

## Situation of Community Forest Resource Management in Vietnam

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## 베트남의 지역사회 산림자원 관리 상황

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### 국문요약

베트남은 국토의 3/4이 고산지대이며 1천만ha의 산림자원을 보유하고 있으나 비효율적인 산림관리로 인해 산림의 규모와 질이 점차적으로 악화되어 왔다. 국가기관이 관리하는 대규모산림과 개인소유의 산림은 비교적 관리가 잘 되는 반면, 지역사회가 관리하는 고산지대의 산림은 제대로 관리되지 못하고 있다.

이 연구는 베트남 지역사회 산림관리의 실제와 문제점들을 고찰하였다. 지역사회에 의한 산림관리는 새로운 제도라기 보다는 이미 지역주민에 의해 개발되어진 전통적인 관리방식으로 1955년 토지개혁 이전부터 이용되어 왔다.

지역사회산림은 지역에 적합한 지식과 제도에 따라 관리됨으로 산림의 보호와 지역사회 발전에 긍정적인 효과를 가져왔음에도 여건 변화에 적응하지 못한 문제점을 내포하고 있다. 따라서 산림의 효율적 관리를 위해서는 물리적, 제도적 여건의 많은 변화속에서 지역사회 산림의 회복과 관리를 위해서 지속적인 실험과 연구가 수행되어야 할 것이다.

주요어(Key Words): 지역사회 산림 (Community Forest) 산림 자원 관리 (Forest Resource Management), 베트남 (Vietnam)

### I. Forest degradation in Vietnam exposed the ineffective management

Vietnam is a country in which three quarters of the land area is mountain areas (approximately 23 million has), and includes 15 mountainous provinces and 25 provinces with mountainous districts and communes. Poverty and forest resource depletion are the main issues threatening rural sustainable development in mountainous areas of Vietnam (Donovan et al., 1997; Le Trong Cuc, 1999; Vo Quy, 1999) [3,7,18].

Vietnam's forests are constantly reducing on a national scale, the forest cover level in Vietnam was 43.0% in 1943; 28.2% in 1995) (table 1), and local scale (in Son la Province was 10%, in Lai Chau: 13%, Cao Bang 12%,...) (Nguyen Ngoc Lung, 1998; Nguyen Viet Dang, 1999) [10,11]. On average, each person in Vietnam has 0,12 ha of forest and 7.7 m<sup>3</sup> of wood, while each person in the world has on average 1 ha of forest and 75 m<sup>3</sup> of wood (Nguyen Viet Dang, 1998) [11].

The forest reduction is occurs not only in area, but also in cover and in quality. Before,

<Table 1> Forest area and forest cover in Vietnam in period from 1943 to 1995

Year	1943	1976	1980	1985	1990	1995
Forest area (×1000ha)	14,300	11,169	10,608	9,892	9,175	9,302
Of which:						
Planting forest	0	92	422	584	754	1,050
Forest cover	43.0	33.8	32.1	30.0	27.8	28.2

(\*source: Nguyen Ngoc Lung, 1998)[10]

Vietnam's forest is mainly natural forest. But with the frequency of exploitation, forests are becoming poorer and poorer, even resulting in exhaustion in some areas. Recently, in the natural forest, the rich forest is 11%, average forest is 33% and poor forest is up to 56% (Nguyen Ngoc Lung, 1998). In the years of 1970~1975, on average, the amount of natural forest wood remaining is 150m<sup>3</sup> of wood/ha in the South - East region and the Tay Nguyen Plateau; more than 90m<sup>3</sup> of wood/ha in the North. Recently, it reduces to, on average, 80~90m<sup>3</sup> of wood/ha in the Tay Nguyen Plateau, in other regions only 30~60m<sup>3</sup> of wood/ha (Bui The Hung, 1996)[2].

The main reasons of forest degradation in Vietnam are almost of forests do not belong to anyone, other areas of forest belonging to individuals but benefit getting from forest does not enough for household consumption; technologies were not useful, no stable way to attract people to participate in forest management (Nguyen Viet Dang)[11]. Other important and directly reasons are regulation of forest management and policies on forestry were not stable; specially, forest management could not control complicated relationships of main elements in forest management system (economic, technology, social and local culture)

Conclusion on forest degradation made by Bromlay and Cernea (1989) may adapted truly

for Vietnam. Forest degradation in developing countries expose the ineffective management of state forest management systems. The reasons are lack of power, equipment and techniques, lack of experiences, rapidly growing populations, and other unfavorable conditions. The resulting losses have been one of the most important lessons learned about development during the last half century in developing countries.

