



LEARNING NOTES

ASRF SERIES 2017-8



Management of Watershed Protection Forest Based on the Muong Minority Ethnic Communities in Da Bac District, Hoa Binh Province, Vietnam



INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, community forest management (CFM) has long been practiced. This approach was institutionalized in 2004 through the Law on Forest Protection and Development (LFPD), which recognizes the roles and rights of local communities, particularly indigenous peoples (IPs), in sustainable managing of forest resources. Indigenous communities have a strong link with forests through their customs and traditions. A number of these IPs are situated in degraded forest sites, thus posing a great challenge to meet their basic needs.

Through CFM, there is hope to improve the socio-economic condition of forest stewards. One of the modalities considered is the Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES). It is an incentive-based conservation mechanism that will compensate indigenous communities for their efforts and commitment to protect and

conserve the forest resources and the goods and services it provides.

This study was conducted to document the CFM system of indigenous communities in Hoa Binh Province and assess the potentials of PFES as a strategy to promote sustainable management of forest resources. Specifically, it aimed to:

- Identify difficulties, opportunities, challenges, and drivers affecting forest management and utilization of Muong communities;
- Propose policy solutions to strengthen stakeholders' capacity in CFM practices; and
- Contribute to policy development, implementation, and direction setting at the national level.

The case study was conducted in two of the 12 Muong communities

in Da Bac district, Hoa Binh Province. These are Doi and Ke villages in Hien Luong, and Co Xa and Mat villages of Tien Phong.

Major milestones in the development of CFM in Vietnam were documented in order to draw insights on the importance of CFM in forest protection and management, poverty alleviation, and climate change adaptation. In addition, a review of major CFM policies was conducted to identify the development trends and limitations of such policies.

The logical framework on CFM of Nguyen Ba Ngai published in 2005 was used to analyze and assess the situation of CFM implemented by Muong community following the five basic contents:

- Identify the forest tenure of local communities;
- Establish a 5-year forest management plan;
- Establish internal regulation of forest protection and development;
- Implement CFM; and
- Conduct evaluation and monitoring at community level.



Participatory rapid appraisal (PRA), SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and consultation meetings were conducted in four Muong villages to understand the real situation of CFM implementation, and identify policy recommendations to facilitate this. Likewise, a policy brief was produced to communicate the most important results of the research.

