COMMUNITY-BASED FOREST MANAGEMENT IN VIETNAM'S UPLAND
A CASE STUDY FROM CA RIVER BASIN

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Abstract

The capacity of Vietnamese government in upland forest management through state or private models has declined due to a shortage in human resources and technology and a cause of social effects. One model that has been existing for ages and meeting the livelihoods of local people in remote areas is community-based forest management. The guiding approach under this community-based forest management model is to facilitate and empower local people to use indigenous knowledge to control and manage forest resources on their land. Based on characteristic and favorable situations in the Ca River Basin, seven types of community-based forest management models as typical examples following the "protecting by producing" method described in this paper has been adopted. Many community forest management systems were, however, changed and perhaps dissappeared. A challenge exists to better cooperate between the government and research organizations to develop policy framework and institutions to support and carrying out community forests on a large scale.

Key words: community-based forest management, natural resources, Vietnam's upland, customary laws

Introduction

There are 3 main models of forest resource management employed by governments throughout the world. These are State, community, and private ones (Bruce 1989; FAO 1996). Over time, due to historical development, new institutions have created different forest management models. The reality of forestry development in the world is driving a process in which these three forest management models are being replaced and recombined. Each forest management system has different characteristics while each is closely related to the forest resource use rights and protection. If only one model is applied, this could lead to the degradation of forest resources or other unforeseen consequences.

In fact, in developing countries there is usually a big gap between the actual impact of forest and forestland management policies and the initial intent of decision makers. The State asserts that it has the right to manage forest and forestland, but regrettably it does not have adequate capacities for implementing this right. The State then transfers this right to local authorities, but the capacity of these local authorities is rather poor (Bruce, 1989).

Maximization of state forest management has caused deforestation, especially the deforestation of tropical forests in 75 developing countries. In 1980, 11.3 million ha of forest were lost. In 1990 this figure was 15.4 ha. The highest rate of forest loss has been in Southeast Asia, with the loss rate of 1.6 percent per year (this rate was 0.8 percent on average) (Pham, 1997).

Deforestation in developing countries reflects the fact that state forest management is not effective. The reasons for failure are many. They include a shortage of human resources, lack of technology, lack of experience, and greatly increasing population pressure. The failure of state forest management has occurred all over the world. Examples come from China and Indonesia (Borlagdan, 1997), Nepal (Bromley and Cernea 1989), Tanzania and Uganda (Banana and Gombia-Ssembajjwe, 2000). This widespread failure of state management is one of the most important lessons of mountainous rural development in developing countries during the past half century (Bromley and Cernea, 1989).

This failure of state forest management has given rise to the hope that if forest management rights are given to individuals, forest protection and development will improve. Private forest management is effective because owners of forests and forestland are clearly defined and they can be confident that they profit from their forestland. In recent years, the reality of farm development in the world has proven the effectiveness of this management model. Farms have increased in quantity and quality. The area they cover has expanded. They

have succeeded in increasing commodity production, job creation, and rising incomes for their owners.

However, over-emphasizing the private forest management model may lead to adverse social effects. In the Philippines, for example, private forest management has been considered the main approach, and this has increased the gap between the rich and the poor. The State lost some benefits it might have had, and yet has not been able to control forest exploitation by households.

Up to the present day, these three models of forest management continue to co-exist and to interact with each other. In different countries, and different periods, one model of forest management or another is considered to be the key to success. But in order to protect the forests while using them for economic development, the three models should be combined. What is now lacking, especially in Vietnam, is an adequate appreciation of and understanding of community-based management approaches and an understanding of when and why and how they work, or do not work!.

Community-based forest management is hardly new. It has been the traditional management model of local people in mountainous areas all over the world, cooperating to co-manage forests and then sharing profits. This approach to forest management has created sustainable resource use by adhering to indigenous knowledge of forest ecosystems of local people. This popular method has been applied for a very long time, while forest resources were rich and States did not have enough power to manage the remote mountainous areas of their countries. There are still some examples of typical community-based forest management that work, such as Turf and Chipko systems in India, Panchayat in Nepal, Umunnu in Nigeria, and Sagia in Sudan.

Like many other countries, Vietnam has a general model of community-based forest management practiced within its borders. This general method has been applied for ages by ethnic minority groups in remote areas of the country. It is not only an effective method for managing, conserving, and developing forest resources, but it is also suited to local people's knowledge, to traditional customs and to ensuring the livelihoods of local people. Until 2003 in Vietnam, this method had not been either officially recognized or appropriately assessed. Fortunately, in order to promote socialization of the forestry sector, after the Sixth Communist Party Congress, the 2003 Land law and the Law on Forest Development and Protection were amended and supplemented and enforced in 2004. This law now officially recognizes community-based forest management. Not only organizations, households and individuals will

be allocated forestland and can lease forests (Article 5 in Law on Forest Development and Protection), but now communities also are allocated land based on rights and regulations (Article 29 and 30 in the Law on Forest Development and Protection)

This shift from policies mainly based on state forest management to increasingly socialized-based management to develop the forestry sector has basically been because of a change in awareness. All economic components have rights to participate in forest protection and development. The State and people protect and develop forests together and both also get benefits from forests, but people are the main force. This change has helped to enlarge the scale of forest and forestland allocation. It has also helped local people exploit forests for stable and long-term use. In the past, only state-owned forest enterprises and co-operatives were allocated forests and forestland, then organizations and individuals were allocated land; now, even more recently, households and then villages have been allocated forests and forestland. On the other hand, not only has forest and forestland allocation been implemented, but forests have also been leased. Organizations can lease special-use, protection and production forests. Households and individuals can lease production forests.

