

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 Viet Nam 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 SMNR-CV, Quang Binh Province

In Quang Bin province the CFM contributions by SMNR-CV were on forest land, which was allocated to individual household of Kinh ethnicity before the commencement of the project. Quang Binh, as other provinces, is under pressure to reduce natural forest loss caused by illegal logging. Forest land allocation to local people was conceived by government as a suitable measure to improve forest protection. Forest land is mainly taken from State Forest Enterprises and from land managed by district administration. Government considered the issuance of land use certificates often the final step without providing sufficient guidance and practical support on emerging responsibilities and getting benefits for the new forest owners. The major parts of forest land in Quang Binh had been allocated in rather small plots to individual households. The management of this forest land was very unsystematic, not planned and not sustainable. Forest protection regulations had only been formally introduced, but mostly as a blueprint without participation of forest holders. Consequently, the regulations were not respected and followed; violations were not sanctioned.

SMNR-CV provided inputs to a practicable management concept and the formulation of improved provincial guidelines for joint planning, reporting + approval procedures on

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

The main site condition in Quang Binh is that forests are mostly allocated to Kinh households. Kinh people, contrary to ethnic minority groups, have limited trust in groups and grassroots organizational set-ups, which limits per se the suitability of a CFM approach like in Dak Lak. A major project achievement by SMNR-CV was to identify and implement a suitable application of CFM for this situation, which was found to be CBFM by forest user groups, which is an innovative and important step for the integration of forest protection and forest development in a sustainable way. Effective forest protection can be achieved by direct short-term (NTFP), mid-term (plantation) and continuous long-term (natural timber) benefits for forest owners. Since CBFM is relatively new to Quang Binh province, it has carefully been piloted and monitored over the last years in order to assess its potential to strengthen forest management, including forest development and forest protection, while at the same time increasing people's benefits from the forest resources they manage. SMNR-CV has developed a practical manual, which accommodates both: CFM and CBFM, and thus can be applied anywhere in Viet Nam. After a longer consultative process the manual was approved in 2009 as the official CBFM guideline for Quang Binh province.

A provincial forestry consultative group (PFCG) was officiated in 2007. The main task of the PFCG was to integrate tested and validated innovations in the regular work plans of respective government organizations. The PFCG proved useful for DARD and essential for smooth implementation of the project tasks.

Most important changes come from the economic possibilities, which link individual financial investments to individual economic benefits. The CBFM arrangement of forest user groups has the potential to make financial investment on allocated land a reliable undertaking. People identify CBFM through user group arrangements as a means for poverty reduction. CBFM also provides a clear strategy for the province on how to tackle ongoing forest degradation and forest loss. The various guidelines are easy to apply, relevant to the situation in Quang Binh, recognized by government, and provide obvious benefits for local people. They follow standard formats with details on procedures and technical information, which minimizes extensive capacity building.

Efficiency

The discussions in Viet Nam in the Community Forestry subsector among donors and government gave a clear mandate to SMNR-CV particularly for the 3 sub-products: FPDR, PLUP-FLA and CBFM. Given national demands for provincial piloting and subsequent guideline development on the one hand and the strong provincial ownership for exactly doing that on the other hand, the SMNR-CV had limited scope for developing additional strategies during the course of the 2 project phases. Available options were basically left to technical and procedural issues. Together with provincial line departments, options were piloted in the field, evaluated, refined and eventually documented as provincial guidelines.

The National Community Forestry Working Group has been a decisive coordinating mechanism for a national geographical and thematic work division in CFM, and contributed substantially over years to the conceptual and procedural development of pilots, guidelines, and resources utilization for CFM in Vietnam. Among a number of donors the German side developed a common CFM approach in Vietnam. The network of German TC supported projects facilitated a continuous evolution and resulted in “the Vietnamese” CFM approach with a strong support from provincial partners of pilot provinces. Inter-project cooperation towards a national approach was tested under different socio-ecological circumstances. Also other platforms and donors participated actively in this networked approach towards a common understanding of CFM in Vietnam. The SMNR-CV benefited clearly from those networks through tight collaboration for concept development, guideline formulation, sharing and learning. The overall leadership always had been with the Vietnamese government.

SMNR-CV managed to contribute to the national debates and concept development with comparative little resources. The network took care of transparency and sharing, leading to a situation in which one project site could efficiently draw on the outcomes of another site. High efficiency was further generated through strong and transparent support from provincial and district key partners for piloting and guideline development. The cost-effective way of doing programs helped in turn provincial, district and commune administration to contribute with their own resources, and also took care of the overall demand to produce guidelines on CBFM, which can be used for implementation with scarce government budgets. This in turn makes it very likely, that the results achieved can be rolled out with government resources.





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Lessons Learned from SMNR-CV Quang Binh

Relevance and Sustainability

In Quang Binh, improved provincial guidelines are issued on forest protection, on forest land use planning and forest allocation, and on community based forest management. All provincial guidelines are applied in all rural districts by the relevant stakeholders for protection and sustainable management of forest resources. The various guidelines and technical manuals on CBFM got recognized and approved by the province and are being applied for the whole province. Provincial and district authorities are capable of accessing and arranging the implementation of the 3 developed methodologies in Quang Binh. One can assume a general high ability and motivation of replicating successfully implemented pilots along the guidelines, as those have been developed in line with the forestry development strategy. The legal framework is available to roll out all over the province. At the same time the provincial roll out partly depends on adjustments of the national policy framework. PLUP-FLA and CBFM have long-term and large scale impacts only then, when the present lack of legal coverage on national level is solved. Quang Binh is the first province in Viet Nam, which has provincial guidelines for the implementation of the Circular 70 (which guides the formulation and implementation of village forest protection and development regulations) and now has the legal and institutional conditions for protecting their forests better than before. The performance of district and commune staff has improved and is expected to further improve with growing appreciation by local people. The new face of the former forest ranger is supportive for forest protection through local participation and locally adapted regulations. With CBFM in practice the work load for district level forest offices is reduced, and the nature of work changes substantially. Many commune authorities have realized the importance of strict and regular monitoring, which keeps awareness and creates a better understanding of things to correct. Monitoring is being shared between villagers, the commune authorities and DARD at district level.

For the future some kind of integration of services for agriculture and forestry is envisaged and wanted. Forest land amounts to some 70% of the land surface of Quang Binh province, and already now in a number of cases a contribution of about 40% of the household income is reported. Support to agro-forestry would be appreciated by local people and by commune authorities. Agro-forestry as a system to be introduced would enable farmers to raise their income from forest land until timber or NTFPs could be harvested. Crops under or in between trees has also the advantage that people take better care of their forests. Agro-forestry could become an additional value to the existing set of guidelines.

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