

Community Forestry

Community forestry (CFM) is referred to as a managerial arrangement, in which village communities or forest user groups are jointly engaged in joint forest protection, joint forest management and have benefit sharing arrangements. Land use rights are provided through contractual arrangements or legal long-term land titles (red books). CFM has four packages:

- Participatory land use planning (PLUP)
- Forest and forest land allocation (FLA)
- Forest protection and development regulations (FPDR)
- Community forest management (CFM)

Though CFM still plays a comparative small role in the overall Vietnam forest sector, it becomes slowly an officially recognized way of forest and forest land management, particularly for ethnic minorities in poor, medium and rich natural forests. Various provincial initiatives have effectively contributed to national CFM policy development. A national CFM concept for Vietnam does exist, and has been detailed as a key outcome under the national forest strategy, but is not yet legalized. CFM implementation relies on the provincial commitment towards developing detailed regulations suitable for the respective socio-ecological conditions of the province. Methodologies have been developed, refined, expanded and documented in numerous project guidelines and comprehensive training materials for over a decade through a sequence of successive technical cooperation projects. They ensure full participation of forest users in all planning and decision-making procedures and have proven feasible under various socio-ecological environments. Effective forest protection and forest management practices by ethnic minority communities or forest user groups can only be expected with available short and long term income opportunities from forest land, which depends on the quality of natural forests on allocated forest land.

The Product CFM in RDDDL Dak Lak

The most significant and hence important product of RDDDL in CFM deals with “benefit sharing of commercial timber utilization”. Dak Lak has become the most prominent province in Vietnam with regards to benefit sharing under CFM. A number of pilots were successful, technical and procedural guidelines are developed and approved by the provincial PC in 2009. Benefit sharing is particularly relevant for indigenous ethnic minorities, who are normally the custodians for natural forests in the province Dak Lak. Ethnic minorities usually have limited market access, and direct income from sustainable use of natural forests is a significant contribution to their livelihood. Institutional arrangements at village level also help to sustain community spirit and build their self-confidence in dealing with DARD and the CPC, which plays a decisive role for benefit sharing by announcing harvesting costs and minimum timber prices. Regulations for benefit sharing have been built on technical guidelines for timber harvesting for commercial purposes. The benefit sharing guidelines, as developed by Dak Lak province, must be understood as an important contribution to the development of an applicable national legislation, which can accommodate the demand of local people regarding major forest products. RDDDL installed a consultative provincial working group on Forest Land Allocation & Joined Forest Management for getting political support for the innovative CFM approach in Dak Lak. The consultative group played a decisive advisory role for DARD and the provincial PC.

Lessons Learned from RDDDL in Dak Lak

Effectiveness

RDDL as a rural development project has the provincial Department of Planning and Investment as the main partner. For the CFM component RDDDL partnered with the Forest Development Department of DARD. The CFM Consultative Group turned out to be instrumental for the development of the methodology and was also an important steering instrument for getting other departments on board and providing strategic advice to the PPC.

CFM as a system is a set of steps, which are logical sequences and build on one another. The CFM strategy for Dak Lak was further conditioned by a number of events:

- The option to concentrate on benefit sharing came up in 2004 and started with piloting in one commune. The national level supported this decision.
- The new forest law of 2004 made land allocation to ethnic minority communities legally possible. It had been done by the province Dak Lak already before.
- Guidelines for participatory FLA were approved in 2005 and further updated in 2007. This supported increased participation of ethnic minorities in economic development.
- In 2006, timber from CFM managed natural forest (336 m3) in the first pilot was auctioned by the community for the first time in Vietnam.
- In 2007 land allocation processes as supported by RDDDL were interrupted due to uncontrolled logging partly inside the first benefit sharing pilot in one target district.
- In 2008 DARD received the ok from the PPC for a second RDDDL pilot on benefit sharing from CFM in another district.
- In 2009 timber from CFM managed natural forests (400 m3) was auctioned and benefits were shared between communities and government. Experiences from benefit sharing in 2 pilots were analyzed and presented at a provincial workshop. The PPC approved CFM with benefit sharing for wider application in Dak Lak.

RDDL built its strategy on national and province demands and added innovation by developing inputs on institutional and technical procedure. Steering by the Vietnamese authorities was open for learning and innovation with a high level of acceptance of new ideas, and growing trust in the capacity of farmers of ethnic minority groups.

Capacity Development

The inputs of RDDDL targeted skills and knowledge of people and offices at commune and district level. The main activities in this regard were trainings, guideline development, and analysis of changed processes and documentation of results of 2 pilots. Whereas trainings were mainly at village and commune level, district DARD offices were indirectly targeted through development of technical procedures and guidelines. RDDDL provided the necessary framework with all technical / procedural details for larger scale application with a set of less cumbersome and more participatory methodologies for the generation of regulations as well as for the many steps of CFM down to benefit sharing,. It became apparent that effective community participation would require a lot of support for communities to enhance their capacities in understanding and making use of the given opportunities. After the approval of provincial CFM guidelines district administration would need coaching and counseling inputs for making use of new procedures and concepts next to technical training under the changed frame conditions.

A lot of attitude change and awareness rising for the requirement of participatory approaches for CFM and particularly for benefit sharing at district and commune staff and offices is necessary. All steps after forest land allocation involve to a great extent participation of local people, which is a new requirement for the commune and district system. Further contributions to a public sector reform in the forest sector are required. In terms of system’s or sector capacity, further decentralization of administrative regulations is essential. Provincial offices need to delegate functions to district offices and further down, in order to cope with a larger number of village based applications, plans, and reports. Peoples’ motivation in dealing with a transparent and legal system of benefit sharing will greatly depend of the actual benefits, which are appropriate to their investments and can be secured without additional payments. The provincial government will need to prove that CFM- benefit sharing can be replicated by other communes and districts of the province, while maintaining essential levels of transparency for all actors involved.





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Impact

In Dak Lak province CFM with benefit sharing is institutionalized and happening with significant contributions to policy formulation processes at national level. Guidelines formulated during the course of practicing FLA, FPDR and CFM with benefit sharing have been used for the formulation / revision of national guidelines by the national level and tested in another 20 pilots outside Dak Lak province.

Various donors use CFM in technical or financial co-operation projects partly at large scale:

- KfW6 did first timber harvesting in Quang Ngai and is expected to do the same in Binh Dinh province
- ADB-FLITCH project considers take over benefit sharing concepts with an expected coverage of 60 communes in six Central Highlands' and Phu Yen province
- Helvetas in Dak Nong province has used the concept
- JICA in Kon Tum province has completed a benefit sharing pilot using exactly the same methodology

Major contributions from RDDDL towards these achievements include:

- Local people not only get income through sustainable forest management, but also learn to manage and use institutions for governance, planning and monitoring. They can design, plan, and effectively implement forest protection and sustainable forest management and have the ability to handle and use financial returns from benefit sharing in a responsible manner
- Local staff at commune and district level can effectively support and guide communities in CFM and benefit sharing
- Technical and procedural details of managing CFM have been elaborated, tested, analyzed and documented in easy to apply guidelines

With RDDDL contributions in using experiences for ongoing learning processes and keeping learning loops alive while mobilization of cooperating partners for networking the Dak Lak province has acquired a strong position in the CFM national debate on instruments, significance and benefits of the approach.

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