As a result, the area of forests and forestland allocated for households and communities has increased, while the areas allocated for state enterprises have decreased. In 1999, of the 10,915,592 ha of forestland in Vietnam, 7,956,592 ha (72.89 percent) had been allocated. The area of special-use forest and protection forest allocated to state enterprises and management boards was 5,730,577 ha (52.50 percent), and that allocated to households and communities was 2,006,464 ha (18.38 percent). In 2004, among 12,306,858 ha that had been allocated, the amount of special-use and protection forests allocated for state enterprises and management boards was 6,092,753 ha (49.51percent), while to households and communities was 3,155,797 ha (25.64 percent), and that to commune people's committees was 2,707,140 ha (22 percent). Communities have received more than 2 million ha of forests and forestland to manage. The cover rate and the size of newly planted areas are increasing. The area of protected natural forest is quickly recovering. Therefore, the protection capacity has also improved. The living standards of households are higher, thanks to gardening and forest farm development (Dung, 2006).

Besides state and private forest management models, new allocation policies for forest and forestland allocation policies have created a legal environment for the development of community-based forest management. However, community forests have already been in existence in some locations for many years. For example, 6 community forests managed by Thai and Danlai people in Pumat's buffer zone were studied by researchers from Hanoi

Agricultural University in recent years in Nghe An province (Lan 1999). The existence of community forests reflects some strong points of community-based forest management and highlights the fact that the State cannot manage all forests and neither can private entities .

Experience from other countries shows that trees and forestland must have their owners. Giving the management right to others does not mean that the State loses its sovereignty. This is because while the Vietnamese government is the overall owner of forest and forestland, it can decentralize, assign responsibilities, share areas and benefits with individuals and communities. When forests have their owner, forest resources will be conserved. Community development will be sustainable. This also is the goal of the Vietnamese government in developing the economy.

Although community-based forest management has been in existence for a very long time and has been recognized as a good method, there are few research activities concerned with community-based forest management in Vietnam, in particular, and throughout the world in general. In the world, the value of community forest management has been acknowledged and this method has been applied to and developed to forest management in different areas. According to Messerschmidt (1993), there were around 363 documents on community-based forest management in over 43 countries in Asia, Latin-American and Africa through 1993. Most of the research indicated that community-based forest management was effective in conserving and developing forest resources and in environmental protection (Vien, 2001).

Research on natural resource management in Vietnam and in the world has shown that there is no global solution for environmental protection, forest conservation and development. Only the initiatives and activities of local communities—especially communities whose livelihoods are based on forests—can succeed in forest management. This is because effective solutions are always closely related to local cultures and societies. They value and use indigenous knowledge on forest ecosystems. They encourage local communities to manage local natural resources and help them to benefit from this. They promote the long-term participation of local people in managing the local environment (Messerschmidt et al. 1993). In summary, community-based forest management has been proven to be an effective means of managing and developing natural resources in many countries.

According to Runge (1986) community-based forest management has played an important role in nurturing scarce natural resources. This management model is often carried out to supplement, in cooperation with, or following private management. From the perspective of socio-economic well-being and environmental security, we agree with Donavan (1997) that in

some places allocating forests and forestland to communities is more effective than allocating it to individuals. This is because many important initiatives, especially forest protection, require activity on a scale larger than the household level.

As mentioned above, the natural resources of community forests have an important role in mountainous rural development in Vietnam, but community-based forest management has fallen into oblivion for a long time. Bloch and Oesterberg (1989) argue that indigenous knowledge should be considered in forest management. Donovan and others (1997) were interested in using forest products (especially medicinal plants) in order to increase income and suggested experience on community forest management in Southeast Asia. Ty and Cuc (1998) focused on indigenous knowledge in natural resource management (through customs of H'Mong and village regulations of Tay Nung people). The research of community-based forest management in 2 villages in Chieng Hac commune, Yen Chau district, Son La province, revealed that the Thai people very much wanted to reinvigorate the traditional forest management method of *"Jompa"* (in Thai, that means a "forest keeper") (Dung 1998) because *Jompa* had been used for a long time. This method (Jompa) was lost when the cooperative management method appeared. Thai people proposed methods of forest and forestland management using 7 village regulations. Vien and Rambo (1999, 2004) studied the social organization and natural resource management of the Tay people in Hoa Binh. Lan and others (1999) researched 6 typical indigenous community-based forest management models in Pu Mat's buffer zone in Nghe An. Their results pointed out 9 factors needed to guarantee the existence and development of community forests. The most important factor is the right of local people to use the land and to enjoy the benefits. Vien and others (2001) introduced some experiences from community-based forest management in the upper Ca River basin. Few if any of the above research efforts addressed all the factors of community-based forest management (technology, social organization, indigenous knowledge, etc.) and neither have they analyzed, identified and proposed a system of factors that support the recovery and development of community-based forest management methods.

