

FAQv2

The long version

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1. The basics

1.1 What is MyLAFF?

MyLAFF is a forum for sharing information about land, rural livelihoods, forests, fisheries, agribusiness investment and natural resource management in Myanmar.

1.2 What does MyLAFF stand for?

MyLAFF = **M**yanmar **L**and **A**gribusiness and **F**orestry **F**orum

1.3 And what is the purpose?

MyLAFF aims to support rural development in Myanmar by providing decision-makers with better access to information and analysis and to promote communication between stakeholders working on issues relating to land, natural resource management and land related investment (agribusiness, fisheries, forestry, etc.).

1.4 How does it work?

MyLAFF makes use of the internet to provide members with a mailing list and online library.

1.5 When did it get started?

The forum was founded on the 8th of July 2014.

1.6 What is the difference between MyLAFF and other info channels?

MyLAFF is not a substitute for official meetings and publications. It attempts to 'add value' to the discourse about rural development in Myanmar by making information-sharing more open and pluralistic. The discussion at MyLAFF is diverse, informal and open 24-7. It pulls together news from a wide range of sources and provides space for professional announcements and debate without delays or censorship.

1.7 What do you mean by 'open' information-sharing?

MyLAFF operates under the principles of open source, open access and open minds. For further explanation, take a look at 'The Dongdok Statement on Access to Information for Development' (Dongdok SAID), which can be downloaded from the MyLAFF repository.

1.8 Who manages MyLAFF?

MyLAFF is managed as a public service by the Land Core Group (LCG). Funding for this service comes from the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT).

1.9 But who actually does the work?

The members do most of the work. The majority of MyLAFF messages are posted by ordinary members. The moderator of the forum is Casper Palmano, an adviser to LCG. He posts frequent news updates from local and international media and is responsible for approving new members and any files uploaded to the MyLAFF repository. You can contact him at mylaffmoderator@gmail.com

1.10 And who makes the rules?

The MyLAFF document repository and google group's initial operating principles and rules were designed under advisement from LaoFAB (www.laofab.org). MyLAFF members were then invited to participate in a 2015 survey to discuss and improve on the websites' rules, principles, and operations. More surveys will be held periodically so that you, the members, can help shape MyLAFF into something useful for you.

The basic principles followed by LaoFAB are: a) the scope of MyLAFF will not be changed, b) the forum should not be used for either trivial exchanges or protracted debates, and c) the moderator should make interventions when necessary to keep the discussion friendly and useful.

1.11 Does the discussion on MyLAFF have any 'official' status?

No. Opinions expressed in this forum are those of individual members, not the organisations for which they are working.

2. Becoming a member

2.1 How much does it cost to join?

Nothing.

2.2 Great! How do I sign up?

Go to the MyLAFF group page, here: <http://groups.google.com/group/MyLAFF> and click 'apply for membership'. Google will send you a confirmation message. Click on the link in the message to complete the application process.

2.3 Why am I asked for personal details when joining the group?

Before membership is approved, you will be asked to provide information about your profession, organisation and country of residence. The purpose is to make sure you have a genuine interest in Myanmar land issues and are not a spammer. Just a few words are required; you are not expected to provide your name and contact details. Once this information has been submitted, the moderator will add your address to the MyLAFF Google Group.

2.4 What's this Google Group?

Google Groups is a free service from Google which allows people to have discussions about common interests. In the case of the MyLAFF group, when a member sends a message to mylaff@googlegroups.com it is automatically sent to all other members.

2.5 Who are the other members of MyLAFF?

Members include Government officials, staff of donor agencies and NGOs, project experts, academics and business people.

2.6 How many are there?

MyLAFF had 576 members by the end of September 2016.

2.7 If I join, how many messages can I expect to receive?

On average, about 5-6 messages are posted every two days. Some days there might be double that number, while occasionally there are none. This number may increase as more people join the Google Group.

2.8 What is the scope of discussion on MyLAFF?

While we are always keen to expand the topics covered, here are some of the things that have been discussed over the past few months: Government plans and policies; the impact of hydropower and mining on rural livelihoods; the role of contract farming and farmer associations; the rapid expansion of cash crops such as maize, palm oil, sugar cane, and rubber production; investment and trade; land grabs and corruption; the work of ADB, the WB, and others; plantations, forest cover, and biodiversity.

