

# Swiss gov't forestry grant scheme extended 3 years

*Economy*

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**THE Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation is extending by three more years its "social forestry" quick response grant fund in the Association of Southeast Asian nations to provide support in resolving issues arising from climate change, hunger, and poverty concerns**



*The school and home gardens project is implemented for learning, improved nutrition, and savings. -- SEARCA.ORG*

In a statement released over the weekend, the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), the project implementer, said that the program, called the ASEAN-Swiss Partnership on Social Forestry and Climate Change (ASFCC), will be in its third phase after this extension.

Social forestry refers to the promotion of environmental, social, and rural development through effective management and protection of forests and reforestation of barren lands.

The ASFCC aims, among others, to analyze how social forestry can benefit communities through participation in a United Nations program called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+).

REDD+ is a financial reward scheme for developing countries that reduce carbon dioxide emissions through forest management systems. Projects under this program are initiated in forested areas of Southeast Asia where shifting cultivation, which has been associated with forest losses, is widely practiced

Around 300 million people has been estimated to be living in rural areas in Southeast Asia. Of this, some 70 million depend on forest for their food and livelihood which have led to massive deforestation through slash and burn agriculture, according to SEARCA.

The ASFCC project also looks on how the ASEAN economic integration can potentially lift many rural, forest-based people out of poverty through better forest management systems. That aside from reducing risks for forest people in light of calamities due to climate change.

"At the ASEAN organization itself, the inclusion of wood-based products among the 12 priority integration sector and the special focus on food, agriculture and forestry as a sector

indicate appreciation for forestry and agriculture as essential components in the process of economic integration," SEARCA said in a statement, quoting the 2015 report funded by the Swiss government, "Impact of ASEAN AEC on Social Forestry and Forest Products Trade."

The budget limit for the ASFCC is \$15,000 for single-country projects and \$30,000 for multi-country projects. Each project should be completed in six months. The grant facility also offers scholarship training up to \$2,000.

Beneficiary states are the Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

In the same statement, SEARCA Director Gil C. Saguiguit Jr. said a streamlined process will be implemented to fast-track the release of grant assistance to beneficiaries.

Eligible project proposals include studies to aid decision-making, exploratory reviews of emerging problems, analytical studies, dialogues and roundtable discussions, and study tours, among others.

Mr. Saguiguit added that a trust fund is being conceptualized by SEARCA as a long-term program that will continue even after the grant program ends.

"This can become the precursor or test-bed for the creation of an ASRF (ASEAN Strategic Response Fund) Trust Fund," Mr. Saguiguit was quoted in the statement. -- **Janina C. Lim**