

Sophie Rose Lewis		
Affiliation	University of British Columbia (Canada)	
Session Chair		
Presentations	Session 3.2	<i>Global Forest Bioeconomy: Continuity or a Pathway to Transformations? (Part 1)</i>

Abstract Session 3.2 – The production of inequality and poverty among ethnic minority communities in Thailand and implications for the emerging global forest-based bioeconomy.

Grounded in the perceptions that Thailand is rich in natural resources, the development of bioeconomy has become central to the strategic development of the Government of Thailand, where crops and forest products are intended to play a central role. However, the forest landscape governance in Thailand is driven by and further drives the production of inequalities. This paper traces policy origins and interests in the bioeconomy in Thailand and outlines the risks of inequality under the current forest landscape governance. Resource and wealth accumulation within the forest landscape has been driven through coalitions of state actors, large agricultural businesses and timber-smuggling gangs. This accumulation is at the detriment of and is structured through the racial oppression of ethnic communities in northern Thailand, which has resulted in labour abuses, poverty creation and their systematic dispossession from land and resources. The labour abuses include a cycle of debt created from an over-reliance on cash crops produced through government policies, the supply chain model of large agricultural-based businesses whereby they work through middlemen rather than direct contracts with farmers, compounded by the lack of secure resource and tenure rights. These indebted farmers, to pay for their debt or gain additional income, occasionally engage in the harvesting of luxury timber species for timber smuggling gangs who, in turn, increasingly pay for their labourers in the form of amphetamines which leads to addiction and further related issues within the communities. I explore how these issues feature in the context of an emerging global bioeconomy.