

ISSUES IN MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL FORESTS BY  
HOUSEHOLDS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF THREE  
PROVINCES IN VIETNAM: HOA BINH, NGHE AN,  
AND THUA THIEN-HUE

**BY**

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In 1998, the International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development asked the authors to write an Issues Paper on community and farm level forestry as a contribution to an international seminar on such kinds of forestry which was, alas, never held. For the authors, however, that opportunity to reflect on issues related to local forest management provided vital inspiration to dig deeper into this theme. This paper is based to a considerable degree on recent fieldwork in different areas of Vietnam, particularly in Thua Thien-Hue province, within the UNDP-funded Programme on Forests (PROFOR).

From 1992-1993, the authors were closely involved in the development of methods for allocation of forest land in Hoa Binh province through the Swedish-supported project "Renovation of Strategies for Forestry Development." They have followed developments there ever since. Since 1995, they have been similarly engaged in the forestry sector in Nghe An province. In the last few years, their research there has been funded through the EU-funded project "Social Forestry and Nature Conservation in Nghe An Province." The understanding gained by the authors of issues related to forest management by local people from the assignments in those three provinces is gratefully acknowledged.

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We hope that the present report will be able to shed some light on the interplay between the farmers and their Government that is so essential if locally based forestry is ever to become a tool for the poor.

-Vu Hoai Minh and Hans Warfvinge  
Hanoi and Stockholm, May 2002

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

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Vietnam is divided into 61 provinces and has some 80 million people inhabiting an area of 33 million hectares (see Figure 1). Four of the provinces are cities with some surrounding rural areas. The provinces are further sub-divided into some 600 districts and these into about 10,000 communes, the lowest level of the government administrative structure. Each commune is unofficially subdivided into villages. Depending on where they are located in the country, they are variously called *lang*, *ban*, *thon*, *xom*, *buon*, *ap*, etc. Larger villages are further subdivided into units often called *cum* or hamlets. Because this paper is about *forest management* in Vietnam by *households* and *local communities*, it is important to define the terms that will be used throughout. But what do these terms mean? For the purpose of preparing the present paper, its authors regard them as presented below.

### The Forest

Forestry is about trees and how they are protected, manipulated, and used. Two terminological issues emerge already here. First, what is a tree? Let us accept that it is a woody plant able to reach more than a certain height, say five metres or so, thus covering both fruit trees and tea plants. Botanically speaking, both bamboo and palms belong to quite different groups of plants than *wood trees*. Because, in practice, they serve purposes quite similar to trees, they will in this paper be included in the groups of plants called *trees*.

Second, how many and how big do trees need to be in order to qualify as a *forest*? And, how closely together do the trees need to stand? What about thick bush, bamboo groves, home gardens, wind-breaks, plantations of coconut palms or rubber trees, fruit orchards, and tea gardens? They all have *trees* in them and all produce either wood or products that can be used for more or less the same purposes as wood. Laying no claim to a scientific definition, the authors simply state that, for the purpose of this paper, the following kinds of *tree associations* will be included under the category *forest*:

- Both natural and planted forests having plants of wood-producing species
- Bamboo groves as well as mixtures of bamboo and wood-producing trees
- Bushland that contain species able to form a crown canopy

The following kinds of tree associations *will not* be considered as *forests* in this paper:

- Plantations of coconut palms or rubber trees
- Tree lines along roads, canals and the like
- Fruit orchards
- Agroforestry associations
- Tea and coffee plantations
- Trees in homegardens

The reason for excluding all these kinds of locally quite important tree associations is because they are not believed to be of central importance to the key topic for the discussion in this paper: what do small-scale, local alternatives that can lead to sustainable management of natural forests in the country look like? In other contexts, such as when discussing local wood supplies, contributions to household economy, and so on, they may be at least as important as the more *forest-like* tree associations to be treated here.

This paper is about small-scale management of forests, typically carried out by households or communities, with an upper and a lower limit to the size of the forests to be considered. While the limits should not be too strictly set, the size of *forests* managed by a *household* envisioned by the authors is typically between 0.5 and 20 hectares and that managed by a *community* between 10 and 500 hectares.

### **The Arrangements**

The concept *management* as it relates to forests treated in this paper is taken to mean the manipulation of a defined area of forest for the production of goods and services desired by the managers, on the basis of some kind of right to do so. The manipulation of a forest against payment from somebody else is not considered as *management*. In present-day Vietnam, this means that the following kinds of arrangements *will* be considered:

- Management of forests in areas covered by Land Tenure Certificates
- Management of a defined area of forest covered by other kinds of agreements officially or unofficially sanctioned by the appropriate authority

The following kinds of arrangements *will not* be considered as *forest management*:

- Protection of a forest as regulated in a contract, normally with payment in cash
- Traditional uses of natural forests by local people in the surroundings of their homesteads, for example for exploitation of wood or for periodic cultivation which have not, officially or unofficially, been sanctioned by the appropriate authorities

### **The Managers**

While a *household* is an unequivocal unit in Vietnam (a group of people registered in their commune as sharing the same residence), a *community* is not so easily defined. The authors define *community* as the associations within a commune (except households or groups of households based on family ties). Some of these associations may be formally established, such as cooperatives, farmers' associations, etc., while others may be informal, based on place of residence or some other common trait. In the cases encountered in the field, the *community* that could be considered as a unit managing a natural forest turned out to be the people living within a *village*. In order to qualify as *managers* in this paper, the *community* must further have a clearly defined responsibility for the forest. Although not strictly correct, the *managers* as defined here are in Vietnamese referred to as *forest owners* although, formally speaking, they do not *own* the forest, but they have renewable 50-year user rights to it.

## **Summary**

This brief survey of the forest sector of three of Vietnam's provinces covers three broad areas. In the first, covering Chapters 1 and 2, a general and very brief survey is made of the forest sector in Vietnam as a whole, followed by a presentation of a possible obstacle to community forestry in the country: its lack of a formal framework. In the second part, covering Chapters 3 through 5, examples are given from the three provinces, Hoa Binh, Nghe An, and Thua Thien-Hue, where local communities have managed to circumvent the formal restriction and indeed set up their own system for community management of a natural forest, with or without external support. The last part, Chapter 6, concludes the paper by making a few observations against the background of the cases presented, reflecting on the issue of the Government and community forestry, and suggesting further learning in the field of economics and silviculture of mini-scale forestry as a way to increase the recognition of and respect for forestry by farmers and local communities.



***Mixed agricultural-forests are increasingly entrusted to community***



## CHAPTER II: THE NATIONAL FOREST RESOURCE

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Forest land in Vietnam has long been divided into three groups:

- Special use forests: consisting of reserves of various kinds
- Protection forests: forests that protect watersheds, dams and embankments that are further subdivided into very essential, essential, and less essential
- Production forests: devoted to wood production.

In recent decades, however, the “less essential” protection forests have been incorporated into the category of “production forests.” As a consequence, for management purposes, there are the following three main categories of forests:

- Special-use forests
- Very essential and essential protection forests (with different restrictions on management)
- Production forests and (former) less essential protection forests (with the same rules for management)

While some less essential protection forests have been reclassified as production forests, as documented in the two national forest inventories of 1995 and 1999, there has also been a rapid change in the classification of other forests from the *production* category to the *protection* category (in this case including “less essential” protection land). Between the two forest inventories of 1995 and 1999, about two million hectares were re-classified in this way. Two main reasons can be given for increasing the area of land in the “protection” category:

- Recent government policies discouraging exploitation of natural forests, reducing the logging quotas from an annual total of about 4 million m<sup>3</sup> in the country ten years ago to less than a tenth of that volume today.
- The impact of the market orientation of the economy.

Increased government emphasis on the protective role of the forests has led to more areas of land being classified as protection forest land. The effect of the second factor, the market orientation, is more indirect. At first glance, such a re-orientation of the economy would be assumed to favour an increasing share of forest land being classified as *production* land, so that its full economic potential could be realised. Obviously, something else has happened.

In the past, government subsidies for *production* forestry provided the life-blood of many forest management units, especially State Forest Enterprises. At present, such support has been terminated. Production-oriented forestry must now find its own way in the market. Given the poor state of most forests, this may be easy for the government to say but very difficult for the enterprises to do. For *protection* forestry, however, the government still provides subsidies. This means that Management Boards for watershed forests and other bodies managing protection forests are assured of continued financing from

the State. State Forest Enterprises are also entitled to State funds for management of protection forests. By re-classifying land they hold from the *production* into the *protection* category, enterprises and other bodies managing such land can ensure continued payments from the State. The fact that the former category of "less essential protection forest" has now become incorporated in the production category has, on the other hand, provided a counterbalance, so that a larger total area than given in the latest inventory is now classified as "production forest".

### **Ownership of Forest Land**

A few years ago, the Prime Minister instructed provincial authorities to clarify the ownership structure and speed up the allocation of forest land to households. The national forest inventory of 1999 provides data on both matters. The forest areas were divided between the following kinds of managers:

- State business units
- Management Boards for watershed protection areas
- Management Boards for special-use forests
- Commercial joint ventures
- Households and collective bodies
- Units of the Armed Forces
- Others

The area of forest managed by households and collective bodies is reported to be approximately two million hectares, or 18% of national forest land. Generally speaking, however, this kind of management is a northern phenomenon. Even in the north, however, the picture seems to be one of great variation between provinces. In provinces in the northern midlands and mountains, the share varies between 10 and 77 percent, in the northern part of the coastal area between 16 - 47% and in the southern coastal area between 0 - 29%. In other parts of southern Vietnam, virtually no forests are formally allocated to households and collective bodies.

In 1999, the forest with "other" ownership was 3 million hectares, corresponding to 27% of the total. The variation between provinces is again striking. For example, among provinces in the northern midlands and mountains, the share of "other" units responsible for management varies between 0 - 54 %, in the coastal provinces between 0 - 58%, and in the provinces in the southern highlands between 10 - 30%. For much of this land, the responsibility for management is "unclear" or "undefined." In all likelihood, however, the real difference is not so marked; much of it can be ascribed to different interpretations of the local situation and different ways to present it.

### **Administration of Forests at the Local Level**

Under the provincial People's Committee, two agencies are in charge of forestry:

- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (often with a Forestry Development Branch): responsible for technical issues related to management and development of forest resources.
- Forest Inspection Branch: responsible for guarding the forests and ensuring that all agencies managing forests do so in accordance with the Law on Forest Protection and Development and related decisions and guidelines.

