

An Analysis of Status Community Forest Management in Vietnam

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베트남의 지역사회 산림 관리 현황 분석

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국문요약

베트남은 도이 모이(Doi Moi) 개혁 정책이 1996년에 도입된 이후, 산림분야에서는 분권적 관리 체계를 받아들였고 국가 경제는 정부의 관리 체제하에 시장지향형(market-oriented)으로 변화하였다. 이러한 상황에서 경제 분야에서는 임업활동을 수반할 수 있게 되었고 지속가능한 임업 발전을 위하여 임야와 토지가 개인, 가정 그리고 사회경제적 조직들에게 분배되었다.

지역사회의 주민들은 임업활동에 더 적극적으로 되었고, 사회임업은 베트남에서 점차적으로 발전하며 사람들에게 의한 사람들을 위한 임업으로 자리잡고 있다. 지역사회 산림(community forest)의 근본적인 특징은 전과정에 있어서 농민과 지역주민의 참여를 유도한다는 데에 있다.

지역주민에 의한 산림 관리는 새로운 산림 관리 방식으로 각 가정에 의해 관리되는 농업에 있어 급속한 변화들이 나타나는 것과는 대조적이다. 본 논문은 지역사회 산림의 현황과 임업 발전에 있어서 지역주민 참여의 이점과 문제점을 SWOT(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) 분석을 통해 구명하고자 하였다.

주요어(Key words): 지역사회 산림(Community Forest), 임야(Forest Land), 산림관리(Forest Management), 베트남(Vietnam)

I. Introduction

The implementation of the policies on multi-sector economy, and orientation of forestry strategy from State-owned forestry towards people's forestry have emerged new elements, such as diversification of forest resource management practices. Community involved in forest management has been adopted as a practice attracting attention from central to grass-root levels.

In Vietnam, community forest has existed for a long time closely connected with the existence and religions of different communities who are dependent on forests. In the last few years,

based on the need for sustainable forest management, some local communities have allocated forests and forest land to communities, including villages and households, for management and long term utilization, in which the communities have the ownership over the forests. In addition, the communities have also participated in contracting forests for protection, zoning for natural regeneration and new plantation programmes from governmental organizations.

Experiences have shown that community based forest management is a socio-economically feasible forest management model, which corresponds to traditional customs of different ethnic groups in Vietnam. As traditional resource

management systems, social forestry are still practiced by millions of Vietnamese farmers and communities.

Community forest effectiveness for productive and sustainable use of fragile lands has made it popular among farmers and a recipient during the past decade of considerable external development support. Efforts to assist community forestry development are more recent and being undertaken nearly exclusively by foreign donor-assisted programs. Less was known of the nature of traditional community-based resource management arrangements.

However, on the legal aspect, community was not yet recognised as an entity to be allocated with forests and forestland. Many arising questions need to be considered, for instance what roles are the communities playing in the forest management system in Vietnam? Should community forest development be encouraged? The purposes of this paper were identifies current status community forest and advantages and obstacles to participation of farmers in forestry development.

II. Research methods

The study was undertaken through in-depth interviews with social NGOs and associations, Communes, village administrative bodies, farm households taking part in poverty alleviation programmes, policy-makers and professionals. The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis has been a useful tool for rural development studies. This study conducted a rudimentary SWOT analysis Community forest management status in Vietnam.

III. Overview of community forest management status in Vietnam

According to inventory results, total areas with

forests in the whole country at beginning of 2000 were 10,915,592 ha. In which, the area was being allocated by the government to the owners for legal use were 7,956,592 ha. Thus, total unallocated or un-contracted area remains 2,958,671 ha (excluding bare land which has been planned for forest plantation). According to local reports, until June, 2001, the communities of 1203 communes, 146 districts of 24 provinces have been managing 2,348,295 ha of forests, accounting for 15.5% of total national forest and forestry land. Forest and forestland currently being managed by communities were formed from different origins and can be classified as three types as following:

1. Forest and forest land traditionally managed by communities for many generations:

Until June 2001, total forestry area claimed and traditionally managed by the communities was 214,006 ha including 86,701 ha with forests and 127,304 ha of bare land. These comprise of sacred, commentary and watershed forests, and the forests that provide traditional products (hunting, bamboo harvesting and medicinal plants etc.). The villagers traditionally define clear boundaries of forests between villages. In some regions, plantation forests and natural forests of former cooperatives were transferred to communes or villages for management. This has been popular among the communities of ethnic minorities in remote areas where village regulations and community relations strongly existed.

