

case studies from participants

A total of 13 case studies were contributed by the workshop participants; the abstracts are presented in Annex 7. During the Chiang Mai portion of the workshop, seven participants were provided with the opportunity to present their case studies and benefit from the constructive criticism, questions, and comments of the other participants. The presentations were as follows.

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| Brett Ballard | – Small-scale irrigation in upland communities in the Lao PDR: A research framework concerning the governance of property relationships in transitional areas of upland Southeast Asia |
| Liu Wenjun | – The land use/land cover change and its social-economic implications: A case study in Menglun Township, Xishuangbanna, Southwest China |
| Fredrich Kahrl | – Trade along the China-Vietnam border: Under the veil of opportunities and threats |
| Yuki Miyake | – Loss of access and reclamation of land rights: A case study of Landless Farmers' Social Movement in Northern Thailand |
| Chen Huafang and Laura Ediger | – Ecological and economic impacts of land use change in Baoshan, Yunnan, China |
| Erik Nielsen | – Beyond borders: Emerging forms of transnational advocacy for improved transboundary environmental governance in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region |

Case Studies within the Context of the Mobile Workshop

Dr David Melick, from the Kunming Institute of Botany, is assisting in editing the selected case studies for inclusion in a future publication. He provided the following commentary in an attempt to situate the case studies contributed by participants within the overall context of the mobile workshop.

“The mobile workshop covered a lot of territory, both literally and figuratively. Participants travelled over hundreds of windy kilometres across three countries in MMSEA. Along the way, participants encountered a diversity of ethnic communities, government regulations, land uses, and environments ranging from the tropical forests in Xishuangbanna to the dry deciduous dipterocarp forests in Chiang Mai.

This region has a long history of human habitation, associated agricultural practices, and use of forest resources. Communities in this region are being exposed to increasingly rapid change. This change is exemplified by the Road 3 road corridor project (Kunming-Bangkok highway) designed to link the markets of China and Thailand, while also increasing access to remote regions and markets in Laos. The road is symbolic of the increased access, competition, and infrastructure that this mountainous and, until now, relatively remote part of Asia is experiencing. The R3 highway may exert great influence on some communities – perhaps bringing new markets, improved service facilities, and opportunities. Conversely, it may also create new unwanted competition, and dilute ethnic traditions and social identities. In still other cases, it is possible that the new road will just run on by – the latest landscape change in what has been an era of great flux and uncertainty for many people in this region.

Similar to the issues and territory covered by the workshop, the case studies represent divergent specialties and interests. Fredrich Kahrl and Erik Nielsen explore policy and transboundary issues from an international perspective. Kahrl examines transborder trade by identifying markets in Southeast Asia and looking at how such markets apply regional socioeconomic pressures. Meanwhile, Nielsen examines a wide range of environmental and socioeconomic problems associated with trans-border development and watershed management in the Mekong Basin. He discusses the importance of civil society in drawing attention to local concerns and helping to resolve problems that would otherwise be at the mercy of entrenched national interests. His paper also highlights the fact that while our workshop has followed the R3 highway corridor, rivers are also natural transboundary conduits.

He Jun examines the dramatic changes in recent years at the national level, as China undergoes the transformation to a market economy, an issue which seems to dominate current thinking in the region.

The market forces and policy directions outlined in the case studies act as drivers of land use change. Brett Ballard documents these changes in his review of recent agricultural changes in upland Laos, while Li Zhinan examines the decline of shifting agriculture and loss of agrobiodiversity in Xishuangbanna. These sorts of changes are often revealed by spatial analyses. An example of this is Chen Huafang and Laura Ediger's study, which shows that government reforestation policies have reduced agricultural land in the Montane western regions of Yunnan, necessitating changes in the livelihood choices of local communities.

Changes in northern Laos were highlighted by Sithong Thongmanivong and Yayoi Fujita. They suggested that recent government efforts to reduce or eradicate shifting agriculture have led to a significant decrease in swidden fields with a concomitant increase in forest cover, although forest patches seem to have become smaller and more fragmented. The effect of government policy in Xishuangbanna was also obvious to all workshop participants, where the rapid expansion of rubber cultivation has occurred at the expense of forest and agricultural lands. This is discussed in Liu Wenjun's study, which clearly shows that accessibility has an enormous influence on local land use change and development. This in turn has a significant impact on the local socioeconomic situation.

Andrew Willson's study suggests that, contrary to desired policy outcomes, deforestation and increased livestock grazing may be the net result of recent policy

changes in northern Yunnan. His case study also highlights the limitations of using broad-scale mapping to interpret the ecological status of vegetative categories, a status that often has profound effects on the land use options available to local communities.

All of the spatial studies above refer to changes on the ground. Changes in the local livelihoods in poor rural communities in Laos are investigated by Bounthong Bouahom, Linkham Douangsavanh and Jonathan Rigg (joint paper). Their study documents large changes at the household level, with shifts in community and family dynamics driven by economics, changing agricultural practices, and the pursuit of outside wage labour opportunities.

At the root of the changes outlined by these case studies is the issue of uncertain land security and obscure tenures. These were common problems faced by many communities in the region. Land security is at the core of the farmer movement investigated by Yuki Miyake, in which vulnerable lowland farmers in Thailand were granted land ownership, but still lost their land. This highlights the fact that land ownership can introduce new issues in communities where capitalism and free markets are relatively new. Market pressures and dilution of customary institutions can result in the loss of land and livelihood security in rural communities – the exact opposite of what the government intended.

Thus we have a diversity of case studies that cover a wide range of issues and scales, but all linked to issues examined during the mobile workshop. Broad-scale policy may seem inspired at the level of government, but the effects on the ground may be unforeseen and even contradictory.

The role of science must also be critically analysed. For example, the increase in the use of remote sensing and photo-interpretive mapping is a valuable tool, but data from such methods are ultimately only indicators of change and must be validated at the village or even household level. To a rural community, the notion of remote sensing may seem aptly named, particularly when the interpretation of results may have a profound impact on people's lifestyles.

What was particularly interesting about the mobile workshop was that it brought together people from various countries and disciplines to look at the same sites from different thematic perspectives. It is how changes affect communities on the ground that cuts across the various disciplines and workshop themes. This was demonstrated to us time and time again as we visited communities and started to gain a better understanding of the needs of the people and the drivers of local land use change.

From a local perspective, agricultural practices, resource use, and access are all directed towards livelihood security and increasing prosperity. Changes in land use result when communities balance the local environment, security of land use, relevant policy and, increasingly, market forces. This was found to be true whether talking to farmers in Laos, who despite seeming to know very little about rubber, are prepared to plant it to service what they perceive to be a booming Chinese market, or to communities in Thailand who have replaced their crops with grass to feed elephants to support a developing tourism market.

It seems significant that despite varying histories of government control, ideology and policy enforcement, we observed that customary resource governance and spiritualism has persisted in many areas. In many cases, this is being revived as governments acknowledge that effective land use management is often determined and implemented by local communities.

So we can come full circle with the case studies. The most overarching policy views examined in the papers by Kahrl and Nielsen boil down to actions that affect livelihoods at the smallest level. Kahrl advocates a shift in the focus of development agencies and players from the problems of supply to those of demand. He sees marketing and private sector pressures rather than production as the challenge facing many communities. Nielsen also concludes by identifying the need to improve governance by focusing policy change and formation on smaller social institutions that reflect local livelihood and environmental concerns.”