

## **EU SMALL GRANTS FOR COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA**

The EU-funded, UNDP-managed small grants programme for activities which promote tropical forests in South and Southeast Asia (SGP PTF) has recently expanded since the first call for proposals was announced in January 2003. The SGP PTF provides small grants (between € 20000 and € 150000) to community led initiatives that promote sustainable management of tropical forests.

Since January 2003 the SGP PTF has received 724 formal proposals from community groups in Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, of which 69 have received funding. The SGP PTF now also covers Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, and efforts are underway to further expand into Cambodia and Lao PDR. The SGP PTF mandate is to carry out grant making activities until December 2007 and has a total budget of 15 million Euro.

The SGP PTF focusses on the rural poor living 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. The National Steering Committees (NSC) are entirely responsible for the selection and approval of grants. The NSCs consist mainly of senior experts but the National Government, EC and UNDP

are also represented. Application procedures take into account the generally low capacity of community groups and therefore 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. Increased awareness of the failures of centralised State control to manage natural resources 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 community centred policies and laws is however nascent as is the awareness or ability of 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, are often the most marginalized and have hardly any access to either state or donor resources.

Focussing on forest dependent communities the SGP PTF has actively engaged with indigenous peoples and rural poor in developing alternative sustainable livelihoods and to bring back to the fore indigenous forest management practices to ensure the sustainable use of their forest resources. 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.

For further information on this unique funding facility please refer to the SGP PTF website at <http://www.sgptf.org>

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