On legal perspective, the Article 9, Decision 17/HDBT dated on 17/1/92 of the Council of Ministers (now renamed the Government) clearly stated in the guideline for implementation of the Forest Protection and Development Law that "villages that have forests before enforcement of the Forest Protection and Development Law and

not against the Law are considered to be granted as legal ownership over the forests current being managed.” Therefore, according to the article, the government recognized villages as owners of above-mentioned forests. However, in reality, many local authorities have not initiated any procedure to allocate forestland to communities for long-term use. In many areas, if the government or governmental organisations want to act on these forests, they need to negotiate with and get agreement from the communities. These forests play an important role in production, livelihood, spirit and religion of the communities. And the communities have authority to decide on protection, utilisation of and benefits from the forests.

2. Forests and forest land allocated to communities by local authorities:

Regarding to allocation of forests and forest land, due to local characteristics, 18 provinces have piloted allocation of forests and forest land to communities for long term management with total area of 1,197,961 ha, including 669,750 ha of forests and 528,211 ha of bare land. Even though local authorities allocated forestry land to the communities, until now very few communities have received land use certificates (red books). Currently several provinces such as Son La, Lai Chau, Cao Bang, Bac Can etc. Still piloting allocation of forests and forestland to communities for management.

3. Forests and forest land contracted to communities for protection, zoning for natural regeneration and new forest plantation

With total area of 936,327 ha, including 494,242 ha of protection forests; 39,289 ha of special forests; 402,795 ha of production forests.

Contracting to communities was carried out

according to the Decision No 01/CP of the Government. The organisations that make contract with the communities mainly consist of state enterprises, management boards of protection and special forests, management boards of 327 and 661 projects, and other projects, and forest protection units. After the communities get contracted with the organisations, they will organise by themselves in order to carry out the conditions stipulated in the contract.

IV. Current forest distributions according to geographical areas

– The North West region has the community forest area of 1,057,585 ha, accounted for 45.04% total area nation-wide. In which, 732,676.6 ha has been allocated to communities.

– The North East region has the community forest area of 472,376 ha, accounting for 20.12% total area nation-wide. In which, 299,987 ha has been allocated to communities.

– The Central Highland region has the community forest area of 495,797 ha accounting 21.11% total area nation-wide. In which, 131,634.9 ha has been allocated to communities.

– The Northern Central region has the community forest area of 188,144.4 ha accounting 8.01% total area nation-wide. In which, 39,663.6 ha has been allocated to communities.

– Other regions, forest land allocated to communities accounts for a small percentage

These figures prove that communities involved in forest management are mainly from mountainous and remote areas where production is mainly for self-subsistence; ethnic minorities are predominant, and traditional customs exist. Members of the communities are still living closely together, who are not affected by market oriented mechanism. Village head and patriarch still play essential roles in organisation and

< Table 1 > Distribution of forest land according to different ecological zones with involvement of communities its management

Unit : ha

Ecological zones	Total	Area of forest land allocated by local authorities	Area contracted for protection and zoning for regeneration	Area of traditional community forests
1. North East	472,375.80	293,986.40	130,541.20	47,848.20
2. North West	1,057,584.87	732,676.57	304,448.60	20,459.70
3. Red river delta	14.20			14.20
4. Northern Central	188,144.40	39,663.60	2,888.10	145,592.70
5. Central coast	666.50		598.00	68.50
6. Central high land	495,797.10	131,634.90	346,139.20	23.00
7. South East	133,712.70		133,712.70	

implementation of community activities.

V. Different forms of community forest management

There were diverse forms of management depending on specific conditions of communities and locals. These can be generalized as following :

1. Forest management by clan, ethnic groups

Clan or ethnic groups managed the forests. Where the forest area is small, the community themselves claim the forest or inherit from previous generations. These forests often located close to residential areas bearing different names such as sacred forest (worship gods), cemetery forest (area to bury the dead) and watershed forest (area to protect water supply for community).

Forest protection closely linked with traditional customs and ideology of communities, in which the role of village patriarch essentially important. The community assigned clear tasks for its members in forest protection, and the members are active carrying out the tasks.

2. Forest management by village or hamlet

This type of community forest management was mainly put in practice recently. This kind of management was based on geographic conditions and residential areas. Most villages developed community forest management regulations; form full-time forest protection guards or assign rotation of households for monitoring. The village head coordinated general community activities relating to forest management and protection.

3. Forest management by mass organisations (commune/village level)

In some areas, mass organisations including Farmers Association, Veteran's Association, Women's Association, Youth's Association etc. involved in forest protection and management. The forest area was allocated or contracted to these organisations for protection and management from state organisations such as state enterprises, management boards of protection and special forests, projects and forest protection units.