While both agencies have a parent body in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Hanoi, they mainly take orders from the provincial leadership (but many technical directives originate from Hanoi). The same pattern is replicated at the district level, where there is a unit for agriculture and rural development that covers forestry, as well as a Forest Inspection Station (in all forest-rich districts). Further, the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development normally administers a number of State Forest Enterprises often established on a district basis. For different kinds of nature reserves as well as for major watersheds, Management Boards are set up with the duty to ensure that the areas are properly protected and used.

For extension in agriculture and forestry, there is an Extension Centre within the provincial Department for Agriculture and Rural Development and an Extension Station at the district level. After the extension system was created in 1993, these units have slowly grown to their present, quite modest, size. There is, finally, also one person paid by the Government in forest-rich communes, guiding the local people in their forestry activities.

### Areas under Forest

The 1995 national forest inventory indicated that something was happening with the long-term downward trend in forest coverage in the country. It seemed that the rate of destruction in natural forests was much smaller than before. In combination with continuing reforestation activities, this had led to a small increase in the area under forest. That the trend observed in that inventory was not only temporary was confirmed in the 1999 national inventory; indeed, it seemed that the area of forest in the country was by then increasing rapidly. Forest areas as given in inventories carried out by FIPI (the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute) at irregular intervals give the following areas of natural and planted forests in the country from 1935 to 1999 (see Table 1).

Year	Area of Natural Forest (1,000 ha)	Area of Planted Forest (1,000 ha)	Total Forest Area (1,000 ha)
1935	14,000	0	14,000
1976	11,100	90	11,200
1980	10,500	420	10,920
1985	9,300	580	9,880
1990	8,400	750	9,150
1995	8,300	1,050	9,350
1999	9,400	1,500	10,900

Based on the figures in Table 1, average annual changes in the area under natural forests and forest plantation can be computed (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: ANNUAL CHANGES IN NATURAL AND PLANTED FORESTS, 1935-1999			
Period	Change in Natural Forest (1,000 ha/year)	Change in Planted Forest (1,000 ha/year)	Net Change (1,000 ha/year)
1935 - 1976	- 70	+ 2	- 68
1976 - 1980	- 148	+ 66	- 82
1980-1985	- 235	+ 32	- 203
1985-1990	- 175	+ 32	- 143
1990-1995	- 36	+ 61	+ 25
1995-1999	+ 298	+ 106	+ 403

Since 1990, the most significant changes in the trend concern natural forests. In the 1990-1995 period, the annual reduction in area of such forests became only about a fifth of previous values. Since 1995, the speed of change in areas under natural forest increased further, now leading to an *increase* in the area of such forest, an event not recorded since the inventories began.

It is widely believed that the main reason behind the increase in area of natural forest is the decreased extent of shifting agriculture, and that that decrease, in turn, essentially is an effect of the national self-sufficiency in basic foodstuff achieved by 1990. Before that time, localities everywhere in the country were strongly encouraged to grow all the food they needed. Since then, there is no longer a need to do so. There is rice available in the markets everywhere, at quite reasonable prices. Instead of cultivating steep swidden fields far away, people in mountainous areas have intensified their food cultivation practices on the best land they have and have also increasingly turned to alternative ways of earning a living. As a result, land on hills and mountains left fallow after a cycle of cultivation is now gradually being re-vegetated in a natural process. As bushes growing back on fallow land or coppices from stumps had reached a certain height, the vegetation became classified as "forest" in the inventories.

In the first half of the 1990's, the government increasingly came to regard the farmers as trustworthy users of forest land without a forest cover. Increasing areas of such land were allocated to them for forestry or agroforestry purposes. It became increasingly evident that the farmers were using the land allocated in a productive and sustainable way. Even though there were no strict demands to reforest the land allocated to its new owners, it was noted that the forest coverage in areas where all bare forest land had been allocated was increasing, essentially through natural regeneration.

Not all is good, however. The volume of stem wood in the forests in the country is still shrinking. It is estimated that the forests contained some 660 million m<sup>3</sup> of stem wood in 1992. By 1999, that figure had shrunk to 580 million, indicating an average reduction of some 10 million m<sup>3</sup> or about 2%. The decrease is



not uniform over the country. There was actually an increase in the northwestern part of the country, where the volume of wood was very low to start with and where the increase in area under forest was especially large. The inventories did not provide data that could verify whether the losses in each of the seven years were of roughly similar size, decreasing over the years, or increasing.



**Afternoon clouds rolling in over a farmstead.**



### CHAPTER III: PRINCIPLES FOR LOCAL MANAGEMENT OF FORESTS

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In the early 1990's, policy and detailed guidelines were developed for allocation of forest land to non-state units. To date, the allocation following those guidelines has mainly concerned "forest land without forest cover," mostly located relatively close to villages. Most of the land has been allocated to individual households, at an average of some two hectares per household. When unforested forest land was allocated in a village, land with bamboo groves or plots of forest on it planted by the households themselves, possibly with support from the World Food Programme, were also allocated, so they also became formally owned by the households.

After the allocation process has been finished in a locality, the households receive Land Tenure Certificates, giving them the right to use the land for "forestry" or "agro-forestry" purposes, free of user charges. The "five rights" defined in the Land Law (rights to transfer, exchange, lease, and bequeath the land use right and use it as collateral for loans) do not, however, include formal ownership of the land as such. The Certificates have a validity of 50 years and are renewable. In case of expropriation, the land user is compensated for his investments in the land. In Vietnamese texts, the person or organisation holding a Land Tenure Certificate to a piece of forest land is referred to as *chu rung*, or "forest owner."

During the early 1990's, "forest land without a forest cover" was the focus of government attention, because it was frequently badly misused. As it was seen not to belong to anybody, everybody used it and nobody cared for its long-term productivity. The allocation of such land against Land Tenure Certificates has in fact proved to be a methodological solution to the problem. The land has now got its owner who has a clear interest in the long-term productivity of the land. It is true that the dream of many foresters, that the households would plant all the land received with forest trees, has not become reality. There has however been a general trend for the land to come under more permanent vegetation protecting it better against erosion. Some land, close to the homesteads, has been planted with vegetables or fruit trees while areas further away have been left to regenerate a forest cover by themselves, often first with bamboo and bush. So far, however, less than half of the "forest land without forest cover" in the country has been allocated in this way. The remainder may formally be held by a State Forest Enterprise, but is often used by farmers for food production or grazing, activities that prevent it from reverting to forest.

#### **Natural Forests**

It was relatively easy for the government to allocate land that had no forest because it possessed virtually no commercial value. Still, in most cases, it was easy to find households willing to accept the land on the conditions given in the Land Tenure Certificates. When the stewardship problem of improved use of forest land without a forest cover had been solved, the government turned its attention to the second most serious case of misuse of forests: previously exploited, degraded natural forests.

Again, lack of ownership was identified as the problem. No State Forest Enterprise was interested in protecting the forests (because they were virtually value-less) and local people had no feeling of ownership so everybody used the forests for their own short-term purposes. For many years, local households or organisations have been engaged by State units to protect natural forests against payment in cash of up to 50,000 dong (USD \$3) per hectare annually. These protection contracts are intended as a temporary solution, meant to protect the forests against destruction until a permanent solution for their management is found. Two methodological problems in arranging a suitable management set-up for natural forests have been identified. First, the forests *have* a value, albeit in most cases not a high one, thus requiring some guidelines on how to use that value. Second, it is not self-evident that households or groups of households would be the new forest owners.

Over the past two years, a series of 14 drafts of "rules for sharing of benefits from management of natural forests between State and non-State units" have been circulated for comments. On 12 November 2001, the Vice Prime Minister signed off on Decision 178 on behalf of the Prime Minister. In principle, that decision solved the first problem by stating who should get how much of a harvest in a natural forest managed by a non-State unit. It remains to be seen, however, whether it is a functional instrument for community-based forest management. In all likelihood, it will turn out that it needs further adaptation to the local reality in different parts of the country. Such changes of regulatory documents, quite common in the country, should be seen as a normal process of learning from field experience.

For the discussion in this paper, only the parts of Decision 178 concerned with protection and production forests allocated are of interest. Rights of recipients of such forests are given in Article 5 (protection forests) and Article 7 (production forests). The responsibilities of the recipients are presented in Article 12. Those three articles are reproduced in slightly abbreviated form in an unofficial English translation (see Box 1).

BOX 1: ABSTRACT FROM DECISION 178- ARTICLES 5,7, & 12	
Article 5: Watershed Protection Forests: Households and individuals who have been allocated watershed protection forests for management, protection and assisted natural regeneration have the following rights:	
1	Be paid by the State for management, protection and assisted natural regeneration in accordance with the corresponding approved project document.
2	Collect subsidiary products such as flowers, fruit, oil and resin when assisting natural regeneration within the limits given by the applicable regulations.
3	Cut dead or broken trees, trees attacked by pests, and wood left on the ground from previous harvests after having received a harvesting permit by the Department. Products obtained in this way can be freely sold in the market.
4	In bamboo forests, have the right to cut bamboo stems, but only after the crown cover has reached 80% and then only up to 30% of the number of stems. After paying taxes, the households and individuals are entitled to the entire value of the products.
5	When the forest is mature for harvesting, have the right to carry out selective cutting of up to 20% of the wood volume except for trees classified as "rare and precious"... after receipt of a logging permit from the Department... After payment of taxes, the households and individuals are entitled to 85-90% of the value of the harvest, with the remainder to be paid to the State.
Article 7. Natural Production Forests: Households and individuals who have been allocated natural production forests have the following rights:	
1	Intercultivate agricultural crops, medicinal plants or use the land for grazing of domestic animals and also other purposes as long as the activities are conducive to the continued growth of the forest.
2	Collect wood and non-wood products obtained as a result of silvicultural operations in the forest.
3	Cut wood for domestic purposes, except for trees classified as "rare and precious"... For major repair of a house, up to 10 m <sup>3</sup> can be cut. Applications for logging by households and individuals must be certified by the commune People's Committee and approved by the district People's Committee who will then issue logging licenses. The harvest shall be done under instruction and follow-up by the local commune. The wood cannot be sold.
4	When the forest is mature for major harvest, the household or individual shall submit an application for logging to the commune People's Committee for consideration and then forward it to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for approval and issuance of a logging license... After paying taxes, the value of the wood harvested is to be divided in different ways depending on the status of the forest at the time of allocation to the household or individual, as follows: a) For forests dominated by trees - Exhausted forest: The household or individual has the right to the entire value of the forest. - Forest under regeneration after shifting cultivation or cutting, with trees of an average diameter below 20 cm: 70-80% of the value for the household or individual, the remainder for the State. - Medium or rich forest forest with a wood volume of over 100 m <sup>3</sup> per ha: 2% of the value of the wood harvested for each year since the forest was allocated going to the household or individual, with the remainder paid to the State. b) For forests dominated by bamboo - Households and individuals have the right to exploit the forest in accordance with regulations in force. After paying taxes, 5% of the value of the harvest is to be paid to the State, with the remainder belonging to the household or individual.
Article 12. Responsibilities: Households and individuals who have received forest, either allocated to or leased by them have the following responsibilities:	
1	Manage, protect and use forests allocated or leased for the purposes and within the area for the allocation or lease given in the decision by the competent authority.
2	Maintain and develop the forest resources allocated or leased. Households and individuals must ensure regrowth of the forests within one year after harvesting
3	Fulfill all financial obligations as stated in applicable laws.

