

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background on forest resources situation management in Vietnam

Vietnam is situated in southeast margin of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. It stretches from 8^o-24^o latitude north and has a coastline totaling 3,200 km and a total land area of 330,541 km². It has border with China in the north, Lao in the west, and Cambodia in the southwest and the South Sea to the east. Vietnam's population is 80 million people with 54 ethnics. 87 percent of the population belongs to the dominant Kinh majority whilst the remainder is divided into the rest of 53 ethnic group. About 24 million people live in or around forests and derive a substantial part of their food and income from the forest and forestland.

Over 60 percent of Vietnam's land area, some 19 million ha, is classified as forestland, of which the areas under forest cover are 9,650,00 ha (28.2 percent of forest area), consisting 8,892,000 ha of natural forest and 750,000 ha plantation forest. According to official figures, forestry accounts for about 2 percent of the country's GDP (San and Gilmour, 1999). However, this figure grossly understates the importance of forestry and forestland in the rural economy, because most of the benefits that accrue from the use of forestland do not appear in the formal national accounts. Forestlands meet much of the energy needs of the rural population with some 15 million cubic meters of fuel wood harvested every year (MOF, 1995a). The forests, particularly natural forests, provide a wide range of non-wood products, ranging from bamboo to medicinal plants.

In the last half-century, the forest extent decreased from 14.3 million ha (1943) to 9.2 million ha. Forest cover has decreased from 43 percent (1943) to 28 percent (1990). Estimates of the annual rate of deforestation range from between 200,000 ha to 400,000 ha per year. The underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation in Vietnam have been identified as rural poverty, insufficient arable land, limited and

inappropriate institutional capacity, and insecure land tenure. Immediate causes of forest loss and degradation have been identified as population expansion into forest areas, fuel-wood collection, logging and harvesting of wood and non-wood forest products, fire, and infrastructure development such as dams and high voltage power lines. (www.forestsandcommunities.org/Country_Profiles/Vietnam.html)

The government of Vietnam's principal forestry agency is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which provides technical guidance and services, as well as having responsibility for developing national forestry policy. It retains two specific forestry arms: the Forestry Development department, which provides policy advice, and the forest protection department, which implements forest protection measures as well as being the branch that enforces forestry laws. Direct responsibility for the day-to-day management of forests, however, rests with Provincial and District administrations, which are collectively grouped as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Traditional forest management in Vietnam was largely based around subsistence economies. During the French colonial era, and up until the Second World War, large tracts of natural forests were cleared for the cultivation of rubber and coffee trees and other tropical cash crops. Efforts to apply principles of scientific management to Vietnam's forest were largely thwarted by the Vietnam War, during which an estimated 2 million hectares of forests were destroyed or heavily degraded. Post-Vietnam War, forest management and reforestation was primarily carried out by state forest enterprises, however, the success rates were low. Up to the early 1990s policy objectives focused on managing forestlands for primarily production purposes, ignoring the needs of local communities. Participatory approaches and flexible forest management to support communities were not encouraged. Local communities considered public forests belonged to "every body, but nobody" and over-exploited them accordingly. Of 1.34 million hectares of plantations established to 1992, only 0.4 million hectares were considered successful. Most were poor in quality, with limited economic, social and environmental benefits.

However, current forest management objectives of Vietnam are to increase people's participation in forest protection and utilization and to improve the living conditions of the rural population through forestry development. One of the early program, arising from 1989 tropical Forestry Action Program exercise, was the implementation of a national program for upland development. Also known as Program 327, this initiative aimed to increase income levels in upland households through improved land use practices and the development of infrastructure. In 1996 the program was extended to cover the whole country, with a particular focus on establishing protection forests and special-uses forests. The program is focusing on developing agroforestry technique and specific development projects, for which the driving force comes from farming households. The program seeks to link improved land use practice with improved standards of living, thereby link the interests of the country with immediate benefits of local participants. In 1994, a decree concerning the allocation of land to be managed by individuals, household and organizations was promulgated. This allocation program, a key plank in the country's push towards sustainable forest management, has seen the management of more than five million hectares of forestlands devolved to 1 million Vietnamese families.