2.9 It sounds like we can say anything, right?

Wrong! Despite this long list of topics, members are discouraged from posting every news article they find on the web or sharing every opinion that pops into their head. All messages should relate to issues of land, natural resource management and/or land related investment and be of professional interest to other members.

3. Membership options

3.1 Help! I can't cope with all these messages. What should I do?

Maybe you need to change your membership settings.

3.2 OK. How do I do that?

Go to the MyLAFF Google Groups website (see 6.3) and click on the small grey box on the top right hand side of the screen labelled 'My Settings'. Select the option 'Membership and e-mail settings' to manage the number of e-mails you receive per day.



'My Settings' button on top right of screen

3.3 What options are there?

- a) no email: nothing will arrive in your inbox, but you can continue to read or post messages at the website.
- b) abridged email: this will give you one message per day containing a summary of what has been posted in previous 24 hours. You can click the links to read the complete messages if desired.
- c) digest email: this also gives you one email per day, but the message contains the full content of what has been posted in the past 24 hrs.
- d) email: this is the default option, which means that you receive each individual message as it is posted.

3.4 Can I filter MyLAFF messages?

Yes. You can use the prefix [MyLAFF] for this purpose. The prefix is included in the subject line for all messages, so it can be used to automatically redirect these messages to a separate folder. This will prevent your inbox from filling up with posts from MyLAFF.

3.5 I'm not interested in this. How do I unsubscribe?

Are you sure you want to unsubscribe? If you are having trouble handling so many messages, then consider changing your membership settings so that you get a single 'digest' message every day. You could even select 'no email' but still have access to the MyLAFF websites.

3.6 Seriously, get me out of here, OK?

If you really, really want to leave the group, you can unsubscribe at the MyLAFF Google website. And if you can't figure that out, just send a message to the moderator (see 1.9). Please do NOT post an unsubscribe message to the forum.

4. Sending messages

4.1 How do I reply to a MyLAFF message?

It's easy. Just click 'reply', write your response, and press 'send'. But remember, your reply will go to ALL of the members, not just the person who posted the message.

4.2 What if I want to respond to the sender, not the group?

Click 'forward' and add the address of the person to whom you want to send the message. (Note that if you read messages at the Google website there is "Reply to author" option at the end of every post).

4.3 And how do I start a discussion on a new topic?

There are two ways of starting a new topic, a recommended method and the lazy method. The recommended method is to open a blank message, type or paste the MyLAFF address (mylaff@googlegroups.com) into the message header, type in the subject, write the message, and press 'send'. Alternatively, you can start a new discussion on the Google Group page by selecting the red 'New Topic' button at the top left of the screen.

4.4 And the lazy method for starting a new topic?

The lazy method is to open an old message from MyLAFF, click 'reply', then change the subject line and (optionally) delete the old content before typing your message. Please do NOT do this. The result is that messages get jumbled up in the online version of MyLAFF, with unrelated items filed under the topic used to start the thread. This is confusing for members reading messages at the MyLAFF website. The 'reply' button should only be used when adding information or opinions to an existing thread, in which case there's no need to change the subject line.

4.5 I tried sending a message to the MyLAFF address and it bounced back: what's the problem?

Maybe you are not a member! Or, if you are a member, perhaps you are sending from a different e-mail address to the one you used to join MyLAFF. Google only accepts messages from senders that are included in the membership list.

4.6 Can I send messages in Burmese or other Ethnic languages?

Yes you can! When replying to a discussion already in progress then all you have to do is hit the 'reply' button and write as normal. When creating a new topic, though, or posting an article or link to a text in Myanmar language please prefix all of your messages and related articles with [MM] as this will make it easier to manage the forum and repository.

4.7 Should I post translations of articles available in both English and Myanmar language?

Please do, the core aim of MyLAFF is the sharing of information and strengthening of communication between involved parties. If you do so, though, please post the original text and translation as separate messages, as this will make it easier to archive them in the document repository. Remember to prefix all posts concerning articles/texts in Myanmar language with [MM].