Until now, papers and research efforts on community forests in Vietnam have mentioned only some aspects or made some recommendations in order to develop community-based forest management methods. There has been no systematic research that considers all the factors involved in community-based forest management in Vietnam. Having been ignored in field research and overlooked by policy makers for many years, community-based forest management methods have fallen into oblivion.

Community forest management (CFM[1]) is defined by FAO as follows: "Community forest management includes many activities of local people with forests, trees, and forest products and the distribution of benefits from those products"

In fact, CFM in Vietnam has two different models that fit this definition. First, even when forests are not owned by a community, members of this community can still participate in managing those forests. Second, the community has use rights to a forest and that forest is protected and managed by all the members of that community. In such cases, communities are closely related to the forest and interrelated with each other in creating jobs, harvesting products, and deriving benefits that are not clearly visible, such as water resource protection, and preservation of beliefs and relics (Quan and Mai 2000).

The first method of CFM is one that was established by international development projects and programs. For example, it was applied in the Da River Social Forestry Development Project (SFDP, Germany) conducted in Lai Chau and Son La. The basic purpose of community forestry development strategies of this project was to provide a social framework in which local people could discuss and carry out by themselves CFM plans with support from local organizations (Van and Apel 2000).

Another CFM method has been applied by the Vietnam-Sweden Mountainous Rural Development Program (MRDP) in an experiment in Yen Bai province to protect the area of protection forests which either are far from residential areas or are low value regenerated forests. MRDP had action plans aimed at 'protecting by producing' in order to introduce advanced technologies of forest exploitation and protection while at the same time increasing households' incomes. At the same time, part of the income from forests would be spent for forest protection and management (Shanks 2000).

In this paper, we focus on the second method of community-based forest management. It is the traditional method in which forest use rights are the common property of a community and the members of this community participate in managing and protecting forests together[2]. For the rest of this paper, the term "community-based forest management" is used to refer to only this traditional community-based forest management method.

[1] Other documents use community-based forest management (CBFM) to express the same meaning as community forest management

[2] Some people do not agree with the term 'traditional community-based forest management'. They call this model of management 'non-official' implying 'local' in contrast to the 'official' management system of the State.

In fact, community-based forest management was the main forest management method in Vietnam before 1950. And as we have mentioned, even though state and private forest management are currently in wide use in Vietnam, community-based forest management has continued to exist in some ethnic minority groups (Vien, 2001). Community-based forest management has different characteristics depending on each ethnic group and each region. However, they share some common features:

(1) The area of community forests is defined by the community and is very close to residential areas;

(2) This method is established by the community, not by the government. Regulations on natural resource management, protection, and use are based on the community's decisions. These regulations define clearly when local people can harvest forest products, where and what types of natural resources can be taken, the maximum quantity that can be taken by one household at a given period, and awards and fines, etc.;

(3) Forestland or other natural resources on community forest are considered to be public assets;

(4) The implementation of these above mentioned regulations is carried out by a group which consists of a village's leaders (the head of the village, the village patriarch, or the village's secretary) or is selected by the local people.

Community-based forest management has been an important element in the culture of many mountainous ethnic groups. The natural resources existing around them do not belong to "individuals" but to the "community." In such places, community activities (fishing, shifting cultivation, hunting, and dancing, etc.) are generally popular. Community-based forest management can be found in many places in the uplands, from the northwest mountainous region to the central plateau. Community characteristics show clearly in village communities. H'mong people in the northern mountainous region and the Co Tu people in the central mountainous region rarely migrate, but when they migrate their entire village will do so. Some research conducted by the Center for Agricultural Research and Ecological Studies (Hanoi Agricultural University) show that in the upper Ca River Basin, the Kinh, and some of the Thai people like forestry land to be allocated to households, while other ethnic groups (H'mong and Kho Mu) prefer that the forestland be allocated to communities (Vien, 2001)

Black Thai people and H'mong communities in Muong Lum commune (Yen Chau, Son La) think forests are their property. Forest areas usually are around their houses, or are watershed forests which supply water for the villages. In this area H'mong people manage their forests better and more tightly than other groups. This seems to be because (1) forest borders are very clear; (2) the villages have strict regulations on using and managing forest products, slash and burn, and forest protection (every member of the community must follow these regulations) (3) people can exploit wood for private purposes such as house construction, but they cannot exploit wood for business purposes (Bay and others 2000).

