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SUCCESS STORY

Creating Opportunities for Constructive Dialogue Between the Government of Burma and Civil Society Stakeholders



Participants at the second of two expert roundtables on the draft National Land Use Policy

“This type of inclusive engagement on issues in the country should be replicated during other consultative processes. This is a good model.”

Dr. Nyi Nyi Kyaw, Director
General of the Forest Department

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Historically, interactions between civil society organizations (CSOs) and the government of Burma on land issues have been largely contentious. Over the past year, USAID and other donors have supported government and civil society in developing a National Land Use Policy through a participatory approach. The first consultation and request for public comments in late 2014 opened a door for participation in the policy’s development. Civil society was largely critical of this early process, as there was limited opportunity for direct, constructive dialogue. To address the shortcoming, USAID and partners worked closely with government representatives to design an extended second phase consultation process. Two expert roundtables were open to all CSOs, with each drawing over 100 participants from across the country.

During the first roundtable, CSOs were invited to present position statements and discuss the draft policy with government stakeholders, representing a new level of civil society engagement in the policy development process. Even more remarkable was the mixing of government and civil society in small breakout groups, building a spirit of cooperation. Thin Maung Than from the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MOECAF) Land Information Unit said, “I have never seen Government officials and civil society representatives work together like this before.” Ku Ku Ju, of the local organization Land in Our Hands, followed by saying, “We want to thank the Government and the organizers of this dialogue for listening to our concerns and taking them seriously.”

The open participation of government and civil society continued during the second roundtable with mixed breakout groups leading to productive, actionable recommendations. U Shwe Thein, Chairman of the civil society organization Land Core Group, stated, “The participants have done a very good job of openly and honestly debating the issues in their working groups, and coming up with useful suggestions that the policy revision drafting team can use.” The Deputy Minister of MOECAF stated in closing remarks that, “Those who participated in this event should be thanked for their hard work, productive outputs, and advice on the National Land Use Policy. This will improve the policy and help the country develop sustainably in a peaceful manner.”