SUCCESS STORY

Building the Capacity of Civil Society to Document Community Tenure with Geospatial Tools

Photo: TGCC

Participants at the CSO training on geospatial tools watch a demonstration of mapping data collection using an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

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Many civil society organizations (CSOs) in Burma are actively working with communities to document land resources, but have limited exposure to community-led participatory mapping tools and methods. USAID Burma Land Tenure Project (LTP) has supported local CSOs with thematic training that supports their work with rural smallholders on securing tenure. USAID's support to CSOs leads to more equitable agricultural and economic development throughout the country.

The National Land Use Policy, recently endorsed by the government, acknowledges the importance and recognition of community or customary rights to land, though at present, these rights are frequently not recognized by local authorities. CSOs are critical to bridging the gap between communities and local authorities, meaning that building their mapping and spatial data capacity is a priority.

The rise in the use of GPS-enabled mobile devices has led to an ever increasing array of applications for users to rapidly locate themselves and then collect spatial data. While these present huge opportunities, clarity as to which applications are most suitable is lacking for CSOs. To address this issue, the USAID Burma LTP provided a technology-focused training program to 25 CSO representatives.

Participants conducted practical exercises with handheld GPS devices, tablet-based data collection, and mapping applications, and were able to work with an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

Theingi May Soe, the Community Engagement Officer for the USAID Burma LTP, said, "The training on such tools is especially important for local CSOs. Their strong knowledge on the legal side of land tenure is let down by a lack of basic mapping skills needed to document community resource information. Improving CSO capacity in this area will greatly strengthen community tenure in many areas of the country beyond the current scope of our project."

The training was the first in a series of USAID-supported institutional capacity development activities that will include additional training and financial support for CSOs to execute participatory mapping methods throughout Burma.