Myanmar Ethnic Groups, Forests and Climate Change Week  
Concept Note

Title of Activity:
Myanmar Ethnic Groups, Forest and Climate Change Week

Relevant Outputs in the UN-REDD Workplan:
Output 1.1 Strengthened stakeholder representation and engagement  
Output 2.1 Institutional structure for REDD+ implementation defined and operationalized  
Output 3.1 Define REDD+ safeguards for Myanmar’s context

Objectives of Activity:
The objective of the Myanmar Ethnic Groups, Forests and Climate Change Week is to:  
• Strengthen engagement between the REDD+ Myanmar programme and Myanmar’s ethnic groups;  
• Clarify and publicize Myanmar’s commitment to Free, Prior and Informed Consent;  
• Publicize Myanmar’s policy target on forest cover;  
• Clarify and publicize Myanmar’s GHG emissions reduction target.

Brief Description:
Background  
1. Grassroots awareness raising  
The REDD+ Myanmar communications and knowledge management strategy, developed under the UN-REDD/Myanmar programme, identifies forest dependent and local communities, including Indigenous Peoples as one of the key audiences for REDD+ communications. Communicating effectively with such communities faces several challenges, including:  
➢ The numbers of stakeholders involved  
➢ The remoteness of many communities  
➢ The diversity of languages in Myanmar  
To date, despite good progress with many other audiences, little progress has been made in communicating with forest dependent and local communities. However, during consultations with ethnic groups (see below), it has become apparent that there are many ethnic-based youth organizations whose mandates are grass-roots awareness raising on a range of issues. Therefore, the possibility of building the capacity of such youth groups to deliver grass-roots awareness raising on forests and climate change appears to be the best option to make progress on this issue.  
Consequently, a national event bringing together as many ethnic-based youth organizations as possible in order to develop a clear and coordinated programme of grassroots awareness raising is proposed.

2. Engagement with ethnic groups on the draft National REDD+ Strategy
In 2012, the Asia Pacific Indigenous Peoples PACT (AIPP) issued a set of recommendations to UN-REDD, which included:

1. UN-REDD should place more attention on the capacity building and strengthening of indigenous peoples towards the recognition and exercise of their rights to their land, territories and resources, and FPIC.
2. UN-REDD should ensure specific consultations with indigenous peoples at local and national levels.

Partly in response to these recommendations, and partly in recognition of the fact that the 15 sub-national consultations undertaken on the draft National REDD+ Strategy had not effectively engaged many ethnic groups, the UN-REDD Programme has been undertaking additional engagement processes with a number of ethnic groups. Since there are more than 100 ethnic groups in Myanmar, it is impractical to undertake engagement processes with each group individually. Therefore, applying a set of two criteria, 12 ethnic groups were identified as being priorities for engagement. However, the other ethnic groups should not be ignored.

So, to complement the 12 individual ethnic group engagement processes, and in response to a suggestion from prominent ethnic leaders, it is proposed to organize a national workshop on the draft strategy for as many ethnic groups as it is possible to contact.

3. Building and clarifying Myanmar’s commitment to Free, Prior and Informed Consent
Under the Warsaw Framework for REDD+, Myanmar is obliged to address and respect the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. One of these rights is the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Currently there is a lack of clarity over Myanmar’s commitment to respect this right. The Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas Law (2018) implies respect for FPIC, but neither the law nor the draft Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas Rules provide clarity of the process to be followed. Likewise, the Forest Law (2018) supposedly provides for FPIC, but the provisions of the law are unclear, and the Forest Rules remain to be developed. The Ethnic Rights Protection Law (2015) makes no reference to FPIC, and the Ethnic Rights Protection Rules remain to be finalized. Only in the National Land Use Policy (2016) is there a clear statement that FPIC should be included in the National Land Law and land administration system.

Because of this lack of clarity, many ethnic leaders remain suspicious of the genuine intent of the government of the Union of Myanmar to respect their right to FPIC. Clearly, it would not make sense for separate systems to be developed for protected areas, for forests, for REDD+, or for other issues such as road construction. Rather there should be a single, comprehensive system that can apply to all sectors and situations. Despite the lack of any reference to FPIC in the Ethnic Rights Protection Law, the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs should play a lead role in developing such a comprehensive system, and an initial national consultation with ethnic groups can stimulate this process.