M'nong in Dak Nue commune, Lak district, Dak Lak province have traditional customs to protect forests surrounding their residential areas. Each hamlet has forests and swidden cultivation areas. The village patriarch strictly controls shifting cultivation activities. Local people are considered to be owners of their land (Huy and others, 2000).

However, for a long time the community-based forest management method has not been officially recognized in Vietnam. This was so until the law on Forest Protection and Development (amended) was issued (noted above). Although the Vietnamese government has not denied or prevented the implementation of this management, in Vietnam's legal framework, a hamlet or village is not considered to be an administrative management unit. According to Vietnamese law, the lowest administrative management unit is the commune (*xa*). In addition, as mentioned above, new policies of the Vietnamese government transferred forest management and use rights from the state to households and other units, or to organizations that were established by the government, not to communities. Therefore, each household managed forests individually and by their own methods, unrelated to other households. Besides, as also mentioned above, all resources belong to the state and do not belong to any household or individual or community. This caused misunderstanding between the State (represented by local authorities, land management organizations, forest protection and state forest enterprises) and communities in forest management. This also served as a constraint upon sustainable forest management. On the other hand, traditionally, the lives of almost all ethnic minority people in the mountainous areas in Vietnam have been largely community or public lives. Their customs and many aspects of their culture (community cultivation, hunting, harvesting, and playing) have been communal or collective. All the properties of a community are held in common and, within guidelines laid down by the community itself everyone can use all the resources in this community.

As both the state and households have gained the right to use and manage forestland and forests, some ethnic minority groups have lost their common ownership, and they are no longer the real owners of the forests. In the period when forests were under state control, local people had to live as dependents in their own native villages. They only worked as forest "guards" (if they agreed to protect forests) or as "laborers" to plant new forest (if they agreed to plant trees and take care of the forests). When land and forests were allocated to households, community characteristics of natural resource management further broke down. People were confused and hesitant when the community's natural resources were allocated to households (Ngoc 2001).

In contrast to this feature of the ethnic minority people, Kinh people in the lowlands prefer private ownership. This had made land allocation policies to households in this area successful, at least for the time being. However, as we all know, the same results did not come about in the uplands. Land allocation and forest management in the uplands weakened local cultures. Upland traditional cultures that should have been maintained were instead destroyed. These land allocation policies also caused the loss of larger forest areas. Local people expanded cultivation areas and increasingly exploited forest resources to increase their incomes (Sikor, 1998; Vien, 2001, 2005).

Forestland is a "life environment" for upland ethnic people, part of an entire way of life. Each method of community forest management is based upon an indigenous knowledge system. It bears the special characteristics of both the local ecosystem and the local culture. It not only has value in terms of the environment and the conservation of local biodiversity, but it is also related to people's lives, intimately related to their "intellectual capital," including the traditional values of these communities.

We will now present some examples of community-based forest management that have appeared to be sustainable from research conducted on natural resource management in the upper Ca River Basin (Vien and others 2001).

The Situation of Community-based Forest Management in the Upper Ca River Basin

The upper Ca river basin consists of Anh Son, Thanh Chuong, Con Cuong, Tuong Duong and Ky Son districts in Nghe An province. Of these, Con Cuong, Tuong Duong and Ky Son are the three high mountain districts, and they are also among the poorest districts in Viet Nam. The three districts are on the national boundary with Laos. Pu Mat nature reserve is also located in this area. In general, the inhabitants of this area are mainly Thai, H'Mong, Kinh, Khomu and Tho people (including local groups such as Dan Lai, Ly Ha, Tay Pong and Odu).

Research results in the Ca river basin show that land and forest allocation have led to significant socioeconomic and environmental changes in this mountainous region. There are some problems, however, that needed to be solved by the local authorities as well as policy makers. For instance, land and forest allocation have reduced areas of free grazing land for livestock (especially for large livestock, which is also one of the strengths for economic development in mountainous regions). This leads to conflicts between agricultural and livestock production and forest development. The poor households, who lack qualifications (i.e., labor, capital, etc,) cannot obtain forestland. Or some of these households are allocated small plots of forestland (exemplified by the situation of households in Khe Thoi village, Lang Khe commune, and those in Chai village, Chi Khe commune). Despite a lack of forestland, households still need forest products (including firewood, building materials, wood for fences, food, etc.) for their home consumption as well as, increasingly, for cash income. Additionally, households also need grazing land for cattle production. Forest exploitation and cattle grazing that trespass on newly privatized land holdings have caused conflict between households in villages (such as in Dinh and Tat villages, Chi Khe commune). Furthermore, poor farmers have shifted their exploitation and use of forest resources from their own forestland to the land owned by the government.

Currently, in many mountainous regions there are no protection forests surrounding villages. This contributes to floods and the erosion of farmland near streams in the rainy season, and is believed to be associated with epidemic diseases and localized droughts in the dry season. The droughts in the dry season not only cause water shortages for daily living activities but also lead to serious fires in residential areas. For example, one fire burned 34 houses down in Huoi Tu village (Ky Son district) in February, 1998. Local farmers could not put out the fire because they had no water available in the village area. Similarly, forest fires annually happen in many places in Con Cuong, Tuong Duong and Ky Son districts.