VI. Advantages and obstacles to participation of farmers in community forest

< Table 2 > SWOT analysis of community forest in Vietnam

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>1) In new forestry policies, management is decentralized in order to meet farmers' needs and attract different stakeholders in forestry activities. Consistent laws and policies, especially in land and forest allocation have greatly motivated people to participate in forestry development.</p> <p>2) Priority was set for mountainous and rural development, environment protection and biodiversity conservation, and development of ethnic mountainous communities, gender development etc. This formed favorable conditions for community forest development.</p> <p>3) At present, different individuals, organizations and economic sectors participate in forestry development, specifically in land allocation and forest contracting.</p> <p>4) Many Government projects invest in forestry and rural development, poverty alleviation, permanent resettlement and cultivation.</p> <p>5) Many international government and non-government organizations give priority to investment in forestry and rural development projects.</p> <p>6) Participation of farmers and communities in forestry activities increases gradually. Many appropriate approaches and tools have been applied to get more people involved in forest resources management.</p> <p>7) State-owned forest enterprises and forestry institutions play an important role in supporting and encouraging different economic sectors to participate in forestry development.</p> <p>8) A national agriculture and forestry extension system was established for different levels, from central to district level.</p>	<p>1) Some Government policies in forestry development are not clear. Farmers, particularly those in rural mountainous areas have little understanding of the policies. Their trust in the policies is limited. As a result, laws and policies have not affected farmers' lives.</p> <p>2) Basically, the current socioeconomic environment does not provide favorable conditions for community forest development. Low living standards and difficulties in local consumption markets limit farmers' participation in forestry development.</p> <p>3) Insufficient master planning has blocked development planning at local levels. Weak service and support systems as well as poor transport systems have been obstacles to the development of people forestry.</p> <p>4) Though the number of individuals, households and organizations involved in land allocation is increasing, the figure is still low.</p> <p>5) The communities' roles and functions in forest management have decreased.</p> <p>6) Farmers' participation in community forest development has improved. However, it is still at a low level, particularly in the projects funded by the Government. Top-down management and token motivation of participation still exist in some projects.</p> <p>7) Extension systems at commune and village levels have not been working effectively in the Vietnamese government-run projects.</p> <p>8) The roles and functions of research and training institutions in social forestry development are still limited.</p> <p>9) Projects funded by the Vietnamese Government make unequal investment, with low input for training on forestry extension and human resources development.</p>

< Table 2 > Continuation

Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Government's continuous priority to agricultural, forestry and rural development, especially for rural mountainous areas, programmer for poverty alleviation and infrastructure development for remote areas provide favorable conditions for farmers to participate in forestry development. 2) International organizations continue to give priority to forestry development projects and programmes. 3) National economic growth continues increasing therefore strengthening community forest development. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Farmers' livelihoods are still low. People in remote mountainous areas still lack food and firewood. This is one of the most potential threats resulting from low levels of farmers' participation in forestry development activities. 2) Unstable socioeconomic environments will be an obstacle to the forestry activities of farmers and their communities. 3) Unsustainable development of projects due to the lack of interest in training, human resources development and research and development of community organisations will have impacts on the development of community forest.

VII. Conclusion

Vietnamese forestry can develop sustainable only if there is active participation of farmers and communities. In order to attract farmers' participation, the Government should complete its legal systems, policies and create favorable conditions by improving project management, strengthening service support systems and completing a collaboration mechanism for production, training and research.

Currently, communities managing millions ha of forests, the question is whether these forests are still existed if the government does not recognise the communities as legal forest owners? Who will replace communities as the owners of such forests? In some locals, community-based forest management had been previously very effective, but currently has been gradually less effective, meanwhile centralized forest management through state organisations such as

state forest enterprises and management boards of protection forests, has not responded to expectations nor fulfilled the needs of communities, the forest management has not been effective neither.

As communities are not recognised as a legal body to be allocated with forest and forestland, they are not aware of benefits and responsibilities, thus they are not active in forest protection and management. In addition, when someone breaks the forest regulations, the communities are facing difficulties in settling the case. Who will be, on behalf of the community, to deal with benefits and responsibilities towards forests and forestland or to solve a conflict when a dispute occurs ?

Community involved in forest management is a new forest management practice in Vietnam, and to some extent in the contrary with rapid changes in agricultural management where individual household is considered as a nuclear

body. The homogeneity of the concept “community” and the concept “collective”, and the collapse of the old-fashioned cooperatives have, to a certain degree, slowed down the development of community forest management practice.

There is, at present, a level of confidence that policies in Vietnam will continue to respond to exemplary rural development project implementation and effectively target incentives encouraging farmers to invest in sustainable management and conservation. The test of these policies rests with the will to support their implementation with the required resources, and upon the ability of extension personnel to facilitate farmers’ combination of best-practice techniques from modern and traditional resource management science to progressively improve rural living standards, rehabilitate damaged ecosystems, and conserve forest biodiversity.

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