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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Gender-Inclusive Agarwood Value Chain in the Community-Based Enterprise of Thailand

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Abstract

Agarwood or eaglewood is a keystone dense heartwood with special aromatic and medicinal qualities in which three-fourths of existing species can only be found in tropical evergreen forests of Southeast Asia. When infected with certain types of mold, the wood structure is damaged. Yet, in that process, the value of agarwood is exceptionally increased in the production for incense, perfumes, cosmetics and jewellery. High-quality agarwood is globally known for such uniqueness, rendering its expensive raw materials to serve both domestic and international market demands.

Although efforts to remove agarwood grown in private forest plantation from a restrictive list under the Thai Forest Law is underway, it is still enlisted under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora which places approval requirements and determines some restrictions in pre- and post-harvesting activities. Due to these cumbersome processes, the agarwood farmers' group in eastern provinces of Thailand collectively formed into Agarwood community in 2006 to mobilise support for smallholders. Led and engaged with women in the community, the Agarwood community develops a variety of innovative products, including toiletries, personal care items, deodorant spray, herbal medicine, etc. to serve diverse and high-end markets. It explores a niche market accessibility and create additional value of agarwood throughout the chain from a sapling, pre- to post-harvest or extraction, manufacturing, processing and trade, including the establishment of community retail stores as ecotourism destination with homestay and learning centre for consumers to experience and expose to agroforestry farmers' lives and visions.

Employing a gender-inclusive approach, this presentation reveals how initiatives to commodify and market agarwood foster socio-technical innovations and knowledge along the value chain, contributing to environmentally-sound development and rural livelihood diversification. The innovations ground on strengthening smallholder farmers' collectivity, networking and institution-building for eco-agroforestry farming and rural poverty alleviation. The active participation of women in agarwood value chain development significantly boosts their leadership and entrepreneurial competence for economic empowerment and sustainable resource management.

Keywords: Agarwood, community-based enterprise, gender-inclusive value chain