Lan and his college (1999) surveyed 41 villages which belong to 17 communes in 3 mountainous districts (including Anh Son, Con Cuong, and Tuong Duong). They found only 9 villages with community forests, each village having one. One of these, the Ta Bo – Pu Canh forest, which protects the water source for daily living activities in Tan Huong village (Con Cuong district), has been narrowed until it seems to be losing its usefulness because of local farmers trespassing on forestland to gain land tenure rights to plots of land. As an example of this situation, the forest of Lo's family in Chai village (Con Cuong district) is usually threatened by the trespass of other households because it has not yet been certified by local authority. In addition, the forest in Khe Sung village, which has been certified since 1995, is a pilot model of

socio-forest project implemented by Center of Forestry Science and Technology, Nghe An province. However, this forest is being devastated by local people, a nd it is also unsustainable for other reasons. The reasons include lack of cooperation within the management group, interference from higher levels, a complete lack of necessary basic regulations, and the lack of attention to indigenous knowledge in forest management.

In fact, many systems of traditional and indigenous community forest management systems have existed and developed in the mountainous regions in Nghe An. Many other community forest management systems, however, were changed and many, perhaps m ost of them, disappeared (for example, Hang Doi forest in Bong Khe commune; Hang Nang Man forest in Yen Khe commune; Khe Ang forest in Na Be village, Xa Luong commune, etc,). Nevertheless, while learning about natural resource management from farmers, we found that local communities living in the upper Ca river basin have many customary laws relating to community-based natural resources management. Therefore, in suitable places, community forest management needs to be legalized and encouraged. Additionall y, local authorities need to support communities in developing community forest management systems with suitable scale.

Customary Laws in Management and Use of Natural Resources in the Upper Ca River Basin

There are 5 ethnic minorities living in the upper Ca river basin. Each of the five communities has its own abundant and diverse customary laws. Within the framework of this paper, we can only cursorily introduce some customary laws and conventions of a Thai community as an evidence of the relatio nship between customary laws and community natural resources management in villages. Similar to other ethnic minorities in the upper Ca river basin, the Thais' livelihood is bound to natural resources, especially forest resources.

Over time, Thai people have evolved suitable means to exploit natural resources for their subsistence, and to protect these resources for posterity. The Thai community in general, and Thai households in particular, are concerned with the protection of plants and animals as wel l as the protection of forest and water resources. For a very long time the Thai people have had an awareness of the need for natural resources protection, and now this is increasingly a concern because of population growth, the intrusion of people from o utside the community, and the growing market economy. The climax of awareness of natural resources protection is customary laws, including both unwritten and written customary laws that constitute village conventions.

Thai customary laws in the upper Ca river basin have passed through three periods: the period of unwritten customary laws (before 1960), the period of the cooperative (from 1960 to 1998) and the period of village conventions (since 1999). Unwritten customary laws were the sole means of managing and protecting natural resources before the 1960s. Since 1999, although village conventions have been issued for natural resources management, unwritten customary laws are still used.

The development and issuance of village convention needs community participation. Village patriarchs and village leaders play a very important role. A survey of customary laws in 6 villages and analysis of 2 village conventions (Na Tong village, Tam Thai commune, Tuong Duong district and Chom Lom village, Lang Khe commune, Con Cuong district), show that the contents of village conventions are practical and have their own characteristics.

In general, village conventions have different numbers of regulations (for instance, Na Tong village convention consists of 22 regulations, while Chom Lom village convention has 50 regulations). Commonly, the contents of village conventions focus on (1) management of production and natural resources, (2) management of order and security, and (3) cultural lifestyle and mutual assistance.

Forests and land are usually the first things mentioned in a village's convention. Each village has specific regulations about land and village boundaries. The boundaries were usually decided by the first residents or village patriarchs and boundaries between two villages usually are a small river, a stream, a cross-valley, a hilltop or an old field that was cultivated for a long time by local people in these villages. In spite of unwritten agreements and a lack of fixed points to determine boundaries, local people still observe their boundaries. The elderly take responsibility for the handing over of land and boundaries management to their descendents. All residents in the village can reclaim land to cultivate, and to collect forest products.

Customary law and village conventions usually consist of 6 main terms regarding the management of land and forests: (1) To affirm that land, forest, fields, streams, ponds, etc, are managed by the community (village); (2) To prevent people living in other villages from trespassing on village land for swiddening, cutting wood, collecting forest products, etc.); (3) To allocate land and reconcile land conflicts. Households have to manage their forestland by themselves; (4) To strictly forbid the exploitation of timber (and even non-timber forest products during certain periods) without permission of the community; (5) Regulations related to forest fires; (6) Regulations related to the punishment of people who violate the convention about land and forest resources management.