1.2 Rationale of the study

The role of people at the local level is crucial in forest management. The local communities live with forest, are primary users of forest products and create rules that significantly affect forest condition (Arnold, 1992). In comparison with central government institutions, the local institution is considered better at proving rules related to access, harvesting, and management. Because it can respond to conflict quickly and cheaply and its monitoring and sanctioning methods are efficacious. Moreover, because the locals are more likely to create their institution if their community enjoys a history of rule making together since the costs, benefits and techniques of institution building will be well known to the participants (Arnold, 1992). Given certain institutional arrangements, individuals may forgo the use of a resource if it is not culturally acceptable. Therefore, the inclusion of locals in forest

management scheme is increasingly considered essential by the researcher and policy-makers as well.

One of serious causes for deforestation and forest degradation in Vietnam has been the limited and inappropriate institutional capacity of forest management. Under the central forest management regime by the nation-state for a long time, local people were separated from forest. They had, if any, few rights over forest resources with which they live. Without legal claims to the stock or flow of benefits from these resources, the locals have little to gain to protect or use the resources sustainably. Such conditions generate incentive structures that encourage individuals to "poach" natural resource and discourage them from constructing or maintaining rules or institutions at the local level to regulate their resource use (Gibson and Marks, 1995). Accordingly, the community forest management that has existed for a long time in several localities, satisfying daily needs of the local people for water source, minor forest products and spiritual belief, also has no chance to be developed. To separate people from forests does not help the government to prevent local people's exploitation and use of the forest, but also encourages them to overexploit it. Because the national government rarely possesses enough personnel or money to enforce their laws adequately. This makes the national forest resource fall under the heavily degraded status.

However, the role and necessity of community forest management have increasingly been represented in Vietnam. Most recently, in June 2000, the first National Workshop on Experiences and Potentials towards Community Forest Management (CFM) held in Hanoi proclaimed that forest protection made by local communities was more effective and required less state budgetary investment than traditional state managed forestry. Forests managed by communities can provide timber for public infrastructure needs and also non-timber forest products, which greatly supplement people's livelihoods. Moreover, community forests can provide timber for construction of general infrastructure. Under CFM, benefits are shared more equally than under other forest management systems in Vietnam. The need for developing CFM are given by the reasons: (1) CFM works well in remote areas where

farmers' livelihoods and income depend mainly on forests; (2) CFM is suitable for areas where the economy is based on self-subsistent production systems; (3) The State cannot afford to employ local people who can manage forest on a long term basis and the present State forest management encounters great difficulties in directly managing forest in remote areas; (4) CFM is well developed in communities, which have long tradition in forest management, active participation of members, well functioning organizational structures, effective regulations and where the head of the community is respected by all community members .

Since the early 1990s, the state in general and forestry sector in particular has made changes in forest management strategies, from state's forestry to people's forestry, in which CFM is becoming more important in the forest management system of Vietnam. According to incomplete data, the areas under community forest management have reached so far approximately 2.34 million ha of forestland. This area accounts for 14 percent of the totally planned re-cultivation of forestland nationwide. This figures show the increasingly important role of communities in forest management and its contribution to natural resources preservation (Phuong, 2000). However, to expand this form of forest management, there are still many difficulties, including: 1) an incomplete legal framework for community forest management, 2) lack of appropriate policies to a) support land allocation/forest assignment to communities; b) provide benefits that encourage households, individuals, communities to actively participate in forest protection/development, and c) govern investment, technology, etc., and 3) inadequate participation of communities in forest management (Bich, 2000)

Challenges and gaps between the present policy framework and what is going on in the field reality lead the realities of forest resources management to new problems, which need to be studied and evaluated. The forest management practice by community in Quang Luu commne is not out of this common context. It was initiated for long time ago and has experienced impacts of changes in forest management regime of the state. Although having certain limitations, this management pattern has had positive contributions in conserving and restoring the local forest resource. To

study the forest management regime of this local community would provide the necessary information as base for proper intervention and approach in order to encourage, maintain and expand this management pattern.

1.3 Objectives of the study

Local community has revealed its important role in managing forest resources over the country and has attracted increasing attention from the government. In order to understand the existence and development of CBFM in the existing legal environment of the country, the study aims at the following objectives.

1. To describe the historical process of formation, the organization structure of the local institution of forest management and its changes through time,
2. To analyze the local institution in forest management in term of its strengths, weakness, threat and opportunity,
3. To identify the impacts of the state policy on the community-based forest management,
4. To measure the performance indicators of the community-based forest management practice.