## II. The development of individual management of forest and social problems in highlands

The Vietnam's Land Law (1993) affirms "Land belonging to the property of the people managed by the State, and the State gives land to economic organizations, people's arm units, State offices, politic and social organizations (generally named organization), households and individuals using sustainable and stable use" (Article 1)[9]. The Land law (1993) and the Governmental Decision 02/CP -Government (1994) set out the judicial framework regarding right to use forests and forest land. It is the basis or foundation of the system of forest and forest land management and for the three main resource management systems: state management, individual management, organization-based (community) management.

With the widespread agricultural reforms, this gave the right of management of forest and forest land to households and individuals in mountainous areas, thus developing various kinds of individual management. In the past 5 years (1994~1999), the State gave 2 million ha of forests and forest land to approximately 800,000 households and individuals. Giving the rights to use the land shifted the focus of development to the socio-economy, especially household economic. Of the households who received forests and forest land, 5~10% are households that do business on forests land, and 3~5% of households form forest farms to produce forest products (Phan Thanh Xuan, 1998)[13]. For example, in Yen Bai Province, there are 9,500 farms, and in Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, there are over 2,500 ha of farms.

But the development of farms usually goes together with the accumulation of forest and forest land by a few people. It is one of element in the increasing differentiation between the poor and the rich, and is an unsustainable element in the development of rural mountainous areas. In Vietnam, there is situation that some households have been received big areas of forest lands, but other with small or without forest lands. In some localities in mountainous areas there are 10~15% households having without any land for productivity (Nguyen Thi Hang, 1998).

These actual situations show that forest products are main resource of revenue of mountainous people. Before they could collect forest products, but recently they could not, because forests belonging to its owners. These situation results people who have no forest have to attack to state forest or individual forest for their means of livelihood. And those are results of forest degradation, conflicts in resource use.

### III. Community forest management in Vietnam

The fact doesn't deny the existence and the role of the community forest in the economic life and culture of the local people in the mountainous areas of Vietnam. Community forest generated the income for the local people and sometimes it played a very important role in their lives, such as protecting against the impact of harvest failure, periods between crop harvests, and protection for the agricultural system.

Community forest played more important role for the poor, as they owned a few or no other property. Their lives depended primarily on the forest to get products for daily needs. There are many upland communities where the whole communities are the poor, so its livelihood is depended largely on community forest.

Before the Land reform (1954), when there was not the state property, the community forest was popular. This form of management has existed in almost all mountainous villages for a long time. At that time the forest resources was still plentiful, people's need did not exceed the ability of forest regeneration, the population was thinly dispersed, and transportation was still limited. Many activities were not formally regulated, but the people still carried out legally, such as rattans and aquilaria procurement

After the Land reform, the state affirmed its right of forest property. At that time, the state forest management was popular and rights were given to forest companies and local authority to manage forest. State forerst management was the "child" of an economic growth orientation. The State controlled overall, farmers joined the co-operative, and property was oriented to the need of socialist production. The formal system was that control of the forest to the state.

However, the state did not have enough power to reach the upland and remote areas, and the power of locality was limited, so they could not manage the forests and forest land as expected. There also appeared conflicts over forest use between the forest companies and local people. According to the people's knowledge, forests belonged to them. For a long time they had lived with forests, so they had the right to use this resource. The forest companies appeared and managed their forests. The forest companies and logging camps with the functions of exploiting, re-growing and protecting forest, but with the ineffective management, these companies and camps only did exploiting. Therefore the local people turned into those who were hired to cut trees for the companies or cut down trees or timber illegally to sell for private business. This resulted in serious forest recession, both in the amount and quality.

