



Vision Statement:

The Mekong Land Research Forum will be the primary resource for informed debate, education, research, and advocacy for policy dialogue around land governance issues in the Mekong region. RCSD with the support of Forum members, will nurture the next generation of researchers in the land sector in the Mekong Region.

Through the Mekong Land Research Forum, RCSD (Regional Center for Social Sciences and Sustainable Development, Chiang Mai University) seeks to **encourage** research on land governance, **connect** researchers looking into issues of land governance in the Mekong Region, and **facilitate** ready access to their work. RCSD sees the network as a means to facilitate **discussion and debate**, the sharing of knowledge, and the enhancement of individual and group capacities in conducting and applying research. Beyond the benefit to the work of researchers on land governance, RCSD intends to use the forum as a platform of interaction with civil society organisations, and where possible policy-makers. It also aims to bolster connections between professionals and students, supporting the **training** of a new generation of land researchers.

As host to the Forum, RCSD at Chiang Mai University offers access to an extensive academic network around the region, and intersection points with cross-cutting topics such as special economic zones (SEZs) and border studies.

There are three principal ways in which this vision of the Mekong Land Research Forum is realised:

1. An online resource

Maintaining, enhancing and fostering utilisation of an online resource offers access to both published and unpublished research. Different search avenues include a conceptual framework through fourteen key themes on land. Annotations of specific articles are also provided, and network members are invited to participate in progressive annotation of key bibliographic items. With its base at Chiang Mai University, RCSD provides a regional perspective from Thailand to complement the initial countries of focus for the online resource, namely Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. A vital accessing point of research, the resource acts as an educational tool for the training of a new generation of researchers and practitioners on land issues.

2. A research network

This brings together those in academic institutions, NGOs and where relevant government agencies, with a research interest on current land issues, and provides a platform by which they may exchange, debate and collaborate. RCSD offers a hub to this network through its own regional institutional connections, and access to its alumni. The network can consider, through moderated online and face-to-face discussions, the latest country-specific or regional trends in land governance, alongside conceptual, technical and methodological approaches. Knowledge can be assimilated and then made available to all stakeholders affected by or involved in the creation and implementation of land policy in the region. It is envisaged that the network of researches can be accessed for providing specialised reviews of existing work as well as a resource for conducting small commissioned research projects. An online meeting point for encouraging dialogue and debate will be provided.

3. Education outreach programme

RCSD commits to establishing a programme that facilitates the training of a new generation of researchers. It focuses around the following activities:

- i. *A focus on land relations within the International Program MA in Social Science (Development Studies)*. In this two year program, participating students are given a specialised pathway to link land to a conceptual overview of development within the social sciences. Research towards a second-year Master's thesis is similarly focused on land, with support provided from an extensive network of practitioners around the region. The program focus has been in operation since 2017.
- ii. *An annual summer school on research techniques on land-related questions*. Since 2016, the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development and the Mekong Land Research Forum has run a week-long intensive summer school on land research in the Mekong Region. The purpose is to equip participants with a research orientation relevant to the challenges of land governance in the Mekong Region. The summer school covers key concepts, provide access to existing research outputs and bring together knowledge of current land issues. It seeks to strengthen individual and networked research that is geared towards secure access to land amongst the rural and urban poor. The summer school involves a mix of early-career academics, mid-level government staff and those working with civil society organizations in the six Mekong countries: Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. In parallel, two Thai-language summer schools have also been held with participants from Laos and Thailand. The summer school program is organised and run by regional specialists in land issues and includes a number of guest lecturers.

In both cases, a key training resource is an online resource into learning activities, assimilating existing teaching methods at Chiang Mai University, and incorporating further tools (such as materials provided by UN FAO). Strong curriculum development can be shared with other academic institutions in the region, with opportunities taken for exchange visits. Beyond a focus on graduate and post-graduate training, expert training can be guided to support government officials in the future.

RCSD sees the online resource as an invaluable resource for the research network and for the outreach program among research students and the new generation of lecturers. At the same time, the network and outreach activities are not primarily online, but are rather based on applied, field-based and face-to-face interactive research and training.