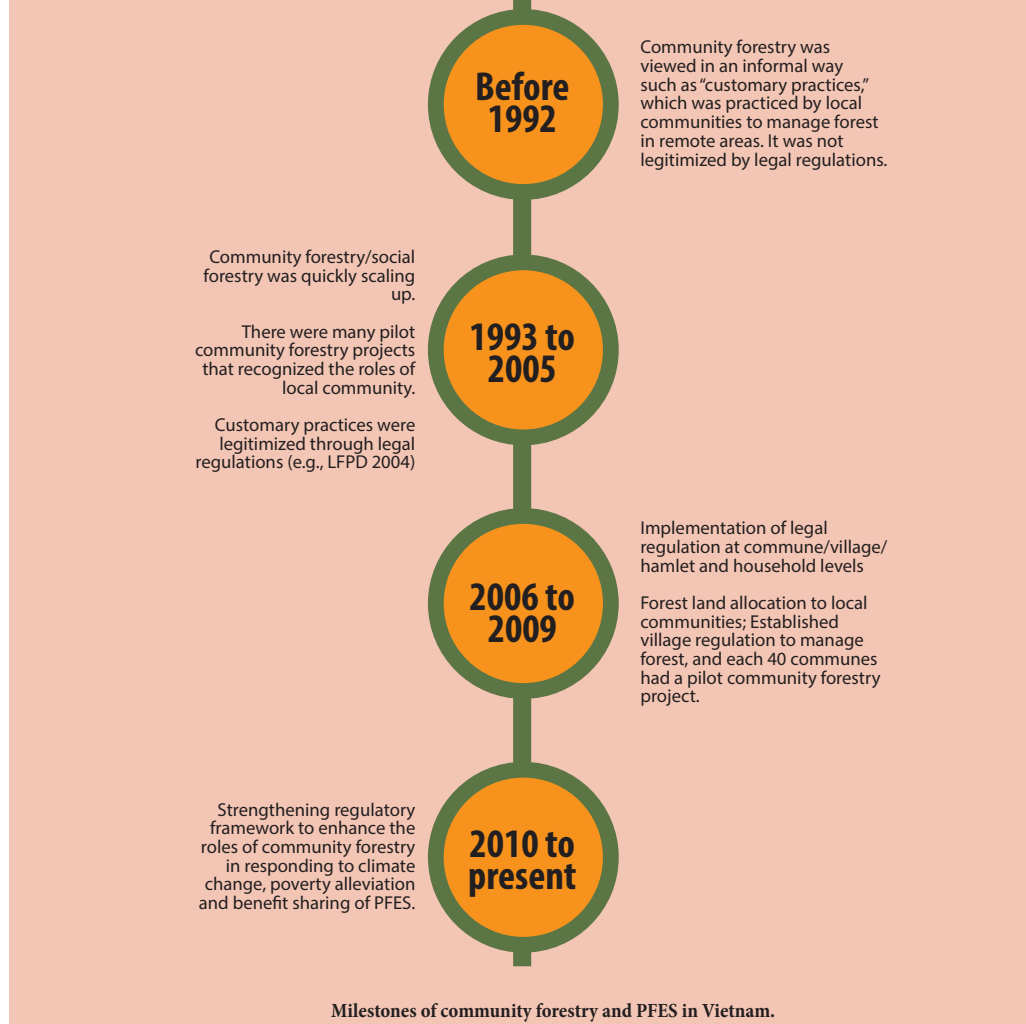
KEY FINDINGS

History of CFM in Vietnam

The Vietnam government recognized the informal rights of local communities over the management of forests even before 1990s. Through pilot and case studies that documented the success of community forestry approach, such rights, particularly those of the indigenous communities, were eventually strengthened by LFPD 2004. This law paved the way for creating more opportunities to improve the well-being of the local communities, of which PFES is one. Below are the milestones of community forestry and PFES in Vietnam.

- **Success in CFM**

Muong's traditional CFM practices largely include watershed protection for drinking and agriculture water supply, and the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for medicine. One of the biggest opportunities for Muong communities was the right given to them to manage their watersheds and enjoy the income from hydroelectric plants through payments for ecosystem service.



Watershed is further protected by the current migration of people to places outside the watershed for employment. This has lessened the pressure and dependency on the watershed, particularly by the corn farmers and livestock raisers who rely heavily on the watershed for land to till and water for crops and livestock.

Through community forestry and PFES program, the demand for timber and fuelwood has been considerably reduced. Watershed management has improved fuelwood plantations and income to afford gas stoves, hence offsetting the pressure on natural forests for biomass energy use. The

Muong communities have institutionalized a forest management board composed of forest protection groups. The members of the board were organized and mobilized to perform forest rehabilitation and protection activities.

- **Payment for Forest Environmental Services**

PFES, a result of implementation of the Decree 99/2010/ND-CP, and implementation of internal regulation on village forest management (monetary sanction) created a significant financial source to support local communities living in watershed area in Da Bac district.

The case studies of four Muong minority ethnic communities revealed successful watershed management, which is reflective of the (1) recognition of tenure rights and traditional forest management practices, (2) active local participation in watershed protection, and (3) equitable benefit-sharing mechanism.

Muong communities gained access to watershed benefits. They are now recognized as vanguards of the upland forests. Vietnam will continue to strengthen tenure rights while applying and maximizing strong customary rules and principles, where applicable, of forest management.

providing incentives to protect the watersheds. Continual improvement in this mechanism should be done to promote equitable sharing of income benefits and to strengthen responsibilities of community members. This modality and its mechanisms can likewise be adopted in other areas.

WAY FORWARD

Strengthening tenure rights

Through the institutionalization of community forestry organizations,

Socio-economic development through PFES

Implementing PFES has been proven to be beneficial in improving the income of community members by

Key Messages

- **Enabling policy environment.** The study underscored the importance of policies that are responsive to issues such as climate change and poverty alleviation, as well as to ensure equitable benefit-sharing and social inclusiveness. Thus, regulations related to forest protection and rehabilitation have to be strictly observed. Budget or financial support should be provided for in the policy as necessary. Amending the Law on Forest Protection and Development (LFPD) is an important step towards empowering the communities. This includes promoting community rights not only to protect but also to use and own added value of the natural forest.
- **Livelihood opportunities.** Livelihood opportunities, particularly outside the watershed, will help lessen the pressure on the watershed and prevent its degradation. The resources upon which the livelihoods of the impoverished communities depend have to be kept productive and be sustainably maintained.
- **Modality for protection and conservation.** Incentive-based conservation mechanisms such as the payment for forest environmental services (PFES) can be an important modality through which forest resources and the ecosystem goods and services can be protected and conserved.

About ASRF

ASRF stands for ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry (AWG-SF) Strategic Response Fund, formerly ASEAN Social Forestry Network Strategic Response Fund. It is the AWG-SF flexible funding mechanism under the ASEAN-Swiss Partnership on Social Forestry and Climate Change (ASFCC). It is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by SEARCA. The ASRF is designed to enable the Leaders and Focal Points on Social Forestry of the ASEAN Member States (AMS) to quickly respond to emerging issues and challenges and articulate policy recommendations on social forestry as it relates to climate change, food security, and poverty alleviation.

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