Co-operatives have been disbanded. State forest companies had been raised on administrative budget subsidies. So, currently there are 426 state forest companies that "are facing many difficulties, out of work, and under threat of disintegration" (Phan Thanh Xuan, 1998)[13]. Since 1993, there have been many policies aimed at preventing forest degradation. State forest companies have had to take responsibility for planting and protecting forests (which they previously had to but did not carry out). Beside forest companies, many other forces are involved to regrow forests (e.g. the army, forestry control, agro-forest companies, etc.). But, because of the administrative mechanisms, they can not prevent forest from degradation.

During this period, the state forest management was decisive and legally unique. But the community forest management still existed, although it was the least important. Many

community forests in many localities were changed into state forest companies, and cooperatives. The few community forests left were either degraded or disappeared because community forest management had been changed into cooperative management, such as *Jompa* community forest management by Thai people in Tat village of Chieng Hac commune, Son La Province (Vu Huy Dung, 1998)[19]; Khau La forest in On Luong commune of Thai Nguyen Province (Dinh Ngoc Lan, 1999).

With the community forest management, giving the right of forest management to households and individuals set out the judicial framework for development of individual forest management. The development of state management and individual forest management have seriously declined the community forest. But community forest management still existed. Recently, in many rural areas the community forest are existing and developing by the power of the communities, such as 6 community forests in Pumat buffer zone, Nghean (Tran Ngoc Lan et al., 1999)[17]. In Yen Ninh commune of Thai Nguyen Province, there is Dong Ranh community forest with the local rules of getting from its benefit, such as bamboo shoot only use for household consumption but not for sale; no cutting timber, etc. (Dinh Ngoc Lan, 1999)

The existence of some community forests shows that community forest management itself has certain good points. Why do not we think of creating advantage for the community forest management to co-exist with the State forest management and individual forest management?

#### IV. The experiences of community forest management

All of documents and studies on community

forest management in Asia, Africa, America show that there are no global solution for the recovery of environment recession, reservation and forest development. Only actions made by local people can bring success in forest conservation and development. Suitable solutions are usually bound to local culture and society, since they employ highly and use traditional knowledge on forest ecology of the people. They encourage and give the management rights to receive benefits from resources, especially natural forest of community resource. Creating the relevant mechanisms can boost the sustainable participation by local people (Messersmidt et al., 1996)[8].

Worldwide, there are currently three main systems of forest management: the state management, community management and household management (Bruce, 1989) [1]. In practice, the development of forestry in the world has been a process of replacement and combination of three system of forest management. Each process of forest management has specific characteristics and close relationships to the use rights and environmental resource reserves. If only one of them is stressed of maximized, this may well result in the forest resource degradation or other consequences.

Community forest management is not a newly created model, but originally came from traditional management systems created by local people, managing and gaining better benefits together. This approach closely connected the form of resource use to local people's original knowledge about forest ecology, thus making resource use sustainable. Community forest management closely links to mountainous people. This popular method has existed for a very long time during which forest resources were plentiful and when the state did not have enough power

to manage forests in the remote areas.

## V. Studies on community forest management in Vietnam

As mentioned above, the community forest plays a very important part in development of rural mountainous areas in Vietnam, but this system has been overlooked. Up to now there have been little research on this theme. Donovan et al (1997)[3] paid attention to the use if products from forest (especially medicine trees) to generate income for the people, and given some experiences on community forest management in South East Asia. Hoang Xuan Ty, Le Trong Cuc et al.(1998) [6] paid attention to traditional knowledge in the process of resource management, through custom laws made by H'mong, and village conventions by Tay-Nung people in some localities in the Northern areas. Tran Duc Vien, Rambo (1999)[16] researched social organizations and natural resources management created by Tay people in Tat village of Hoa Binh province.

In some articles and research on sustainable development of mountains in Vietnam, recommendations paid attention to forest and forest land management. From these articles, one can suggest the following. It is necessary to give community organizations villages and descent lineages forest areas in order to support benefits to the community; and to help these organizations in forest management and use as "owners of forests"(Phan Thanh Xuan, 1998). It is necessary to "make advantages for the mountainous people and to let them have the right to use land and resources sustainable" (Vo Quy, 1999). It is necessary to "reclaim some forests and land for the community to preserve and to deal with the general needs of the community"

(Hoang Hoe, 1999)[5]. It is necessary to “develop a new system on resource conservation”. It is necessary to “nourish and develop the system of local management, and find ways in which it can be adapted to national management systems” (Le Trong Cuc, 1999)

In fact, in Vietnam, only the state forest management has been focused on up to now, but recently Vietnam has been in the process of developing individualized forests and forest land. However, not much attention has yet been paid to community forest management. Research in five northern mountainous provinces (Vinh Phu, Son la, Yen Bai, Tuyen Quang, Ha Giang) by researchers from CRES/EWC “having not found out any detailed examples (or references) about the contracts to give forest land and forest to the local community (or social organizations)” (Danovan et al, 1997).