4.8 What's [NLM] and how is it different to normal media updates?

[NLM] = The Global **New Light of Myanmar** (aka *Myanma Alin*). We've chosen to mark articles from this source out as it is currently the go-to English language government mouthpiece, meaning that the articles should be taken with a grain of salt. As yet, the other government mouthpiece news sources are available only in Myanmar language. If you would like to post articles from *Kyemon* or *The Yadanabon* please prefix them with [KM] or [YB] respectively, instead of the usual [MM] used for Myanmar language posts.

4.9 Can I advertise on MyLAFF?

No. This is a forum for sharing professional information. It is not the place to advertise goods and services. The border between professional and commercial information is sometimes a bit fuzzy, and we don't object to people making recommendations and connections, but blatant publicity for companies and products is not allowed.

4.10 What about job announcements?

Job announcements are permitted under the following conditions: the position must be in Myanmar, and the job must require professional experience in a field related to land management, agriculture, natural resources, land related investment, and/or rural development. If you want to post an announcement, please remember: no attachments (see 5.8).

5. Things to avoid

5.1 Is the discussion moderated?

Generally speaking, discussion on MyLAFF is not moderated. Members can start new topics at any time. The majority of messages are immediately forwarded to other members without being seen or approved by the moderator.

5.2 But some members are moderated, right?

Thus far, there are no moderated members, but this may change. Members are placed on the moderated list if they post an unhelpful message at some point. These members can continue to submit messages which are reviewed by the moderator. If the message is unhelpful, it will be deleted. If it is OK, it is posted to the forum.

5.3 What do you mean by an 'unhelpful message'?

Members are put on the moderated list for the following reasons: a) sending messages that are outside the scope of the forum, b) being offensive, c) engaging in chit-chat, d) attaching files, e) posting 'Out of Office messages' to the group.

5.4 What type of message is considered offensive?

Members are expected to show respect for each other. They don't have to agree, in fact we enjoy a good argument! But we should stick to the facts rather than making rude remarks about each other. You can raise questions about the policies and activities of organizations involved in land, natural resource management and land related investment - and that includes Government Departments, donor agencies and private companies - but please do this without calling into question the intelligence or integrity of other members of the forum. More advice about 'netiquette' can be found here: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/book/>

5.5 What is the problem with 'Out of Office' messages?

If your computer sends an 'out of office' message to the MyLAFF address it will automatically go to ALL members (that's a lot of people!). Some of the members don't appreciate this. Any offender will be put on the moderated list; this will stop them from sending further messages unless the moderator approves them.

5.6 Out of Office messages are automatic, surely you can't blame me?

Please don't see moderation in these cases as an accusation, we understand that it's not your fault that these messages are sent, and that some organisations have them set up independent from yourself. The software that creates Out of Office messages usually has the ability for creating exceptions, so it's possible to avoid the issue entirely if you create an exception within your e-mail service for MyLAFF e-mails. For example, in Outlook, try 'Tools -> Out of Office Assistant -> Add Rule'.

5.7 What's wrong with 'chit-chat'?

MyLAFF is different from FaceBook or Twitter. Members do not appreciate casual responses that increase the number of messages without adding any substance to the discussion, e.g. 'thanks for your suggestion', 'thanks for your contribution', 'I completely agree', or 'you must be joking!'. You can send this kind of message directly to the person concerned and thus avoid overloading the inboxes of other members.

5.8 And why can't I send attachments?

Attachments should be avoided. Due to the current state of internet connectivity in Myanmar, a large number of MyLAFF members have slow connections. Documents of only a few pages can block their access. This is particularly annoying if - after waiting for 2 or 3 hours - they open a file that is of no interest to them!

5.9 So how can we share files?

You have two main options: a) If the document is already online somewhere, you can post a message containing the link, or b) you can upload the document to the MyLAFF document repository www.mylaff.org, and then share a link to the file.

6. The MyLAFF websites

6.1 What? There's a MyLAFF website?

Actually there are two websites: the one provided by Google, and another that we created for ourselves called 'The MyLAFF Document Repository'.

