



ACMECS Bioenergy Network: Implementing a transnational science-based policy network on bioenergy

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Despite the currently low prices for fossil energy resulting from a number of geopolitical reasons, intergovernmental efforts are being made towards a transition to a sustainable bio-economy. The main reasons for this include climate change mitigation, decreasing dependencies fossil fuel imports and hence external market fluctuations, diversification of energy generation and feedstock production for industrial processes. Since 2012, the ACMECS bioenergy network initiative leads negotiations and organizes workshops to set up a regional bioenergy network in Indochina, with the aim to promote biomass and -energy markets, technology transfer, rural development and income generation. Policy development is guided by the International Union of Forest Research Institutions (IUFRO) Task Force “Sustainable Forest Bioenergy Network”. In this paper, we highlight the achievements so far and present results of a multi-stakeholder questionnaire in combination with a quantitative analysis of the National Bioenergy Development Plans (NBDP’s). We found that traditional fuelwood is still the most important resource for generating thermal energy in the region, especially in rural settings, and it will remain an important resource even in 25 years. However, less fuelwood will be sourced from natural forests as compared to today. NBDP’s have a focus on market development, technology transfer and funding possibilities of a regional bioenergy strategy, while the responses of the questionnaire favored more altruistic goals, i.e. sustainable resource management, environmental protection and climate change mitigation, generation of rural income and community involvement etc. This is surprising, since a sub-population of the (anonymous) questionnaire respondents was actually responsible drafting the NBDP’s. We therefore suggest the following measures to ensure regulations that represent the original aims of the network (climate change mitigation, poverty alleviation, sustainable resource use, diversification of energy generation): i) More communication between policy makers and the other stakeholders, ii) Invitation of stakeholders representing rural communities to participate in this process, iii) development of sustainability criteria, vi) feedback cycles ensuring more intensive discussion of policy drafts, v) association of an international board of experts to provide scientifically sound feedback and input and vi) establishment of a local demonstration region, containing various steps in the biomass/bioenergy supply chain including transboundary collaboration in the ACMECS region.