How does the community forest management play a role in the development of forestry of Vietnam? This is an urgent issue for researchers, requiring policy planners to have a balanced view and suitable solutions.

Research on community forest management of 2 villages, Chieng Hac commune (Yen Chau Districts, Son La Province), Vu Huy Dung (1998) reported that the people community of Thai in these villages indeed wanted to recover the traditional forest management called “*Jompa*” (which in Thai language means “forest protector”). The *Jompa* system had formerly been their forest management system, but it disappeared with the appearance of co-operative management. Recommendations are given on ways to manage community forests based on seven village’s conventions. Tran Ngoc Lan et al (1999) researched 6 models of traditional community forest management in Pumat buffer zone (Nghean), the author drew conclusion on

nice main elements that ensure the existence and development of local community forests. Of these, the most important thing is the right to use or the right to benefit. These researches on community management did not cover to all elements of community forest management (techniques, social organizations, original knowledge, rules); and also did not analyze, determine or make recommendation on the system for supporting these elements for restoration and development of community forest management.

Forgets in respect to researching and omitting in respect to policy planning are pushing up the recessions of the community forest management - one of 3 main forest management in Vietnam is facing up with the challenges “recession or development”

## VI. Some issues about restoration and development of community forest management in Vietnam

Community forest management is not a newly created approach, but originally came from traditional regulation system created by local people in natural resource management in Vietnam’s mountainous areas. According to Runge (1986), the system of community resource management currently plays an essential role in nourishing rare natural resources, and this system usually supplements and combines with individual management system [14]. Regarding some forests, we agree with Donovan’s point of view on socio-economics and environment security, that giving the forest land to local communities is more effective than giving it to individuals, because many important activities, especially forest protection, requires activities beyond the household scale [3].

The community forest management is viewed as model of separation of power in forest management, sharing in the responsibility and benefits between State and people (community), dividing into areas for management.

In fact, not all the forest are managed by the Vietnamese State and individual management systems can not cover the remaining forests. Currently, out of 10 million ha of forested land, 6 million ha were given to economic organizations (forestry farms, economic unit) and 2 million ha to farmer households (1998), with remaining 2.1 million ha of forest: not belonging to anyone.

So, who will be the owners of the "unclaimed" lands? Is it possible, with the giving the forest/forest land to individuals, to return this "unclaimed" land to the communities that used to be the owners of this lands.

In the Article 1 of Land Law, if "social organizations" includes village communities, Vietnam law will recognize the right to use forests by community organizations.

Based on experience from many countries, forests and forest trees cannot exist without the owners. While giving the management rights does not mean the State loses the right to own forests; but divides rights, responsibilities, locations between individuals and communities. When the forests have their owners, the forest will be protected, developed and the development of community (village) will be sustainable and this follows the development goals of the country

In Vietnam, the local people have their original experiences on community forest management. However, today when the natural and socio-economical situations were changed, community forest management system although has its advantages, but some of its elements recently do not correspond with new situations, so these

system need to change. For example, formerly community forest management existed without formal laws, but recently when natural resources become exhausted, outsiders usually trespass upon community forests. So existence of community forest needs essential laws, that are important foundation for development of community forest.

Custom laws, traditional rules in community forest are difficult approach within newly situations. Therefore, there are many experiences on community forest management in other countries, but these experiences only are suggestion and reference. Community forest management has its local culture. Every country or areas, especially in mountainous areas exist cultural diversity. Moreover, the community forest management has its three elements: technology, socio-organization, and local culture (Oakerson, 1986)[12].

Recently, community forest management need base on traditional culture existed on principles of sharing responsibilities and benefits, sustainable use.

Restoration and development of community forest management in mountainous areas of Vietnam need concern of scientists and policy makers, support from State, NGOs.

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