6.2 What is the Repository?

This is an online library that was launched in November 2014. You can find the site at: www.mylaff.org. All MyLAFF members are given a password that can be used in conjunction with their email address. Once you have logged in, you can search, browse, upload and download documents. More details are given in section 7 below.

6.3 And what is the Google website?

Our Google page is here: <http://groups.google.com/group/mylaff>. If you subscribe to Gmail, you can jump from your mailbox to MyLAFF by using the menu bar at the top of the page (select 'more' and 'even more' and then 'groups'). At the MyLAFF group page you can read the latest discussion, post new messages, and change your membership settings. You can also search the archive of old messages, which is very useful if you are doing any research about rural development in Myanmar.

6.4 I tried to visit the MyLAFF Google website and it said I was not a member. What's the problem?

You must sign in to Google before visiting the website. To sign in, please visit: <https://www.google.com/groups/signin>. Note that you need a Google password to sign in. If you have not got a password, click on 'create an account now' at the signin page. It is free and takes only a minute. Google will send you a confirmation message; once you have responded you can visit the website.

6.5 So, I need a Gmail account to visit the MyLAFF Google website?

No. Google will allow you to create a password for any email address. Make sure - however - to use the same email address for which you are subscribed to this group (ie. the address at which you receive MyLAFF messages).

6.6 But I need two passwords, right?

Well, you need a password for the MyLAFF Document Repository (which we will send to you) and another password for the MyLAFF Google Group (which you select). But you can change or select passwords so that they are identical for the two sites.

6.7 Help! I forgot my password.

For the MyLAFF Google Groups Website, go to the signin page (see 6.4) and click on 'I cannot access my account', and then select the appropriate option. For the MyLAFF Repository, select the 'recover your password' option (written in green) which is below the 'login' button on the website's homepage. You will be asked to provide an e-mail address to have the password reminder sent to (it's easier if you provide the e-mail that you're registered to MyLAFF with). If this doesn't work, write to the moderator (see 1.9).

7. Using the repository

7.1 What is in the Repository?

The repository at www.mylaff.org contains copies of laws, training manuals, market studies, conference reports, presentations, academic papers, NGO and CSO reports, and other documents pertaining to issues of land, natural resource management, and land related investment in Myanmar. Documents are available in English, Burmese, and other ethnic languages of Myanmar, and most are PDF format files.

7.2 How do I download a document from the Repository?

Use the 'search' or 'browse' options to find a file that has an interesting title. Click on the filename to open a record that shows more details of that document. If you are sure you want the document, click on the button that says 'download file'.

7.3 And how do I upload documents?

Click on 'browse' in the menu bar and open the relevant folder. Click the button that says 'upload a document to this folder'. You will be asked to fill in some details (title, author, date...). Then use the browse box near the bottom of the page to find the file on your computer, and finally click 'submit document'. If you are not sure what to do, you can always aim your mouse pointer at the blue information icons and a hint will appear on the screen.

7.4 I want to upload something but I don't know which folder to use?

Don't worry. The MyLAFF Repository is organized around 'virtual folders', which means that you can put a single file in more than one folder. If, however, you have a collection of files for a topic that is not yet included in the repository, just send a request to the moderator who can create a new folder for you. Please don't send the files to him; you can upload them yourself!

7.5 I uploaded a file, but it didn't appear online. What's going on?

It may take one or two days before your documents become visible. This is because they need to be reviewed and approved by the moderator. This provides an opportunity to ensure they have been placed in the correct folders and tagged with enough information to make them searchable.

7.7 Who owns the copyrights?

Copyright to the documents and photos is held by their respective authors and/or photographers. The files are made available through the MyLAFF repository on the basis of 'fair use'. It is understood that members can make use of these files for non-commercial purposes, but should acknowledge the copyright holder if this is known.

8.3 This is really clever stuff. Who created the repository?

The website and software was developed by Joakim Lagerqvist. You can contact him at joakim.lagerqvist@gmail.com.

MyLAFF FAQv2

Casper Palmano (With thanks to Andrew Bartlett)

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Send queries and suggestions to:

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