

Devolving management rights to natural forest to local people, Dak Lak province, Central Highlands of Vietnam

GENERAL INFORMATION	
<i>Sources of information of the practice</i>	<p>Devolution of Forest Management. Six years of experience in Dak Lak. Tran Huu Nghi, Thomas Sikor, Dang Thanh Liem, Nguyen Van Doan, Vu Van Manh. 2002</p> <p>What Benefits and for Whom? Effects of Devolution of Forest Management in Dak Lak, Vietnam. Nguyen, T. Q. 2005. Aachen, Germany, Shaker Verlag.</p> <p>Forest Devolution in Vietnam: Differentiation in Benefits from Forest among Local Households." Nguyen, T. Q. <i>Forest Policy and Economics</i> 8(4):409-20, June 2006.</p> <p>From Legal Acts to Actual Powers: Devolution and Property Rights in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Tran, T. N. and Sikor, T. <i>Forest Policy and Economics</i> 8 (4): 397-408, June 2006.</p> <p>Decentralization of Forest Management in Vietnam: What Implications Does It Have on Household Economy?" Nguyen, T. Q., Forthcoming in CIFOR's book on Forest Decentralization in Asia and the Pacific</p>
<i>Relevant contacts</i>	<p>Dak Lak Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) 47 Nguyen Tat Thanh, Buon Ma Thuot, Dak Lak, Vietnam GTZ Office Vietnam. Email: gtz-vietnam@gtz.de</p> <p>Tan Quang Nguyen, SARD recorder. Email: tananh@hn.vnn.vn</p>
<i>Useful links</i>	Mekonginfo http://www.mekonginfo.org/
INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME OR PROJECT PROMOTING THE PRACTICE (IF APPLICABLE)	
<i>Programme or project</i>	The German-funded Sustainable Management of Resources in the Lower Mekong Basin Project (SMRP)
<i>Time frame</i>	1995 - 2002
<i>Donor</i>	Mekong River Commission (MRC) and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ)
<i>Implementer of the programme or project</i>	<u>Government Organizations</u> : GTZ, Vietnam Forest Department and Dak Lak Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)
LOCATION OF THE PRACTICE	
<i>Region</i>	Asia
<i>Country</i>	Vietnam (the SMRP project also worked in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand)
<i>Province, Districts, Villages</i>	Six districts of Lak; Krong Bong, Ea Ka, Ea Hleo, Dak Nong, and Cu Jut in Dak Lak province
<i>Climatic zone</i>	Humid
<i>Other descriptive information</i>	Dak Lak is characterised by high ethnic diversity with significant potential for conflicts between indigenous groups and migrants.
INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRACTICE	
<i>Practice category</i>	Managing natural resources sustainably
<i>Practice type</i>	Institutional practice for natural resource management
<i>Sector</i>	Property rights
<i>Institutions fostering the practice</i>	As implementer of the project
<i>Beneficiaries of the practice</i>	24 communities in 6 districts (3,243 individual households, 10 household groups of 111 households)