### ***The Community as Forest Manager***

The second question mentioned above was to whom the natural forest should be allocated. The Land Tenure Certificates are legal documents that can only be signed by legally recognised bodies, such as households, individuals, and different kinds of business organisations. Communes are legal units, but *not*

villages, hamlets or "communities" of people living there. While the "bare" forest land mostly is located relatively close to villages, the poor forests are often located quite far away. For that reason, households (or individuals) will often have difficulties protecting and managing a piece of such forest. Business organisations are generally uninterested because of the low present value of the forest and the lengthy period of protection needed before the trees can be harvested. Often having thousands of inhabitants, *communes* are generally seen as too large for effective protection and management of a forest; if allocated to them, the forests would risk remaining in a situation of open access, seen as having "no real owner."

Experience from Vietnam and elsewhere suggests that a unit larger than a household but smaller than a Vietnamese commune might be the best management unit for a block of natural forest. In the Vietnamese context, this could be a "village" (variously known as *lang*, *ban*, *thon*, *xom*, *buon*, *ap*, etc.), several of which form a commune. Sometimes, however, even villages are too large, with several hundred households. In such cases, sub-units of villages, often known as *cum* ("hamlets"), would be more suitable. Traditionally, forests in the neighbourhood of villages are seen as belonging to the entire village or hamlet. No family or any other group in the village should have any special rights to the forest and its products. In consequence, a management unit must be found which is seen to represent the entire village.

Allocation of forest land to households, individuals, and organisations has, in recent times, been regulated by Decision 02 (1994) and Decision 163 (1999). According to Decision 02, local people were free to decide whether they wanted to receive forests on a household by household basis or if they wanted a larger group (for example a few households or a village community) to receive the land and manage it for a common purpose. The normal result of allocation of forest land in a commune was that most of the land was divided between households but that some land was entrusted to larger groups.

In most places, this worked well in practice but was not supported by existing forest policies. As explained earlier in this section, the Land Tenure Certificates issued subsequent to allocation of land are legal documents that can only be signed by legally recognised bodies. Households qualify but not groups of households or village communities. Decision 163 solved this contradiction by requesting land allocated to non-legal bodies to be re-allocated to legal ones.

Most of the drafts in the series of proposals for rights and responsibilities in management of forests by non-state units developed over the past two years had a clause covering the case of a village community managing a forest. In Decision 178 (12 November 2001), no such article was included and the decision refers only to "Rights and responsibilities of households and individuals who have received forests and forest land, either allocated, leased, or contracted." A number of cases encountered in the field also indicate that the initial preference among many villagers for collective responsibility for natural forests has been replaced by a desire for household level management units. In those cases, the villagers simply

divided their commonly held land in household patches. The duty of the authorities in implementing Decision 163 in the field then merely became registering the sub-division.

Clearly, the character and location of the forest has something to do with the preference for household or larger units for management. For relatively small areas of relatively good forest located relatively close to the homesteads, preference is almost universally for household management. For larger areas of forest, especially if poor and located far away, the preference is instead for sharing of the management duty among members of a larger community.

### **Production/Protection Forests**

About half of all forests in Vietnam are classified as protection forests. The exact borders between production and protection forest land are, however, seldom defined. A forest may be classified as a protection kind for various reasons. One reason is that it protects something, normally a downstream investment such as a dam. State Forest Enterprises and other organisations often wish to have their forests classified as protection forests in order to be paid by the government for protecting them. Also, households may feel that the benefits from having protection forests outweigh the restricted user rights. Managers of protection forests are aware of the temporary character of the payment for protection, but seem convinced that some other kind of benefit will follow when payments cease.

In recent years, the government held a more or less equally generous attitude to protection and production forests. For example, in Programme 327 (1992) for re-greening of upland areas, activities were supported in both kinds of forests. As modified in Decision 556 (1995), however, state funds were essentially directed to protection forests. A number of more recent decisions point in the same direction. For example, Decision 187 (1999) instructs State Forest Enterprises to make a clean separation between activities of a business character, based on production forests, and those of a public service character, based on nature reserves and protection forest land. For the first kind of activities, the enterprises will have to earn their way in the market while, for the second, they can continue to count on state support. Similarly, Decision 661 (1998) provides funds for the National Five Million Hectare Reforestation Programme, but only for reforestation and protection on land classified as nature reserves and protection forest land. For reforestation on production forest land, supposed to constitute more than half of the areas in the Reforestation Programme, the government places its trust in the market and in the self-interest of households and other economic organisations.



## CHAPTER IV: LOCAL FOREST MANAGEMENT IN HOA BINH

Hoa Binh is a hilly, midland province located in the northwestern part of Vietnam, about 100 km southwest of Hanoi, with few high or steep mountains (see Figure 2). The province with its 4,750 km<sup>2</sup> has some 800,000 inhabitants, reflecting a population density of 170 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, slightly below the national average. The province is divided into 10 administrative units, 9 districts and the provincial centre, Hoa Binh town. Each district is in turn divided into 15 to 35 communes that are unofficially divided into villages. With some 60% of the population, the Muong constitute the majority ethnic group in the province. Other groups are the Kinh (18%), Thai (12%), and Zao, Tay, and Mong.

About 80% of the households in the province live from agriculture, with irrigated rice being the most important crop. All farm households hold paddy land, allocated through Land Tenure Certificates. On rainfed land, cassava, upland rice, maize, and a variety of vegetables are also grown for home consumption. Sugar cane is the most important commercial crop. Natural and planted forests are sources of fuelwood, construction wood, and many other products that are consumed at home or sold for cash.

Through its Forest Inspection Branch, the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development supervises the management of all forested land. Man-made plantations, except those belonging to State Forest Enterprises, have been allocated to households. Natural forests have mainly remained under the formal authority of the State Forest Enterprises, often with protection arranged through contracts with local farmers or groups of farmers. Table 3 indicates how land was used in the province in 1997.

**TABLE 3: LAND USE IN HOA BINH PROVINCE, 1997**

Land Types	Total (ha.)	Per Capita (m <sup>2</sup> )	% of land
Agricultural land	74,960	937	15.8
▪ annual crops	53,300		
▪ long-term crops	10,170		
▪ grazing land	11,490		
Forest land	303,680	3,796	63.9
▪ with forest cover	147,640		
▪ without forest cover	156,040		
Other land	96,300	1,204	20.3

### **The Methodological Origin: Allocation of Forest Land in Tu Ne Commune**

In early 1993, the project "Renovation of Strategies for Forestry Development" was asked by the then Minister of Forestry to develop an improved method for allocation of forest land and forests. After studying the situation in Tu Ne commune of Tan Lac district, staff of the Strategy Project designed a revised



methodology for allocation of forest land, characterised by the following three traits, each signifying a departure from previous methods:

- All land in the commune was allocated at the same time. After this process, no un-allocated, open-access land would remain in the commune.
- The distribution of land between the villagers was performed by the villagers themselves. Unless there were obvious reasons to change that distribution, the role of the authorities then became to formalise the allocation done.
- The Land Use Certificates issued for forest land essentially left it to the farmers to decide how to use the land.

The Certificates indicate in a general way that the land is to be used for "agroforestry purposes." Within that wide framework, and as long as they keep within the limits set by the Land Law and the Law on Forest Protection and Development, the farmers can use the land as they see in their own best interest.

In the new methodology, two key elements of the old one were retained. First, the Land Tenure Certificates issued after the allocation had a validity of 50 years and could be renewed. Second, the Certificates were in fact a kind of contract about the use of a piece of land, signed by the head of the household concerned and the Chairman of the district People's Committee.

Since the new recommendations for the allocation of the forest land departed from those previously applied, permission for the trial to go ahead was needed from the provincial People's Committee. After the permission for the trial was received, the forest land in Tu Ne commune was allocated during the autumn of 1993. For different kinds of forest land, allocation made in three types: bare land, planted forest/bamboo groves, and natural forests.

### ***Bare Land***

Bare land was allocated to households. In cases where a household was already using the land, for example for cultivation of cassava, the household normally received the plot under cultivation. This notwithstanding, the principle was to make the allocation equitable and fair.

### ***Planted Forests/Bamboo Groves***

Prior to the allocation of land in Tu Ne, some pieces of forest were already effectively managed by households. This was the case for plantations of trees and bamboo that families had created on their own in the past. Plantations supported by the World Food Programme during 1990-1992 fell in a similar category. In both cases, plantations had been carried out and were subsequently maintained by a certain family who was recognized as their effective owner. No Land Tenure Certificates had however been issued. In the allocation during 1993, land belonging to the two categories above was simply allocated to those who had created the plantations, either by their own effort or with support from WFP.

### **Natural Forests**

The natural forests in Tu Ne were under no immediate threat. In the early 1990's, the authorities in the commune had decided that the remaining forests had to be sustained. Fuelwood and other products could be collected, but the forests could not be cleared for cultivation.

In Tu Ne, natural forests were not allocated against Land Tenure Certificates. Instead, protection contracts were signed, where the households were to get between 20,000 and 50,000 dong per hectare per year (\$1.40 - \$3.50) for protection during the first five years. After that period, no payment was to be provided. At the time of the contracting, an inventory was made of the forest. The volume of wood then standing in the forest was seen as belonging to the State. The value of subsequent increases in volume was in principle to be shared in equal parts between the State and the household protecting the forest. This increase in value was to be realised when the trees were harvested. While almost all households in Tu Ne were eager to get a piece of bare forest land, less than half of them were interested in the protection contracts as many felt that the payment was too low for the work required.

### **Early Protection of Natural Forest in Man Duc**

In 1996, two years after the forest land had been allocated in Tu Ne in accordance with the new farmer-centred method, two consultants from the Strategy Project visited the Forest Inspection Station in Tan Lac. They had come to find out how the matter of contracts for protection of natural forests had developed, feeling that the system with protection contracts was too expensive for the government. Payments for such contracts on the scale necessary to protect the natural forests in the country for five years would amount to more than USD \$100 million.