Customary laws and village conventions about water resource management deal with both irrigation water and domestic water resource management. For example, (1) protection as well as repair of water dams and irrigation canal systems; (2) protec tion of domestic water resource (do not pollute water, do not throw dead animals into streams, etc.); (3) preservation of water organisms by strictly forbidding the use of explosives and powdered lime to catch fish, shrimp, etc.; (4) punishment of people who violate the convention.

Customary laws and village conventions are the pinnacle of achievement resulting from the awareness and responsibility in each community. They help local people to survive and to retain resources for their lives and for future g enerations. Regulations of natural resources management (including forest, land, and water) are always associated with production regulations (agricultural and livestock production, forestry exploitation). Overall, regulations are closely related to the benefits, as well as to the responsibilities, of each community member in natural resource management.

The content of village conventions focus on pratical issues in natural resource management. Commonly, a regulation consists of three parts: benefits, respo nsibilities, and punishments.

Along with the changes in nature and society, the Thai community has suitable adaptations in relating to the natural environment. Therefore, usually, every year people in the community discuss their village convention in order to complement or modify it. This flexibility ensures the practical value of the village conventions.

The impact of the village conventions on natural resources management partly depends on the power of the state legal system. The village convention nee ds support from the Government as represented by local authorities in order to be effective. The typical kind of support is to punish people who live outside the community if they are guilty of breaking the village convention.

Besides the state's lega l system, customary law and village conventions regarding natural resource management have contributed to socioeconomic development and community natural resources protection in mountainous rural areas.

Different Types of Community Forest Management in the Upper Ca River Basin

Indigenous community forest management has existed in many different forms in Viet Nam . Community forest management is usually closely linked to indigenous knowledge and local culture. By consulting and analyzing different example s of community forest management

we can selectively adopt practical management approaches and we can find good solutions for developing community institutions in local natural resources management. This is a necessary and immensely practical task

In fact, it is rather difficult to classify types of community forest management, because each community forest has its own specific characteristics. There are sometimes considerable differences from one place to another. These differences represent the mult iple purposes of forest management. Therefore, we resort to simply listing some different types of forest management as examples before finding convincing classifications.

In the upper Ca river basin, we find several types of community forest management, including: (1) forest management for household use; (2) forest management relating to irrigation water resources; (3) forest management relating to running water resources; (4) forest management and aquatic products preservation; (5) forest set aside for po or households; (6) forest management for protection of alluvial soil near streams; (7) forest management based on kin relationships; (8) watershed forest management.

In this paper, we cite some typical examples of community-based natural resources management in the upper Ca river basin as evidence for the undeniable existence and significance of this form of forest management.

Case study 1. The Community-Used Forest of Na Tong Village (Tam Thai commune, Tuong Duong district)

Na Tong village has an area of nearly 900 ha. In 2000, this village had 102 households with 452 people. Natural resources management in Na Tong village is implemented at 3 levels. The village manages small rivers, streams, the irrigation system and the cemetery. Local households manage paddy fields, home gardens, and protective forests that had been allocated to households. And the social organizations manage land and other forests, of which the Veterans' Union manages community-used forest (175.5 ha), the Farmers' Union manages the bamboo forest area that is populated mainly be '*met*' bamboo (local name) (23.2 ha), and the Women's Union and the Youth League manage agroforestry land (236.4 ha). In this section, we will focus on the community-used forest managed by the Veterans' union.

The community-used forest has an area of 175.5 ha surrounding Na Tong village. This verdant and luxuriant forest is controlled to provide forest products for farmers, such as timber and non-timber forest products (such as firewood, bamboo shoots, and medicinal plants). In

order to protect this large area of forest, people living in neighbouring villages are also allowed to collect some forest products based on an agreement with people in Na Tong village.

Community-used forest management in Na Tong village has experienced 4 unique periods:

Before 1964: First local people and then the agricultural cooperative managed the forest. At that time, the main regulation was to allow local people to collect timber and non-timber forest products within set limits. In addition, village authorities allocated swidden land to households.

The period of 1964 – 1974: The village authorities (i.e., the agricultural cooperative) managed the forest. They did not allow local people to do swiddening or to cut timber. Until 1974, all the regulations had been disseminated by word of mouth. Only some of these regulations were written in the annual minutes of the cooperative meetings.

The period of 1975 – 1998: Regulations on community-used forest protection were issued. The main terms of these regulations were discussed and decided in annual cooperative meetings. These terms were written in reports of these meetings.

The period of 1999 – now: The main regulations of forest management are in the village convention. Management of this forest has been assigned to the Veterans' Union.

The community-used forest of Na Tong village is very important to local people. Normally, they cut timber for building houses and collect non-timber forest products for their daily home consumption. As local people recall, Na Tong villagers and others in neighboring villages survived the famine in 1991 thanks to selling ten tons of chestnuts collected from this forest.

In short, forest management based on the association between the Veterans' Union and the community generated the fundamental regulations of community forest management in Na Tong village.