<i>Users of the practice</i>	Forestry officials, local people
<i>Natural resource used or accessed (if applicable)</i>	Forests
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE	
<i>Background/problem statement</i>	<p>Forest resources and their functions are of great importance to Dak Lak province. Since liberation in 1975, local forest resources have mainly been under the management of state organizations, which have exploited forests intensively. In addition, the boom of coffee production during the 1990s in Dak Lak, on one hand, helped improve local livelihoods but on the other hand, drew a massive inflow of migrants to Dak Lak, causing tensions within local communities and detrimental impacts on the environment.</p> <p>Dak Lak lost around 30,000 ha of forest per year on average during the 80s-90s. Originally covered by dense primary forests, only one half of Dak Lak was still covered by forest in 2000. Deforestation not only decreased timber supplies but had negative impacts on biodiversity and downstream water flows. Rainy season flooding became more severe, while rivers started to dry out in the dry season.</p> <p>The State Forest Enterprises in charge of managing forest land could not arrest deforestation, on the contrary their logging operations often contributed to it. The lack of effective forest protection and management fuelled agricultural expansion and population explosion. Local people and migrants cleared large areas of forestland, either for subsistence cultivation or the production of commercial crops.</p> <p>The failure to stop land conversion and deforestation eventually drew the ire of the national government in 1997. The Prime Minister and several other high ranking decision-makers called upon the provincial government to institute immediate measures against deforestation and uncontrolled migration.</p>
<i>Approach followed</i>	<p>In 1996, Sustainable Management of Resources in the Lower Mekong Basin Project (SMRP) started its activities in Dak Lak province to test and develop practices for participatory and sustainable forest management, which could be later expanded to other areas.</p> <p>As technical assistance and capacity building were new concepts to the provincial administration and the local socio-economic and cultural conditions were generally difficult, initial project activities were designed as confidence building measures and focused on field level demonstrations. These activities included agricultural trials with improved varieties, the dissemination of improved cultivation practices, and development of a fuel-efficient wood stove. In addition, the project sponsored a series of baseline studies on various aspects of forest management and land use.</p> <p>From 1997, the project assistance gradually changed focus. The project moved out of field-level implementation and provided technical assistance to provincial programmes in land use and forestry. Over the years, project assistance helped the Dak Lak Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) develop four key elements for a radically new approach to forest management, an approach that devolves authority over forests to local people and local decision-makers. The four elements were participatory land use planning, forestland allocation, community forest management regulations, and on-farm agro-forestry trials.</p> <p>SMRP began work on participatory land use planning in Dak Phoi commune in late 1997. After a steering committee and working group were set up and trained, and meetings with government officials and villagers about the objectives and procedures of land use planning were held, various practical aids, such as three-dimensional models, transect walks and participatory mapping were used with village representatives in order to map village land use.</p>

	<p>From 1998, the SMRP team began to provide technical support to DARD experiments with forest allocation. The trained working group and the villagers planned future land use and discussed methods for distributing forest plots. A decision was then made to withdraw land from the State Forest Enterprise and to allocate it to villagers. Land Use Rights Certificates (or Red books) were issued to households, groups of households and communities and boundaries were established in the field. Local ethnic minority groups received priority in forestland allocation, receiving around 90% of the allocated forest.</p> <p>Once forestland allocation was completed in the first villages, a clear need emerged to develop management and protection regulations for the allocated forest. For this purpose, DARD cooperated with the provincial Forest Protection Department. With technical assistance from the SMRP team, the two departments began overseeing local pilot trials in 2000. Each pilot was implemented by the district-level Forest Protection Unit and commune-level Forest Management Board. With the participation of local people, an outline of village regulations was drawn up and submitted to the commune for approval. After the regulations were approved at district level, they were put in place, monitored, revised, if necessary, and resubmitted at district level for approval.</p> <p>As in the case of forest management regulations, the need to conduct on-farm trials with agro-forestry systems arose as a consequence of forestland allocation. Local people demanded assistance on how to turn their new land rights into tangible benefits. The SMRP team, therefore, supported the implementation of on-farm trials with agro-forestry practices in Diet village in 2001. This involved commune-level working groups (including staff of the commune level Forest Management Board and State Forest Enterprise) helping households to develop production plans based on their labour capacity, access to capital and land holdings.</p> <p>Extension stations were contracted to supply seed and animals to participating farmers and households were helped to submit loan applications to the bank. The working group was responsible for monitoring and documenting the implementation of the trials, organizing a workshop to evaluate the trials and disseminating the results after the first season.</p>
<p><i>Innovative elements</i></p>	<p>Forest devolution in Dak Lak makes two breakthroughs in the devolution process in Vietnam. First, it gives local households the rights to natural forest resources along with long term land use titles for forested land. Secondly, the Dak Lak devolution programme directly shares timber benefits with local people who manage forests. In concrete terms, each recipient household is entitled to a ten cubic metre timber quota every 20 years for housing, with logging activity subject to approval by competent state organizations. In addition, when the forest is mature enough for commercial logging, the household is entitled to a 6% share of the after-tax value of logged timber for every year of protection (e.g., 60% of after-tax revenues after ten years). Forest recipient households are entitled to collect and use all non-timber forest products under the forest canopy without having to pay a resource tax.</p> <p>In Vietnam, benefits for forest recipients in terms of timber and cultivation land had already been under discussion before but it was in the Dak Lak forest devolution programme that they were realized. By doing this, Dak Lak has changed policy discussion into a new direction. Forest devolution in Dak Lak has not only created an important platform for discussion about forest policy in Vietnam but also directly informed national forest policy, in particular the regulations on benefit-sharing in forestry.</p>
<p><i>Impacts on natural resource base</i></p>	<p><u>Actual:</u> Between 1999 - 2002, the programme allocated 24,900 ha of forestland to local people, of which, 14,300 ha to 3,243 individual households, 1,600 ha to 10 household groups, and 9,000 ha to 24 communities. An assessment in 2002-2003 in 13 villages showed that around 2 years after the completion of forest devolution programme, both forest area and forest resources still had the tendency to decline. However, the lost area of devolved forest was much lower than that of non-devolved forests in</p>