4. Contribution to peace and reconciliation
Myanmar’s many ethnic-based conflicts are rooted in part in the management of natural resources. The desire of most parties for some sort of federal system of government is undermined by centralized management of natural resources. Despite recent moves to some decentralization of authority to State and Regions, governance of the forest sector is still viewed
by many as highly centralized, as characterized by the policy focus on Reserved Forests and Protected Public Forests under the jurisdiction of the Union Forest Department.

In particular, the gazetting of Reserved Forests and Protected Public Forests is viewed by many as being, at best an infringement on their customary rights, and at worst nothing more than a government land-grab. Therefore, the announcement during Myanmar Ethnic Groups, Forests and Climate Change Week (at the formal opening ceremony or during the consultation on the National REDD+ Strategy) or the abandonment of the old policy objective of a specific area of Reserved Forests, to be replaced with a policy target for forest cover, would emphasize the recognition of past inappropriate processes.

The rights-based system of forest management enshrined by the Cancun Safeguards emphasized through the FPIC session would contribute to reducing tensions and building confidence of all parties in a democratic and respectful approach to the management of forests in Myanmar.

**Proposed structure for the Myanmar Ethnic Groups, Forests and Climate Change Week**

In order to address all of the issues described above, a week-long event is required. Representatives of as many ethnic groups as possible should be invited to the event. In reality, it might be reasonable to expect representation from about 80 ethnic groups. For each ethnic group, there should be representatives from youth organizations (2), CSO’s (2), and Ethnic Armed Organizations (NCA signatories)/political parties (2).

The basic structure of the events would be:

- **Day 1:** Working with youth groups on planning for grass-roots awareness raising
- **Day 2-3:** Awareness raising and consultation on the National REDD+ Strategy
- **Day 4-5:** Designing a process to ensure FPIC is respected across all sectors and issues

From the government of the Union of Myanmar, MONREC (Forest Department) would be the lead agency for Days 1-3, and MOEA would be the lead agency for Days 4-5.

With around 250 representatives from 80+ ethnic groups present in Nay Pyi Taw for a week, additional non-technical events would be organized. Besides a formal welcoming ceremony, there could be:

**A tree planting event.** Each ethnic group would be invited to identify a tree species of special relevance to their culture. The Forest Department would ensure two saplings of each species would be available and one sapling each would be planted alongside each other by a representative of the ethnic group and a representative of the Union government. The area where the planting takes place would become a “Forest Peace Park”.

**Ethnic cultural performances.** Each evening, ethnic groups would be invited to perform songs, dances, or other cultural productions.

**Ethnic cuisine.** Each evening, ethnic groups would be invited to serve traditional food and drinks. By organizing Myanmar Ethnic Groups, Forests and Climate Change Week during the dry season, this and the cultural performances could be held each evening in an outdoor setting in Nay Pyi Taw/Thabyaygone/Pyinmana, to attract local participation.
Participation and preparation

As noted above, for ethnic groups, participants from youth organizations, CSO’s, and EAO’s/political parties would participate. Estimated numbers: 80 groups x 6 persons/group: 240 For the National REDD+ Strategy consultation and FPIC process, senior officials from MONREC, MOALI, MOHA, MOBA, MOEE, MOEA, UAGO. Estimated numbers: 8 from each: 56 Representatives of CSO’s: Estimated numbers: 4 from each of 8 organizations: 32 Officials from UN organizations. Estimated numbers: 6 from each of 5 UN agencies: 30 Media (for formal opening ceremony, tree planting event: 30 UN-REDD PMU (8) Total: 396

For the formal opening ceremony and tree planting event, representation from the government of the Union of Myanmar would be at the highest level (President, State Counsellor or Vice-President). Senior official of UN organizations, Ambassadors and other dignitaries would also be invited.

Preparation for the event will be guided by a multi-stakeholder organizing committee, consisting of representatives from government (MONREC/FD and MOEA), ethnic CSO’s and UN agencies. The role of the organizing committee will include mobilization of inputs, including financial inputs from other projects and initiatives working on the same or similar issues.

Date and venues
Given the amount of time required in preparation, a date in April is anticipated. Still being the dry season, the ethnic cuisine and cultural performances could be performed outdoors. The tree planting event would be organized for early morning to avoid the heat. The formal opening ceremony, and technical sessions would be held at an adequate venue at a Nay Pyi Taw hotel or at the MICC.

Proposed budget
Funding to sponsor the travel and accommodation of ethnic group representatives and some CSO representatives, and the venue costs is estimated to total approx. USD 125,000. Some funds will be allocated from UN-REDD (≤ 50%), but funding will also be sought from other sources.