The inspectors receiving the consultants said that no forest destruction had taken place after the allocation, because the farmers now had their own bare forest land which they could use for agroforestry purposes and also because many farmers had agreed to protect the natural forests. The consultants wanted to study a few contracts for protection of natural forests in order to learn how the clause about payments from the State for protection was addressed. The consultants got some contracts and looked through them carefully but failed to find the clause indicating the payment.

It was confusing, but the inspectors said that, "This was no longer a problem: the farmers in Man Duc commune were willing to protect the forest without payment." The consultants remembered the lack of enthusiasm shown by the farmers in Tu Ne at the modest protection rates, so they agreed to accompany the inspectors to a village in Man Duc to meet with local farmers and see for themselves.

By not being pioneers in land allocation, like the farmers in Tu Ne, those in Man Duc had lost out in the competition for State funds. No funds for protection of natural forests were available for them. However, when that commune was about to initiate allocation of its forest land (with and without forests), the situation looked different from what it did when the pilot allocation was made in Tu Ne. The farmers in Man Duc realised that there was something of value in the forests that they were to protect: fuel and non-wood products. Since all forest lands including bare land and that with tree cover was to be allocated under the program, local farmers realised access to fuelwood and non-wood products depended on their participation in the program, as open access resources would no longer exist. As a consequence, only those who hold protection contracts for forests would be ensured of their fuelwood supplies.

Further, the protection of the forests in Man Duc had turned out not to be such a heavy duty. It was achieved not through patrolling but rather in an institutional way. "What belongs to the State belongs to everybody but that which has been entrusted to a fellow farmer belongs to him." So, while everybody in the past saw it as in their right to collect what they needed in the un-allocated natural forests belonging to everybody, they now respected the "ownership" or more properly expressed, the right to the products in the forests which were allocated to other farmers. So, even though there was no payment for protection of the natural forests in Man Duc, there were volunteers for forest protection contracts for all the natural forests. In one of the villages that had 50 families, the area of natural forests was subdivided into 100 plots, 50 located close to the village and 50 further away. Fifty pieces of paper numbered 1 to 50 were put in one hat, while fifty more, numbered 51-100, were put in another one. Every family drew one number from the first hat and one from the second. In this way, each household receives two forest plots, one near the village and one at some distance from the community.

### **Natural Forest Allocated in Nhuoi Village**

#### ***Management of Forest Land***

After the methodology for allocation of forest land first tried in Tu Ne was accepted for nation-wide application through issuance of Decree 02 in January 1994, allocation of bare forest land and planted forests and contracting of natural forests for protection were vigorously pursued by the provincial authorities in Hoa Binh, so all forest land had obtained an "owner" by late 1995. The formal issuance of Land Tenure Certificates could not keep up with the real allocation in the field, but this was not seen as a major problem. Nhuoi village in Da Phuc commune of Yen Thuy district in southern Hoa Binh was no exception. When "bare land" was allocated, groves of natural forest located on such land were included in the allocation, some 2 ha. per household, with very small variations between households.

Nhuoi village has 125 households, all belonging to the Muong ethnic group. It has 130 ha. of agricultural land of which 11 ha irrigated. All agricultural land has been allocated to households against Land Tenure Certificates. Forest land in the village covers 300 ha., mostly with some kind of woody vegetation. The

average production value per person in the village last year was 2.7million dong (USD\$180) with most of the cash coming from cultivation of soybean and sugar cane. Six households in the village are classified as poor, with per capita production values below 1million dong (USD \$67).

Most of the water used in Nhuoi village, both for irrigation of the rice fields and for domestic use, comes from a small stream originating in a limestone mountain partly located within the boundaries of the village.

In order to maintain this vital water flow, the villagers decided many years ago to protect 30 ha. of forest in the stream's upper catchment. At that time, no official community management guidelines existed for this kind of common forest. By 1998, awareness of the value of protection of the local watershed had reached authorities at higher levels. In a formal agreement with the commune People's Committee, all households in the commune accepted to abstain from all kinds of exploitation in the entire catchment, some 60 ha., even prohibiting the collection of leaves for food wrapping or dead wood for fuel. The commune authorities delegated the responsibility for ensuring that no harm was caused to the forest to the village headmen in cooperation with the work groups in the villages. No Land Tenure Certificates with their attendant user rights have been issued for this land.

Natural forests growing on limestone mountains close to the homesteads in Nhuoi village were allocated to households in 1995 against Land Tenure Certificates. Borders between areas belonging to different

## BOX 2: THE CASE OF MS. BUI THI Y AND HER FAMILY

Ms. Bui Thi Y lives with her husband and two of her grandchildren in a traditional Muong house on stilts. Her two children have already married and built their own houses next-door. Like virtually all the other villagers in Nhuoi, Ms. Y and her husband are farmers. The household has 700 m<sup>2</sup> of paddy land giving one crop per year of some 400 kg of paddy. The household has two buffaloes, rented out to other families during the peak cropping season, and a number of pigs, normally between two and five, selling them off as they mature. The family, like many others in the village, rears silk worms on cassava leaves, thus making that crop serve three purposes: emergency food for humans, fodder for the pigs (boiled tubers), and silk worms (fresh leaves). The annual production of worms, about 100 kg, is sold at some 400,000 dong. In addition to its paddy land, the household has the formal right to some 4,000 m<sup>2</sup> of flat land. Ms. Y has however given that land to her two children who now grow violet sugar cane there. The total production value of the household is some 2.7 million dong per capita per year, about the average in the village.

In 1995, forest land was allocated in the village. Ms. Y and her family along with a neighboring family shared 8 ha of forest land around a small limestone mountain less than a kilometer from their home. One part of the land was bare of forest cover and is now used for cultivation of cassava and other food crops. The family had cultivated that land long before it was formally allocated to them. Most of the land obtained in 1995 was forested, however, with relatively small trees with diameters less than 20 cm. Many species were good for construction purposes. Also, bamboo was present, mainly the large *luong* variety, yielding both good shoots for eating and strong culms for house building.

Because the forest allocated to the household is both valuable and located relatively close to their homesteads, the family of Ms. Y frequently goes there to check that nobody steals wood or damages the forest in other ways. This checking involves little extra effort, as household members go there frequently to collect dead wood as fuel, to prune the timber trees, and cut vegetation competing with them, obtaining additional fuel in the process. The buffaloes are also periodically allowed to graze under the forest canopy. The household watches carefully over the development of the trees in their forest plot. When the children moved out from their parents' house, they constructed small and simple dwellings. When the forest is able to provide enough large stems, they will use them to build more solid houses.

households were identified in the field, using local landmarks such as big trees, rocks, etc. but not through clearing of vegetation since this would disturb the vegetation. Individual households thus formally obtained the full rights to pieces, albeit small, of natural forest, as behoves a "land owner" having a Land Tenure Certificate.

As a standard procedure when there are significant forest resources in a village, the village development plan or the village rules for socio-economic development (names vary) includes a section on forest protection, management, and utilisation. In the case of Nhuoi village, after the village rules had been accepted by the community, a process that required numerous village meetings, the rules were sent for review to the commune People's Committee and were then submitted to the district People's Committee for final approval. After this was received, all villagers signed a declaration agreeing to the following rules (see Box 3).

**BOX 3: KEY POINTS IN FOREST DECLARATION, NHUOI VILLAGE**

- Households who have received natural forests by the State are responsible for protection and management of the forest are not allowed to harvest the forest without permission.
- Households can collect fuelwood (branches, leaves, dead trees etc.) for domestic use but are not allowed to sell fuelwood or give it to people living outside the village.
- Households who need timber for house construction or repair are to apply for a permit from the village authorities (for up to 7 m<sup>3</sup> of timber per new house) for consideration. The village will then forward the application to the commune People's Committee and to the district Forest Inspection Station for approval.
- In the particular case of the 60 ha of commune watershed protection forest, no harvesting of any kind of forest products is allowed.
- Serious cases of violation of the rules are to be reported by the village to the commune and district authorities for settlement.

During recent years, the forests in the commune have been well protected and are now recovering rapidly. Many of the trees that were very small and almost worthless when the allocation was made in 1995 have now become quite valuable. It has also seems that the dry season water flow coming from the mountain has increased. It should be noted that this local initiative emerged without outside support.

It seems that much of the success in establishing the community forest in Nhuoi village must be ascribed to the strong, traditional capacity of village communities to govern themselves, both in preparing the rules for the forests and in managing them. The profitable cultivation of soybean and sugar cane, that provides a good income for the local people, relieves the pressure on the forests and thus facilitates the protection and development of the forest resources. As a result, the local people could afford to forego immediate gains from the forest in the interest of higher long-term benefits.



**Village children in front of the protected watershed forest, Nhuoi Village, Hoa Binh**

#### BOX 4: THE CASE OF MR. BUI VAN CHUONG & MS. CHUONG THI COONG

The family of Mr. Chuong and Ms. Coong is one of the poorest in Nhuoi, with the total production value of the entire household estimated at only 5 million dong (less than USD \$50) per family member. The household is large, with seven members of whom three able-bodied workers. It has 2,100 m<sup>2</sup> of irrigated one-crop land, yielding some 500-600 kg. of paddy per year. Over the remaining 3,400 m<sup>2</sup> of agricultural land, the family mainly grows sugar cane, soy beans and maize for sale and cassava, peanuts and vegetables for home consumption. In 1995, the family and another poor family in the village got a loan of 600,000 dong (USD \$40) from the local fund for hunger elimination and poverty alleviation, but they have not yet been able to pay it back.

The lack of a cash reserve makes it difficult for the family to buy fertilisers and this in turn keeps productivity of the land low. In the past, before their two buffaloes and a few pigs all died of disease, the family was better off. Except for a few chickens providing eggs and a little meat, the only animals reared by the family are silk worms sold for cash (about 150,000 dong per year). In order to complement the income from farming, Mr Chuong works as a day labourer, helping fellow farmers in agriculture for up to a month per year, earning a meagre 8,000 dong (USD \$0.53) per day. In cases of acute need for cash, the possibility is always there to borrow from private lenders, but the interest rates are very high, some 3 to 5 percent per month, so the family does not dare; it is difficult enough to repay the State-sponsored loan.

Like most other families in Nhuoi, the Chuong-Coong family received some forest land with forest located on the side of a limestone mountain, about 1.7 hectares, located less than a kilometre away. Unfortunately there is very little bamboo in the forest, so the family cannot harvest bamboo shoots. In spite of its poverty, the household has not exploited the forest for any products except fuelwood, hoping to be able to wait until the forest has grown to provide higher-value products.

