has not finished here in Chiang Mai, but that our 'road' will continue well into the future in the form of renewed and sustained collaboration among partners in MMSEA.



Field visit in Thailand