Case Study 2. Bong Stream Forest in Bong Village (Lang Khe Commune, Con Cuong District)

The Bong stream forest has an area of 25 ha. Since 1960, this forest has been controlled with the aim of protecting the irrigation water source for 32 ha of paddy fields and providing timber for house construction. Similar to the community-used forest in Na Tong, Bong stream forest is very verdant and luxuriant. Chestnut trees, teak trees, and other species are abundant.

Located at a distance of 5 to 6 km from Bong village, this forest is protected by verbal customary laws and the village convention. There is only one path into the forest.

Case Study 3. Hoc Stream Forest in Dong Tien Village (Lang Khe Commune, Con Cuong District)

The Hoc stream forest has an area of 30 - 40 ha, of which 12 ha is a forest of tall ironwood and *sang le* trees. Since 1990, this forest has been managed by the village authorities to protect an irrigation water source for 42 ha of paddy fields and to protect the valuable trees it contains. Regulations for Hoc stream forest protection were issued by the community. These regulations strictly forbid forest exploitation (including timber, non-timber forest products, and wild animals). Local people who break the regulations will be punished. Additionally, the village assigns a forest keeper (an old man) who is always present at the forest's door. The keeper is paid 300 kg of rice a year. *Hoc* stream forest management in Dong Tien village is an efficient community natural resources management effort.

Case Study 4: Ta Bo – Pu Canh Forest- "Suoi Nuoc Mmoc", Tan Huong Village (Yen Khe Commune, Con Cuong District)

This forest, which is located in the center of the village (nearby "*nuoc moc*-water rise" stream) has an area of only 4 ha. There are a lot of big trees with 50-60 cm diameter in the forest. According to local people, the forest has been protected since the first families came to establish the village (about 100 years ago). Through many generations, local people have still respected the unwritten regulations; they do not use forest products collected from this forest. Local people said that this is a holy forest with "*dragon eyes*" and "*nuoc moc*" stream. If people bathe in or catch fish in the "*nuoc moc*" stream, they may die. Local people also built a temple to worship for a peaceful life. They said that forest protection is closely related to keeping the "*nuoc moc*" stream clean. In the recent years, some recently arrived households have stealthily cut the trees and trespassed on forestland. The existence of this forest is threatened. However, the community has not yet found a way to solve this problem.

Case Study 5: "Mo Tom" Forest in Chom Lom Village (Lang Khe Commune, Con Cuong District)

This forest has an area of several dozen ha. It has been protected to prevent soil erosion and for forest products collection since local authorities first established the village. Located near the Ca River, this forest has a stream in which local people can seasonally catch shrimps. According to the village's convention, the forest is protected, and local people are not allowed to

sell products collected from this forest. In order to encourage local people to obey the village's convention, the local authorities allow each household to keep a given amount of timber logs to make pillars for their house on stilts when they build new houses. Other construction materials must be obtained from trees in home gardens or other sources. Local people help the authorities to check the adherence to this regulation. Until now, no one has broken the village's convention.

Case Study 6: Forest for the Poor Households in Khe Can Village (Bong Khe Commune, Con Cuong District)

During the process of land and forest allocation, Khe Can village had 15 poor households who did not meet the criteria that would enable them to receive forestland. Thus, the local authority decided to allocate a forest area of 30 ha for them. This forest is located 3 kilometers from the village. There is only one path which runs through the village to the river bank. Under the village's convention, all village members are allowed to graze their cattle in this forest. Only the 15 poor households are allowed to collect firewood and non-timber forest products. They must do this by themselves (without any other power or means of transportation). This regulation is accepted by the community, and other households in this village will help the village authorities to check adherence to this regulation. Basically, all of 15 poor households seriously follow this regulation.

Case Study 7: Protection Forest near the Lam River, Thach Son Commune (Anh Son District)

Nearly 50 years ago, the forest was established based on the suggestion of a village leader with the goal of preventing alluvial soil erosion on the bank of the Lam river (a branch of the Ca River). On about 50 ha local people planted bamboo; however, bamboo is easily swept away by floods. Therefore they now grow other trees, such as *coi, gao, sung, leu beu, true, bun* and some low trees. Every year, the local authorities encourage local people to plant trees at the beginning of the spring. The village's convention does not allow people to collect forest products (including firewood and animals) in the protection forest. Recently, the commune security has issued regulations to punish (by fines of rice or cash) local people breaking the regulations. Thanks to these regulations, the alluvial soil area of 208 ha is still protected along the Lam river bank.

Some Lessons Learned from the Models of Community-based Forest Management in the Upper of Ca River Basin

Lan and his colleagues (1999) studied 9 types of community-based forest management in the villages of Thai, Kh'mu, Dan Lai, and Kinh people in Tuong Duong, Con Cuong, and Anh Son districts. After a field trip that took them through 41 different villages, they found that community-based forest management is the underlying condition that allows these forests to exist. In order for these types of management models to exist, it is necessary to have or establish the following conditions:

(1). A reasonable scale (4-200 ha), appropriate geographic location, landscapes, and suitable spiritual factors (isolated forests, rough terrain, legends of supernatural power and fictitious stories of forest and plant gods, and so on)

(2). A community or a group of people who use the forest and other beneficiaries are clearly defined and recognized by the community. The community here is seen as a village.