**Children from Nhuoi village, Hoa Binh Province**





## CHAPTER V: LOCAL FOREST MANAGEMENT IN NGHE AN

Nghe An is a large province located in the centre of northern Vietnam, stretching from the coast to the border with Laos (see Figure 3). It has a total area of 16,400 km<sup>2</sup>, with high and steep mountain chains, hilly midlands, and fertile coastal and river plains. Typhoons accompanied by flooding come by the end of the rainy season and often cause serious damage. As a whole, Nghe An is among the poorest provinces in the country, but there are large differences in wealth between urban and rural areas as well as between delta/coastal and mountainous areas.

The total population is estimated at about 3 million, giving an average density of 180 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, with districts varying between 18 and 800. With some 87% of the population, the Kinh ethnic groups dominate. The Thai are the largest minority, with about 7%, but it constitutes the majority in four upland districts. An estimated 72,000 persons belonging to ethnic minority groups to a varying degree rely on shifting cultivation for food production.

### Land Use

Land in Nghe An is used for the following purposes (see Table 4):

Kind of Land	Total Area (ha.)	Area per inhab. (m <sup>2</sup> )	Share
Agriculture Land	179,000	600	11%
Land Under Forest	605,000	2020	37%
Land "not yet used"	679,000	2260	41%
Residential Land	15,900	53	0.9%
Other Land	157,000	523	9.5%

*\*This is a common name for land that is not used in accordance with a plan. Normally it denotes forest land without a forest cover which is used for non-forest purposes, such as food production or grazing.*

### Forest Land

In Nghe An, the area of land intended for forestry covers a total of 1.2 million hectares, corresponding to 72% of the total area of the province. The area of land that is actually under forest is slowly increasing, however, the quality of the new forests is low. Forest land in the province is divided into three categories as follows (see Table 5):

The forests are estimated to contain a total of 40.3 million m<sup>3</sup> of wood, giving an average stocking of 67 m<sup>3</sup> per hectare, and some 815 million bamboo stems (mainly of the small *nua* and large *met* species). Almost all the wood and bamboo grow in natural forests; the plantations contain only an estimated 255,000 m<sup>3</sup> of wood and 8.3 million bamboo stems.



**TABLE 5: AREA OF FOREST LAND IN NGHE AN PROVINCE**

Category of Land	With Forest Cover	Without Forest Cover	Total
Nature Reserves	151,000	35,000	186,000
Protection Forest Land	295,000	312,000	607,000
Production Forest Land	159,000	228,000	387,000
Total	605,000	575,000	1,180,000

### **Profitable Bamboo in Thach Zuong Village**

#### ***Management of Forest Land***

Thach Zuong village is located in a mountainous area of Thach Giam commune, Tuong Zuong district, in the north-western part of Nghe An. It has 105 households with 516 people. With the exception of a few Kho Mu and Kinh families, all belong to the Thai ethnic group. The village has several sources of income: shifting cultivation, animal husbandry, aqua-culture, forestry (payment for forest protection, harvesting of *met* bamboo) and small-scale businesses. Electricity is supplied to the village. There is one primary school with five classrooms. The road system is poor and the health care system is rudimentary. The total land area is 911 ha. (indicating a population density of 57 per km<sup>2</sup>), of which:

- 300 ha of natural forests, including 60 ha. of watershed protection forest.
- 78 ha. of forest plantations (mainly *met* bamboo).
- 12 ha. of forest groves belonging to households.
- 520 ha. of residential land, dry fields and other land.
- No flat or gently sloping land suitable for paddy cultivation.

#### ***Plantations of Trees and Bamboo***

Open land was allocated and Temporary Land Use Certificates (*so lam ba*) were issued to households in 1992. This was carried out as a trial, well before the issuance of Decree No. 02, that made provisions for allocation of forest land against Land Tenure Certificates. With seedlings provided by the district Forest Inspection Station, the households created a mixed forest covering 12 ha, with the beautiful cabinet wood *Chukrasia tabularis* together with some acacia and *met* bamboo. Both shoots and stems of *met* bamboo are now regularly cut and sold for cash. In a few years, the acacia can be cut if desired, but the *Chukrasia* will need quite some time before the logs will be large enough to fetch top prices. In 1992, the village was paid, although poorly, by the district Forest Inspection Station for protection of 60 ha of previously planted *met* bamboo. Later, the village planted another 18 ha of *met* with support from a State reforestation project.

### ***Village Rules***

Just like in the case of Da Phuc described above, Thach Zuong village has prepared its own rules for community forestry, as a section in their "Village Development Rules." Revised annually, these rules have the following to say about forestry:

- When burning in order to clear land for cultivation, prevent the fire from spreading into the forest.
- Anyone needing timber for construction or repair of houses must apply for permission. In order to minimise the incidence of flooding and erosion, trees growing along the sides of rivers or streams must not be cut.
- Anyone who cuts valuable trees without permission shall at the first occasion be fined between 20,000 and 50,000 dong, at the second between 50,000 and 100,000 dong. In both cases, the products harvested shall be confiscated.
- Those who need bamboo stems from the *met* plantation belonging to the village community for house construction must ask the Village Management Board for permission. Anybody cutting bamboo shoots or *met* stems without permission will have the products confiscated and shall in addition pay a fine amounting to the value of products cut.

Over the past few years, the village has cut 10,000 to 12,000 stems of *met* each year, with a sales value of some 80 to 100 million dong. Forty percent of the revenue is paid to the village fund for common use, with the remainder distributed among households, each getting approximately 300,000 to 500,000 dong (USD \$20-30) per year.

### ***Natural Forest***

In 1992, the district Forest Inspection Station made an agreement with the village for protection and management of 300 ha. of natural forest, classified as watershed protection forest. The village agreed to protect the forest against all forces of destruction and set up a forest protection group for the purpose. As compensation for the protection duty, the members of the group are paid in paddy, with each able-bodied labourer in the village contributing 5 kg. per year.

The community forest is mainly to preserve water resources and provide timber for house construction in the village. Households who need timber for construction or repair of houses have to apply to the Village Management Board for permission, stating the number, species and location of the trees needed and also when they plan to cut them. After considering the application, the Management Board forwards timber requests to the commune People's Committee and to the district Forest Inspection Station for approval.

Until 1998, the village also cut and sold some logs in the market. After contributions were made to the village fund, an amount of between 40 and 50 million dong was shared among village households, equivalent to some USD 30 each. However, the increased incomes from the *met* plantations, fruit trees,

#### BOX 5: THE CASE OF MR. QUANG VAN CHANH AND HIS FAMILY

This Thai family have seven members of whom only two are labourers. The family does not record their production and purchases in detail but is considered to be of medium wealth in the village with a total annual production value in the range of 9 to 10 million dong per year, just enough for them to lead a hard but stable life. The family received 0.5 ha. of bare land in 1993 for which the "Preliminary Land Use Certificate" was issued in 1997. On that plot, the family almost immediately planted *met* bamboo, a large fast-growing species well known in the trade for building materials, some 100 widely spaced clumps. For the first two years, when the bamboo was small, rice and cassava was grown between the clumps. This is no longer possible but the bamboo is now big enough for harvesting. Even the oldest stems can be left for another few years before they begin to deteriorate in quality, and the family has no urgent need for extra cash at present, so it wants to keep the bamboo as a kind of saving or insurance for the future.

The household also received a strip of land for family forestry, some 20 metres wide and 100 metres long, stretching from the bottom to the top of a hill next to the village. Since the family received it, low-value bush and trees have been cut so that the promising trees in the original scrub could grow rapidly. At present, there are already a few trees big enough for house construction, some 25 cm. in diameter. At the bottom part of the forest plot, the family planted a few dozen fruit trees, mainly mangoes and jackfruit; the latter not only for the fruit but also for its beautiful wood. Fuelwood is regularly collected for the kitchen and also for sale, but only done during the slack seasons in farming because it gives very poor returns: fuelwood which takes half a day to cut and carry to the road will fetch only 3,000 - 4,000 dong when sold to passing vehicles which will carry it to Hoa Binh townlet some five km. away.

Land for shifting cultivation has not been divided between households but is used in common. Together with 20 other households, the family cultivates about 0.3 ha every year, getting 600-700 kg of paddy. The family has seven cows. No calf was sold last year as the family wanted to keep them as an insurance against future difficulties. The household also has a few pigs. Each year, one or sometimes two are sold. At 8,000 dong per kg, this gives the family a cash income of up to a million dong. The family expended considerable labour and 900,000 dong as payment when they made a fish pond of some 100 m<sup>2</sup> a few years ago. Unfortunately, they lost all the fish last year in an exceptional flood. They plan to restock the pond with fingerlings and will raise its banks so that it will be less likely to be flooded.

The family plans to re-build their house next year. The trees in their own forest will not be sufficient, so the family intends to apply to the Village Management Board for permission to cut about 5 m<sup>3</sup> from the community forest. Before passing on the application to the forest authorities in the locality, the Management Board will ask other families if they judge the application to be reasonable.

animal husbandry, fish ponds etc. and an increasing awareness of the value of the forest for protection of soil and water resources have led to a halt in the harvesting of logs.

#### ***Land for Shifting Cultivation***

Two hundred and fifty hectares of open land were allocated to households and the corresponding Preliminary Land Tenure Certificates were issued covering an average of 2.5 ha per household. Households can only practice shifting cultivation on this area. In recent years, shifting cultivation has declined in extent; at present, households cultivate between a half and one ha per year. The remaining area is used for cultivation of short-term agricultural crops such as corn, squash etc. and for grazing.

## The Community Trust Forest in Khe Ngau Village

### Management of Forest Land in Khe Ngau

Khe Ngau village is located in Xa Luong commune of Tuong Zuong district, the same district as Thach Giam, and is equally mountainous. The village has 103 households with 533 people. Most villagers belong to the Thai ethnic group (90%), with the remainder being Kho Mu.

The village covers 1,281 ha. (indicating a population density of 42 per km<sup>2</sup>), divided between the following kinds of land (see Table 6).

TABLE 6: LAND USE IN KHE NGAU VILLAGE	
Kinds of Land	Total Area (ha.)
Ponds, Lakes, and Other Land	34
Forest Land	
▪ Natural Forest for Watershed Protection	435
▪ Natural Forest for Productive Purposes	422
▪ Plantations	10
▪ Agro-Forestry Land*	380
Total	1,281

\*Used for shifting cultivation

As there is no flat land in the village, people's livelihood has primarily depended on shifting cultivation of hill rice, the collection of forest products, and hunting. These activities have led to degradation of the surrounding forests and has had a negative impact on the environment, especially on the availability of water in the dry season.