	adjacent areas. This comparison indicates that forest degradation slowed down in the devolved areas.
<i>Impacts on livelihood of the practice users</i>	<p><u>Actual:</u> The harvests from devolved forests played an important role in household economy. In absolute number, the value of harvest from devolved forest accounted for around 22% of that from crop production in 2001/2002.</p> <p>Compared to 1999 (the year immediately preceding forest devolution), total value of harvest from forest in 2001/2002 grew 170%.</p> <p>Comparing aggregated income from off-farm sources, the total value of harvest from devolved forest accounted for 67.6% on average. In six villages, aggregated harvest from devolved forest was even higher than cash income from all off-farm sources.</p>
<i>Other impacts</i>	<p><u>Actual:</u> In Dak Lak, devolution makes an important contribution to easing tensions between indigenous ethnic groups and migrants. Devolution serves to strengthen the land rights of indigenous groups, limiting their loss of land to migrants.</p> <p>The devolution program in Dak Lak has gained the attention of international donors, forestry policy-makers from the ministry level, and other provinces. Learning from Dak Lak example, Son La province in the Northwest region also took action to devolve its forest area to local people with the help of a German funded Social Forestry Development Project Song Da. By the end of 2004, around 825,000 ha of forest in Son La had been devolved forest local people.</p>
<i>General success factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressed the urgent need for change: serious decline in forest resources during the decades of forest management under state only organizations has put a high need on devolving the management rights to local actors. • Commitment of the province to change: not only were the provincial authorities committed to changing from state only forestry to multi-holder forestry, they also provided financial resources to make it possible. • Strong political will from the Government of Vietnam. • Availability of technical support: the devolution programme in Dak Lak benefited from the technical assistance from GTZ. This was particularly helpful given the fact that forest devolution in Dak Lak was unprecedented in Vietnam. Technical support from GTZ provided the SMRP team with confidence to test the devolution. • The initial emphasis on training and capacity-building of provincial administration. • Decentralized structure of GTZ project, leaving the initiative with the government counterpart in Dak Lak.
<i>Technology success factors</i>	-
<i>Institutional success factors</i>	<p>Access to inputs and resources</p> <p>Institutional support and outreach</p> <p>Policy environment</p>
<i>Problems remaining to be resolved</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate attention from devolution program to local rules on forest tenure. Although SMRP was a catalyst in forest devolution in Vietnam, there was a general lack of attention to the customary forest governance structure of the local ethnic people. This lead to discontent of some households, mostly non recipients. • Lack of legal back up for local people to realize the newly endowed rights: most farmers find it difficult to protect their timber resources from unauthorized logging. Local forestry staff are not always present when the forest recipients need help in realizing the rights they have been devolved • Unclear and unfeasible benefit sharing mechanism: the calculation of timber benefit of 6% is difficult to monitor as there is lack of base data. In addition, it is unclear what land can be converted into cropping land and

	<p>how much is allowed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In most cases, there is a general lack of extension support in both technical and financial terms for forest recipients. • It remains unclear how the achieved success can be scaled up at the provincial and national level, given the resistance by State Forest Enterprise, who perceive devolution as a direct threat to their existing control over forests, and tradition of top-down implementation in the forestry sector.
<i>Keywords</i>	<p>Access to resources, Community development, Economic growth, Economic resources, Extension activities, Forest conservation, Forest management, Forest products, Forest resources, Forestry, Forestry development, Forestry policies, Forestry production, Forests, Income generation, Institutional strengthening, Land policies, Land reform, Land use, Natural resources management, Property rights, Reforestation, Resource management</p>
<i>Editorial note</i>	<p>We are grateful to Dr Thomas Sikor (Junior Research Group on Postsocialist Land Relations, Humboldt University, Berlin) who took part in a peer review of the practice and attested to its sustainability and success.</p>