(3). The community makes decisions by itself. There is a high degree of consensus regarding management objectives; a clear management regulation is accepted by the community and is carried out at the people's own initiative (such as the regulations of interests and responsibilities, especially the use rights and assured benefits of all members).

(4). The community can monitor the agreed upon regulations by behavioral standards within the community (for example: anyone who breaks the rules will be despised by the community, and there are some people who have to leave the community).

(5). The community has the ability to defend its rights; it can put a stop to infractions by outsiders.

(6). The right of the community to manage the resources is accepted by the official (e.g. commune, district, provincial) authorities and approved by the local society.

(7). The models conform to local cultural factors and local customs.

Successful community-based forest management is tightly linked to many factors. It is not an autonomous entity that can operate independently. The use right and the right to benefit are immensely important factors in gaining and keeping people's participation and long-term support in protecting forests and generating forest activities. Most factors are changing, so to achieve sustainability, the management systems of community forest management must be flexible, always looking for ways to adapt to changes in the society and in organizations.

Each model of successful community-based forest management is close to the pool of local knowledge and traditional culture of the community. The community forest is seen as a part of the overall meaning of a community, combining the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimension of the community. It supplies many products that serve households'

livelihoods. It can also give poor people access to natural resources (especially when confronted with a tendency towards privatization). But it is also attached to the community as a community, serving as an important ecological factor within the human ecological system of each community.

In reality, together with the tendency towards privatization threatening communities' forest and forestland use rights, pressures on natural resources are being brought about by a tendency toward commercialization of forestry products, in-migration, and immigration, and general population growth. It is especially important to note that these trends are pushing poor people farther away from enjoying benefits that they currently enjoy re: the use of their natural resource base. A result of this is a developing and growing gap between rich and poor.

The models of community-based forest management examined here can contribute to the solution of some of the above problems. However, it is necessary to have a general solution in conjunction with the support of policies and institutions. First of all, it is necessary that community-based management of natural resources—and especially forest resources and forestland—be officially recognized in terms of legislation. It should be noted that while many traditional community-based forest management models are still developing and will continue to exist, many other forest management systems will be changed or lost because of changing circumstances. Therefore, in areas with suitable conditions, not only should the establishment of community-based forest management systems be encouraged, but existing ones should also be supported with technical assistance.

The government has recognized the community-based forest management system as one of the methods of forest management, along with the government forest management model, private, and collective models. For upland communities, the most popular of these models is the community model, with its specific locally adapted culture and institutions. Research organizations need to help the government develop a policy framework and instructions to support community forests. This policy should be extremely flexible to ensure that it encompasses highly diverse goals (for example: forests for the poor, forest for water protection in small basins, special-use forests in villages, forests for preventing land erosion along riversides, etc.) and equally diverse methods for sharing benefits and responsibilities. Preserving different methods of community-based forest management depends on local customs and land-use types. It is necessary to develop premises and an overarching policy framework for this management form, and it should be based on the lessons learned from community forest management models that have been studied.

The most suitable solutions for natural environment and local livelihood protection are always ones that are related to local culture and society. Thus, we need to realize the importance of these local factors and to use indigenous knowledge about forest ecosystems while combining it with advances in science and technology. Simultaneously, we should encourage and empower local people to manage natural resources and enjoy the benefits from these resources, especially forest resources. This is the way to encourage the long-term participation of local people in natural resources management in general and forest resources in particular.

Parallel to maintaining and developing community forest management models, it is necessary to combine them with the other management models (households, governments). It is also necessary to combine state laws and customary laws. This combination will be an important factor contributing to the socioeconomic development of upland areas. It will reduce the pressure on natural resources, and, especially, it will provide a foundation for developing forest resources in order to meet social, economic and environmental goals.

In Conclusion

Community-based forest management is just one of a number of measures for socializing protection tasks and developing forest resources rather than considering forest protection to be only a task for forest management forces, forestry workers or forest plantations.

Participation of the communities in managing and protecting certain forests of ethnic minority people in the highlands has clearly produced forest ecosystems that are maintained and developed with a high degree of stability because they are based on the principle of combining protection with the sustainable use of natural resources by local people. A good and suitable policy environment extending from the central to the local is an important factor in carrying out community-based forest management on a large scale. A comprehensive research program which covers technology, culture, and institutional factors will help us to have a more sound perspective on community-based resource management. Moreover, in Vietnam this is a requirement imposed by reality and it presents a challenge and a responsibility for scientists. What kind of position will community-based forest management systems have in the development of forestry in Vietnam? What kind of roles can it play? These are urgent questions for researchers and policy makers if they are to have good insights and come up with appropriate solutions.

We are working toward and expecting a satisfying and secure life for all people. Community-based forest management can play a significant role in achieving that.

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