### The Trial Project: Community Management of a Natural Forest

In 1995, in cooperation with the district Forest Inspection Station, a trial project was undertaken to manage 276 ha. of natural protection forest by the village community. Encouragement in the form of a contribution of 10,000 seedlings of *Chukrasia tabularis*, fish fingerlings, and 8 million dong in cash was made by the provincial Forest Inspection Branch. As a part of the arrangement, the community agreed to protect another 120 ha. of ever-green, broad-leaf forest and to assist natural regeneration over an area of 50 ha., where a promising young crop of *Eugenia caryophyllata* and *Lagerstroemia calyculata* was emerging.

Given that the formal rules make no provision for management of a natural forest by a village community, the villagers and the staff of the Forest Inspection Station had to find an innovative way to reach their objective: to establish common management of the 446 hectares of relatively good natural protection forest in the village. They decided to ask three trusted households in the village to "lend their names" by applying for allocation of a third of the forest each. As the entire village had joined the scheme, the request from the three families was not contested by other villagers and it was also accepted by the local authorities.

### ***Village Rules***

The village rules for Khe Ngau cover all aspects related to the community such as land use, socio-economic development, security, etc. Like the other cases described in this paper, the rules have a section on forestry, summarised as follows (see Box 6).

#### **BOX 6: SUMMARY OF VILLAGE RULES FOR FORESTRY IN KHE NGAU VILLAGE**

- All natural resources located within the village area are under management of the village community.
- People living outside the village are not allowed to encroach upon the area.
- Harvesting of timber, collection of non-timber forest products and shifting cultivation without permission are strictly forbidden.
- Areas designated for shifting cultivation shall be distributed equally among households, on the basis of the number of persons in the households.
- Fire breaks must be made when land is cleared for cultivation.
- The use of fire for hunting is forbidden and fire must not be used to clear land when the wind is strong.

The use of forest resources by community members is also regulated. Families can collect fuelwood for their own use. People needing timber for repair or construction of a house are to make an application identifying the number and species of trees needed as well as where they stand and submit it to the village management board for consideration. The application is then forwarded to the commune People's Committee and the district Forest Inspection Station for approval.

#### BOX 7: THE CASE OF MR. VI XUAN LIEU

The family has six members, the old parents, their son and his wife, and two grandchildren. Only two in the house are able-bodied labourers, the son and daughter-in-law. The family has no record its income and expenses, but is regarded as somewhat better off than the average in the village.

In 1994, the family received 1.8 ha. of forest located 3 km. from their house that they were to protect. Later, when valuable trees had emerged from the bush, they would be allowed to cut them as long as they followed instructions from the local Forest Inspection Station. The duration for the allocation, all properly documented in a "Preliminary Land Use Certificate" was 50 years, so the family did not worry that they would not be able to reap the fruits of their labour. In order to increase the future value of the forest, the family planted 20 *Melia azadirach* trees and 30 clumps of *met* bamboo in the forest nearest to their house. Both species are fast-growing and produce good building material, so they can either be used by the family or sold for cash.

For production of staple food, the household annually used about half a hectare for shifting cultivation, yielding two crops of a local rice variety per year. In total, this gives about a ton of paddy, adequate for the family. The family cultivates maize on small patches of more or less sloping land close to water courses, getting some 300 kg per year on average. The yield is mostly fed to the animals at home but can also be sold at about 1,000 dong per kg. The household also cultivates banana, taro, egg plants, squash and ginger around their homestead and elsewhere in the neighbourhood where land is not too steep. The products are mainly sold, bringing about two million dong per year.

Fish are cultivated in small ponds near water sources. Income from fish is somewhat unreliable as it depends on the erratic, local water flow. On average, however, the family spends some 150,000 dong to buy fingerlings per year and gets about six times as much when the fish are sold. The year 2001 was a bad one when all the fish was lost when water bodies overflowed during heavy summer rains.

Last year, with permission from the Village Management Board and the local authorities, the family cut about 7 m<sup>3</sup> of timber in the community forest for making a house for their son. The village has 10 ha. of *met* bamboo forest. On average, a member in the village can cut the stems from five 5 clumps of bamboo, giving up to 100 stems, each worth some 5,000 dong at the roadside market. There is, however, no obligation to cut bamboo, so families can keep the stems "in the forest bank." Last year, the family did not cut any bamboo in the community forest, but in the past they have earned up to half a million dong per year.

The village protection group handles violations of the village rules. Serious cases are reported to the Village Management Board, so that they can request the district Forest Inspection Station to settle the issue according to applicable laws. Half the amount of any fines levied shall be awarded to the forest protection group, with the remainder added to the village fund. The Village Management Board has also informally allocated agro-forestry land (380 ha) to households (3-4 ha per household on average), to be used for shifting cultivation and grazing.

#### Box 6: The Case of Ms. Vi Thi Xuan and Mr. Luong Van Tam

The young family consists of husband and wife and two children of school age. The family leads a simple but relatively good life, combining farming, forestry and small-scale business, selling items such as fish sauce, salt, batteries, lighters, and cigarettes, etc. in a small shop.

The household received 6.1 ha. of forest land for protection and utilisation, with a duration of 50 years, covering 5.3 ha of land with natural forest with bushes and small trees intended for agro-forestry production, located about 2 km from their house. Since the allocation, the family has planted 40 trees, using seedlings provided by the district Forest Inspectorate. The species selected were *Melia azadirach*, relatively fast-growing and good for house-building and *Chukrasia tabularis*, a slow-growing but beautiful cabinet timber. When passing their forest area on other business, the family stops by to check if anyone has cut their trees. They have also built a hut near the forest where they stay during the shifting cultivation period from April to November; besides, all households in the village look after the forests belonging to other families as well, as set out in the Village Rules for forest protection. The family collects fuelwood, mainly consisting of branches and dead trees, and *dot* grass, for production of brooms for sale. All big trees are protected so that the family can one day cut their own trees for a new house.



**Bamboo plantation, Thach Zuong village,  
Nghe An Province**

**Thai children from Khe Ngau village,  
Nghe An Province**





## CHAPTER VI: LOCAL FOREST MANAGEMENT IN THUA THIEN-HUE

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Thua Thien-Hue is located in the central part of Vietnam (see Figure 4). Climatically, the province belongs to the northern part of the country but formed part of the former South Vietnam during 1954-1976. The province has a little more than one million inhabitants over an area of about half a million hectares, giving an average population density of some 200 per km<sup>2</sup>. The old cultural and educational centre of Hue City with its 300,000 inhabitants is by far the largest urban area. The vast majority of the population (97%) belongs to the Kinh ethnic group, but there are locally important groups of Ca Tu and Pa Co.

The province is among the wettest in the country, with annual rainfall in the range of 3,500 to 4,500 mm. It has a distinct rainy season, falling several months later than further north, concentrated in the months of September through December. In spite of being located relatively far south (16° N) and by the sea, winter is quite cool even in the lowlands, with minimum temperatures sometimes falling below 10 degrees.

From the sea to the border with Laos, over a distance of some 70 km, five different kinds of land can be distinguished: coastal sands, swamps, alluvial areas (mainly under paddy), sloping hills, and steep mountains reaching as high as 1,800 m. The land in the province is classified into several categories (see Table 7).

The forest administration in the province has the common structure, with a Forest Development Branch within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and a Forest Inspection Station in each district that has forest. In addition, there are six State Forest Enterprises and two Watershed Management Boards, one for each of the Huong and Bo rivers. Finally, the Bach Ma National Park has its own Management Board, but, being a *national* park, it administratively falls under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Hanoi.

### **The Mountain Stream Forest in Thuy Yen Thuong Village**

#### ***The Village***

The village of Thuy Yen Thuong is located some 50 km south-east of Hue City, a few km west of the main north-south road through the country. It has 1,860 inhabitants, all belonging to the Kinh ethnic group and lies along a stream originating in the mountains of the Bach Ma National Park, where it leaves the steep parts of its descent to become a quiet winding creek providing water for irrigation and household use. The forest begins just uphill of the village. It has been exploited for wood in the past but there is no evidence of shifting cultivation.



TABLE 7: LAND USE IN THUA THIEN-HUE PROVINCE			
Kinds of Land	Total Area (ha.)	Area Per Capita (ha.)	Share (m <sup>2</sup> )
Agricultural Land	70,200	700	14%
▪ Paddy Land	50,000		
▪ Auxiliary Crops	12,500		
▪ Cash Crops	7,700		
Land Under Forest	214,100	2,100	43%
▪ Natural Forest	170,200		
▪ Planted Forest	43,900		
Forest Land without Forest	141,900	1,400	28%
▪ With Grass	23,600		
▪ With Bushes	58,000		
▪ With Very Thin Vegetation	60,300		
Other Land	74,500	740	15%
Natural Forests	170,100		
Rich	37,400	Average wood stock 240 m <sup>3</sup> per ha.	
Medium	43,600	Average wood stock 170 m <sup>3</sup> per ha	
Poor	69,500	Average wood stock 50m <sup>3</sup> per ha.	
Planted forest	43,900		

The total area of natural forest within the borders of the village is 1,966 ha. In the past, it was under the formal administration of the local unit of the Forest Inspectorate. The inspectors have not been able to prevent certain villagers and some outsiders from exploiting the forest beyond sustainable levels. They also knew how dependent the villagers were on forest products for domestic use or to sell in order to get cash for urgent expenditures.

In reality, the forest has been used as an open access resource, with no clearly defined “forest owner” who had an interest in the long-term productivity of the forest. Local people collected forest products as they needed. The State had no effective means of protecting the forest either by enforcement or paying up to 50,000 dong per hectare annually for forest protection, as is done in many other parts of the country.

### **The Case of Thuy Yen Thuong**

In 1999, the district People’s Committee, the district Forest Inspection Station and the provincial Forest Development Branch sought cooperation with the PROFOR Vietnam project in order to stabilise forest cover in the area. They proposed that a locally-based organisation protect and manage the forest. There

was no legal framework for allocation of a natural forest to a community for management. Consequently, the local authorities hoped the higher authorities would accept this innovative approach for a pilot project. Thuy Yen Thuong village was not the only one located along the foot of the mountain range where the forests were overused, but it was a natural candidate for a trial project because the villagers had already approached the local forest inspectors, asking for assistance to insure their forest would not be destroyed.

The following three objectives were set for the trial project:

- The existing natural forests should be managed in a sustainable way;
- The forests should provide benefits to the local people, thus contributing to the national goals of hunger elimination and poverty alleviation;
- The cost to the State for forest protection and development should not exceed 50,000 dong per hectare annually for protection contracts.

