

EU funded small grants programme for community forestry in South and Southeast Asia expands.

The EU-funded, UNDP-managed small grants programme for activities which promote tropical forests in South and Southeast Asia (SGP PTF) has been the subject of increased grant making activity since the first Call for proposals was announced in January 2003. The SGP PTF focus is the provision of small grants (between € 20, 000 and € 150,000), on a competitive basis, for community led initiatives, which promote the sustainable management of tropical forests. Since January 2003 the SGP PTF has received a total of 724 formal proposals from community groups in Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam and of these 69 have received funding.

The SGP PTF has since expanded into Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Formal Calls for proposals have been announced in Malaysia and Sri Lanka and a formal Call for proposals in Indonesia is expected in January 2005. A total of 171 formal applications for funding have so far been received in Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Efforts are underway to further expand the SGP PTF activities into Cambodia and Lao PDR and if successful are expected to announce calls for proposals in the first quarter of 2005. The SGP PTF is mandated to carry out grant making activities until December 2007 and has a total budget of € 15,132,497.

The SGP PTF is a unique funding facility focussing as it does on the rural poor who live in and from forests in the region. The practice and principle of the SGP PTF is that individual country programmes are country-led both in terms of their overall strategy and project selection. There is no central handling of grant proposals and voluntary National Steering Committees (NSC) are entirely responsible for the selection and approval of grants. The constitution of the NSCs is by majority senior experts from civil society but also includes National Government, EC and UNDP representation. Application procedures for grants take into account the generally low capacity of community groups and applications in the form of short concept papers in local languages are encouraged. Despite the low capacity of many of the applicants and the enormous demand for small grants, processing from receipt of application, further development of a concept to full proposal and final approval can take as little as three to six months.

The SGP PTF fits well into the current opportunities provided by the general drive towards decentralisation by national governments of the management of natural resources in South and Southeast Asia. Increasing awareness of the failure of centralised State control to adequately manage natural resources, and in particular forests, has led to a plethora of initiatives, policies and laws that increasingly recognise the rights, roles and obligations of communities in the sustainable management of their natural resources. Implementation of these new community centred policies and laws is however nascent as is the awareness or ability by rural communities to engage local government in these new found rights and responsibilities. Forest dependent communities in the region, who form the central focus of SGP PTF funding, often represent the most marginalized of civil society, live in miserable poverty and have little awareness and for that matter access to either state or donor resources.

In focussing on forest dependent communities the SGP PTF has actively engaged with Indigenous Peoples and the rural poor in both developing alternative sustainable livelihoods and to bring back to the fore indigenous forest management practices to ensure the sustainable use of their forest resources. In engaging in such initiatives the SGP PTF recognises the need for active coalitions of a broad range of local stakeholders to ensure project sustainability post grant funding. Furthermore the SGP PTF has sought to increase the immediate impact of country programmes through joint funding initiatives with other small grant donors, local government funding and the private sector. The most important co financing initiatives to date have been established with the GEF funded small grants programme and a total of 9 joint projects with the GEF SGP have been approved to date.

The SGP PTF is currently subject to an independent mid term review. For further information on this unique funding facility please refer to the SGP PTF website at www.sgpptf.org or make direct contact with the Regional Programme Coordinator at mark.sandiford@undp.org

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