Once the district decided to proceed with the trial project, a series of meetings were held between the villagers in Thuy Yen Thuong and representatives from the People's Committee in Loc Thuy commune and the Forest Inspection Station in Phu Loc district. From the meetings, it became quite obvious that the villagers, both individually and collectively, were willing to make a deal giving them increased responsibility for management of the forest uphill from the village.

In an initial survey, an area of some 400 ha. of relatively good forest, about a fifth of the natural forest located within the village boundaries, was suggested by the Forest Inspection Station as site for the trial. After the villagers agreed, a more detailed inventory was made to serve as a basis against which to judge the effectiveness of management by the village community (see Table 8).

In the past, the forest identified for the trial did not have a "real owner," merely being under formal "State administration" by Loc Thuy commune People's Committee, Phu Loc Forest Inspection Station and Phu Loc district People's Committee, none of whom was able to arrange for effective protection and lawful exploitation. The authorities presented the villagers with three choices: continue as now, split the forest between the households in the village and let each manage its piece, or arrange for common management. After much discussion, the villagers expressed their preference for the third alternative.

**TABLE 8: INVENTORY OF THUY YEN THUONG VILLAGE**

Type	Amount
Total Area	405 ha. (previously exploited but still relatively well stocked with trees too small to harvest for timber)
Total wood stock	31,800 m <sup>3</sup>
Average wood volume	76 m <sup>3</sup>
Main species	
▪ <i>Desmos dumosus</i>	29%
▪ <i>Eugenia brachyata</i>	18%
▪ <i>Parashorea stellata</i>	11%
The number of trees, large and small together	between 1,600 and 8,600 per ha.
The annual increase in wood volume	2% per year or 1.5 m <sup>3</sup> /ha/year
total growth of the entire fores	600 m <sup>3</sup> per year.

### **Overall Conditions**

Since there were no legal provisions for formal allocation of a forest to a village community, the allocation required a specific decision by the provincial People's Committee. By the end of 2000, the provincial leadership gave its approval for the trial allocation. The village community and its members also agreed to a set of rules for management of the forest. After acceptance at the village and commune levels, these rules were forwarded to the district for approval that was given by the end of the year (see Box 8). During the first few years, a maximum of 50 m<sup>3</sup> of wood can annually be selectively cut to meet urgent needs of the local people for timber for production tools, coffins, house repair, etc. However, the competent authority must approve the harvest. In addition, the village has the right to collect dead wood for fuel, harvest non-wood forest products and hunt common wild animals. The villagers and the Forest Inspection Station also agreed on a monitoring system for the forest, tentatively with inventories of the wood stock every five years.

### **Village Rules**

One of the conditions for the arrangement was that the villagers established rules for their relation to the forest (see Box 9). Because of the formal character of the handing-over of the natural forest to the village community in Thuy Yen Thuong, the rules for protection and management of the forest in that village were more comprehensive than those in the other cases of community or household forest management reviewed in this paper. The villagers themselves formulated the rules following a "list of contents" provided by the Forest Inspection Station in Phu Loc. After the rules had been approved in a general village meeting, they were endorsed by the commune People's Committee and then approved by the district People's Committee.

#### BOX 8: RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES IN THUY YEN THUONG VILLAGE FOREST

##### Responsibilities of the village

- The village is to monitor changes in the forest resources with assistance from the local forestry agency.
- The village must frequent patrol the forest and prevent violations such as illegal harvesting of timber, hunting, etc. All cases of violations must be reported to the village chief and to the Forest Inspectorate for settlement.
- Emerging natural regeneration must be assisted and protected, especially in areas with promising regrowth. In such areas, no charcoal production, fuelwood collection, and timber cutting is allowed, but lianas and bushes of low value are to be cut, liberating young trees of valuable species.

##### Rights of the village

- The village has the right to manage the forest resources and to use land and forest in accordance with the law. It is entitled to a part of the value of the forest.
- The village has the right to confiscate wood and equipment of those who violate the rules and to request the competent authority to punish them in compliance with the law.
- The village is to set up a fund, to which contributions can come from local people, from awards, from the State or other donors. Deposits and withdrawals from the fund are to follow rules established by the villagers. The management of the fund is to be monitored by the commune People's Committee
- The village community is entitled to a part of the increase in wood volume. The more rapidly the forest grows, the larger the share will be for the local people. Based on the increment of the forest, the yield of the forest will be shared as follows:
  - If the increase in wood volume of the forest is above 2% per year, equivalent to more than 1.5 m<sup>3</sup>/ha, the village is to get 50% of the growth (>300 m<sup>3</sup> per year);
  - If the growth is 1.0-1.5 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/year, the village will get 30% (120-180 m<sup>3</sup> per year);
  - If the growth is 0.5-1.0 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/year, the village gets 20% (40-80 m<sup>3</sup> per year);
  - If the growth is less than 0.5 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/year, the village gets 10% (<20 m<sup>3</sup> per year);
  - If there is no increase in wood volume, the forest will be returned to the State.

It is still far too early to judge whether the trial allocation in Thuy Yen Thuong will be successful. In a joint survey of the forest in September 2001 by the community and the district Forest Inspection Station, however, no signs of recent cutting of large trees or other violations of the agreement for community management of the forest were found. Further, it will annually be considered whether the village rules for forestry need to be revised so that they can be revised as needed. The first review will be made in 2002. On the whole, it seems that the rules have been found relevant and suitable, so it is likely that only minor revisions will be needed. While the long-term success of the Thuy Yen Thuong village forest model cannot be predicted, it has already been replicated in two more places in Phu Loc district and there has been wide interest from forest authorities and projects in various parts of the country to learn about the Thuy Yen Thuong case.

#### BOX 9: FOREST RULES IN THUY YEN THUONG VILLAGE

##### Obligations of the Villagers

- The forests in the locality must be protected, especially the village forest. If a forest fire is discovered, the village, the local unit of the Forest Inspectorate or the commune People's Committee must be informed. Everybody has to participate in fighting the fire.
- Before vegetation is burnt for cultivation, the village and the local unit of the Forest Inspectorate must be informed.
- Illegal exploitation, trade and transport of forest products encountered should be stopped and the transgressors handed over to the competent authorities.
- A forest covering 15 hectares should be created around the stream flowing through the village.
- Villagers have the following tree planting duties:
  1. During the Tree Planting Festival every spring, an adult must plant at least 30 trees, a school pupil 10.
  2. A couple must plant 100 trees after marrying and 50 more after the birth of each child.
  3. Pupils graduated from secondary school must plant 50 trees, graduates from high school must plant 100.
- Every household must annually contribute five working days for other forest management activities. Households unable to do so must pay 20,000 dong to the village per working day.

##### Special Prohibitions

- No clearing must be done of forests for cultivation.
- All production of charcoal is forbidden.
- Fire must not be used in the forest in order to collect honey or beeswax.
- It is forbidden to use dynamite and electricity to catch fish in streams in the area.

##### Rights of the Community and the Villagers

The village will consider the need for wood and non-wood forest products of its members and will be reasonable in meeting them provided that the villagers concerned have fulfilled their responsibilities. Only after the demand of local collective bodies and poor villagers is met should any products harvested in the forest be sold in the market. Priority is given to the following purposes in use of the wood:

- Preparation of coffins
- For production purposes and public work
- Domestic use
- For sale, with the income placed in the village fund.

For the village collective, first priority in use of products from the forest is given to construction of irrigation structures, production of agricultural tools, and building and repair of kindergartens. The following kinds of households will be given priority:

- Those with poor houses or in need of furniture.
- Poor ones who have actively participated in forest protection and development.

Households authorised to cut wood are entitled to the following maximum amounts:

- 0.5 m<sup>3</sup> for a coffin or for agriculture production tools
- 1 m<sup>3</sup> for furniture
- 4 m<sup>3</sup> for house building.

Grazing of animals under the forest canopy is permitted provided that it does not harm the forest.

#### The Village Fund

- A village fund is to be established, replenished with proceeds from harvest licenses, sale of products, contributions from local people, cash awards, grants from the State, etc.
- Any payments from the fund must be accepted by two thirds of the Heads of the sub-villages.
- The commune People's Committee is to monitor and check management of the fund and is also to approve the annual settlement of the fund.

#### Awards

- Households and individuals who have made exceptional contributions to forest protection and management are to be commended by the village and will be nominated to the State for awards that may be available. They will also be given priority in allocation of wood and non-wood forest products.

#### Penalties

Apart from suffering penalties as provided for in applicable laws, violations of the village rules will be punished as follows:

- Each violation has to be compensated by a contribution of five working days in tending and protecting the village forest.
- Those who have broken the village rules will be criticised in front of the villagers.
- Repeated violations will be punished by exclusion from participation in traditional ceremonies and festivals in the village.



**Tree nursery, Thuy Yen Thuong village, Thua Thien-Hue province**



**The foothills of the Truong Son mountain range, Thuy Yen Thuong village, Thua Thien-Hue province.**



## CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

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This paper briefly describes several examples of community management of natural forests. A number of other cases in Vietnam have been documented by other observers, and, in all likelihood, there are hundreds of cases of such kinds of management, spread all over the country. Some are formalised like the ones presented here, most are not. Many have been created as a component within an externally supported project, while most are truly local in origin such as the ones presented in this paper.

In this last chapter, a few observations by the authors regarding the relation between the Government and community forestry is discussed, as well as a proposal for further learning in this neglected field of forestry. Based on the five cases presented in this paper a number observations can be made. It is important to note that there was no conscious selection process leading to the discovery of the five cases. Instead, the authors more or less stumbled across them when working on consultancy assignments in the three provinces where they are located.

- The duty to manage a natural forest *can* be delegated to a village community
- In recent decades, management duties have been formally delegated to village communities by local governments.
- Communities managing forests in agreement with the local authorities generally have done an effective job of sustaining and developing these resources.
- Community forest management systems are different, each of them having grown out of the specific socio-economic conditions prevailing in their locality.

### **Policy-making for Forestry**

When discussing policies for forestry in Vietnam, it is important to distinguish between *policy-writing* and *policy-making*. Most policies for the forestry sector in Vietnam are written in Hanoi by senior staff in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. When they are to be implemented in the field, it is often found that, while they may be good in a general sense, they are inappropriate in specific situation in many localities.

The Government acknowledges this "gap" between the Centre and the localities and, as a consequence, the central government strongly encourages local authorities to adapt policies as necessary to make them work in the field. Law-breaking is not sanctioned, but certainly some constructive policy-bending is allowed and even encouraged to foster development and the achievement of the broader goals defined by the central Government. The process is iterative. After local authorities in a number of places have developed better policies, effectively making or redefining policy, the improvements are incorporated in the next version of the policy by the *policy-writers* in the Centre.



## **Government and Local Power over the Forests**

The Vietnamese Government has taken quite radical decisions designed to put forestry in the country on a sustainable footing. Under the former State planning system, grants were indiscriminately made available for all kinds of forestry, irrespective of whether any monetary returns could be expected or not. This is no longer so. At present, State grants are available only for activities that are environmentally or socially desirable, but judged not to be financially viable. In practice, this means such funds are designated for forest operations on land classified as special-use and protection forest land. Activities on land classified as production forest land are in principle to be financed by the forest owners in their own self-interest.

In this transition towards sustainability, a process that has been underway for several years, the Government has recognised the weakness of its own institutions in the forestry sector, principally the State Forest Enterprises, in living up to the new demands for financial self-sufficiency. Instead, the Government has encouraged a transition from State to people's forestry, arguing quite forcefully that local people, mainly households and "individuals" (i.e. entrepreneurs), will be better able to protect and develop the forest resources of the country.

It will come as no surprise that the general guidelines of the Government have met and still meet with considerable resistance from those losing out in the process, such as the State enterprises. There is also lack of enthusiasm for the new direction among many traditional foresters at higher levels in the administration. They are unfamiliar with the new kind of forestry favoured by the Government and are somewhat removed from the everyday reality of forestry among ordinary people living in and around the forests. At the district and lower levels, the situation is different. Generally speaking, the leadership at those levels is younger, more open to change, and with a better understanding of local-level problems and potentials.

## **The Case Studies**

The five cases of community natural forest management presented in this paper are located in three provinces, two in northern Vietnam and one in the centre of the country. In two of the cases, the managers of the forests belong to the Muong ethnic group, in two cases to the Thai group, and in one case to the Kinh group, the largest one in the country.

The case from Man Duc in Hoa Binh province was developed by the commune members and was later sanctioned by the district authorities. The Nhuoi case from the same province was a village and commune initiative, also later sanctioned by the district. Both cases in Nghe An province (bamboo in Thach Zuong and the trust forest in Khe Nhau) were developed in cooperation between the villagers and the district forest authorities. In all these four cases, there was no involvement of an externally supported project in the

design of the local solution to the problem of sustainable management of a natural forest. And, in all four cases, the intent of the designers was to create something of local usefulness; if it had the additional value of being replicable or indeed multiplicable, that was an added but unintended bonus.

The case from Thuy Yen Thuong in Thua Thien-Hue province was different from the four others in three important respects. First, while it was designed at the local level, in cooperation between the village and the district forest authority, it was both radical enough and visible enough to require approval by the *provincial* leadership. Second, it was developed with support from an international project. Third, the aim of the main designer, the local forest authority, was to create something that could be replicated elsewhere in the province. Using a minimum of external funds, the design has been used in other places, though so far only in the district where it was developed.

### **Timing and Usefulness of the Cases**

Information on the cases was mainly collected in 2001, before the Government had issued Decision 178 addressing local management of natural forests. Still, it is debatable what influence Decision 178 is actually having on the issues discussed in this report, *community* management of natural resources, as Decision 178 only regulates the relation between different units of the State and local households (and other *legally* recognised bodies), *not* communities of local residents.

Observers in Vietnam are divided over this issue. Some say that the fate of community management of natural forests was sealed when Decision 178 was issued, while others state that the issuance of the Decision did not change anything. Community management was unregulated before and remains unregulated now. At some future date, however, it *will* become necessary for the central Government to clarify the role of local communities, because local communities do have a role to fill in managing natural forests. At present, the Government wants these forests to come under local control, but there are often no local households able or willing to accept the management responsibility. The five cases presented here point out that there is a role for local communities, and that these communities have been successful in convincing local authorities of the soundness of their collaborative approach to forest management.

### **Community Forestry and Food Security**

While the sample of cases of community forestry presented in this study is too small to allow firm conclusions, one aspect was repeatedly mentioned in the discussions. All the communities that had established a community forest to which everybody had restricted access were in a position of food security. They either produced enough basic foodstuffs for their own consumption or produced something to sell for cash with which to buy the missing food.

## **The Government and Community Forestry**

In its successive decisions related to management of agricultural and forest land, the Government can be said to have begun close to home. It first gave farmers rights to good agricultural land (Decision 64 from 1993), then to poorer land relatively close to the homesteads, classified as forest land without forest but in reality used for food production as well as to forest plantations on village land (Decision 02 of 1994). Now the subject of natural forests is being addressed, somewhat further away from residential areas (Decision 178 of 2001). For forests located further from settlement areas, organizations larger than a household, would normally act as the manager, though no regulation or policy has yet been designated to authorize such an arrangement. Still, the dynamic reality is there. Villagers take a common responsibility for natural forests in many parts of the country and the authorities are often content to see the process unfold.

Rules regulate. Depending on their characteristics, they may stimulate or stifle development. Absence of rules gives greater freedom to innovate, and the Government may need innovative farmers as pilots pointing the way. Depending on the local situation, the freedom to innovate may or may not be grasped, so it may or may not result in change and improvements. For the time being, the Vietnamese Government is observing rather than regulating community forestry, observing approaches emerging in the field, while appearing to wait until more conclusive evidence arises before stepping in and pushing the process through new policies.

Box 1 summarizes the rules for sharing of benefits from management of a natural forest given in Decision 178, as well as those recently formulated for Thuy Yen Thuong village. Both are based on the following principles:

- Natural forests are seen as a valuable resource belonging to the Nation, administered by the State, so the State should not simply give them away to a household or community.
- The compensation to the local managers of a forest should be fair. A small or brief effort in managing the forest gives the right to only a small benefit while a greater effort is compensated by greater benefits.
- The local managers have the right to collect dead wood for fuel and non-wood products as well as inter-plant agricultural crops and let their animals graze there, as long as those activities do not interfere with the growth of the forest.
- The *sharing* between the State and the local managers concerns only the logs felled during major harvests.
- Cutting of logs in the forest must be done in accordance with rules designed to ensure sustainability established by the forest authorities.

The main difference between Decision 178 and the agreement for Thuy Yen Thuong lies in the way the share of the wood going to the local managers is calculated. The rules for Thuy Yen Thuong require a

rapid decrease in revenues to the village if there is a slower increase in wood volumes increments than expected. Seen from another perspective, the rules give very strong incentives to the village community to ensure that no harm is done to the forest, in the process foregoing immediate gains. While the State authorities must see this as a desirable effect of the rules, there is a cost side to the State as well: the system requires regular inventories of the standing stock. In principle, this is required to determine the share of the harvest going to the village community prior to any major harvesting, perhaps at intervals of 20 years, but the villagers are likely to ask for more frequent information, so that they can know what to expect from their forest. For that reason, such inventories were a part of the agreement between the local government and Thuy Yen Thuong, (see Table 8).

The rules given in Decision 178 say nothing about the growth rates in the forest and thus require no close follow-up. The value of the wood falling at the major harvesting occasions is simply split as stated in the rules. Judging from the percentage figures given for the share of the harvest to go to the local forest managers, Decision 178 also seems more generous than the rules for Thuy Yen Thuong. Only time will show which approaches are used and their impact. Although they originate at different levels in the Government system, both sets of principles are preliminary. Based on early experiences from the field, both are likely to be revised over the years to come.

Benefit sharing systems also present the community with problems and opportunities. In many cases where a community forest management agreement is being considered, the forest in question is under considerable pressure and is likely slowly to be degrading. Most of the unauthorized or illegal wood harvesting is likely to be carried out by people in the locality, either for their own use or for sale to traders. In reality, this means that they are in a position to capture the entire growth of the forest and quite possibly more. If they sign a forest management agreement, they would have to reduce the amount of wood cut, enabling the forest to recover and ultimately become rich enough to permit harvesting according to traditional forest management principles. In the short run, this constitutes a cost to the local community. The advantage is that future exploitation will be legal. In addition, by reducing present exploitation levels, the community will build up a future resource that will belong to them. In many cases past illegal logging was not carried out by everybody in the community, but rather by certain villagers or professional loggers. In the legalised situation, the entire community would have equal right to the wood.

Most of the drafts in the series of proposals for rights and responsibilities in management of forests by non-State units developed over the past two years had a clause covering the case of a village community managing a forest. The text in Draft 13 is reproduced in Box 10 (see below).

#### BOX 10: ARTICLE 11 – FOR VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

When managing forests, village communities have the following obligations and rights:

- With participation of the local people and on the basis of applicable laws, the communities must prepare village rules (*quy uoc*) for protection and use of the forest.
- The village chief is responsible on behalf of the community, with responsibility to manage, protect, and use the forest in accordance with rules in force.
- Forest products harvested can be used for common purposes or in support of households, as stated in the village rules.
- The village community cannot subdivide the forest among its members, nor can the forest be exchanged, transferred, rented out, be bequeathed, or be used as collateral for loans.

The mere inclusion of this article in the Decision would not have changed anything in reality. Formally speaking, the village communities would still not be legal bodies and would thus not be recognised as legitimate recipients of forest land against Land Tenure Certificates. It could instead be seen as an "if so, then" clause: If, at some future time, village communities become legal units so that they can receive forest land against proper Certificates, then those rules would apply.

During the preparations for the National Workshop on Community Forestry held in Hanoi in November 2001, a few days after the Prime Minister approved Decision 17, much attention was focused on the "failure of the Vietnamese constitution to recognise village communities as legitimate forest managers."

A recognition of village communities as legal units in their own right would have profound implications, not only for forestry. And, if we look only at forestry, it is not to be taken for granted that giving village communities the same rights as other land users fills the regulatory vacuum. If the community can receive a piece of land against a land tenure certificate, it would also have the five rights associated with the certificate. As seen in the draft of Article 11 (see Box 9), those rights were explicitly denied the community, for a good reason. It would simply not be legally possible for the managers of a forest belonging to all the residents in that community to lose it, neither by mis-management nor by fraud.

Perhaps a special kind of framework is needed for community forestry, one that gives the community the right to manage a piece of forest on behalf of its members, much like we have seen in the cases referred in this paper. Such a framework may emerge within the next few years, based on field experience from cases of successful community-based forestry in different parts of the country

#### **A Proposal for Learning**

The issue of financial returns to forestry of different kinds is an important consideration for decision-making. It is quite probable that many farmers have a good "feeling" for what pays and what does not, and even if they have not grown trees by themselves, many farmers in the neighbourhood may have, giving an

indication of the value of such a venture. In a way, the situation is more difficult for foresters and extension staff who are supposed to *know* the value of the advice they are giving.

Many studies have been made which aim at illuminating what the financial result looks like for a farmer devoting his or her resources to forestry. There are, in particular, a large number of studies indicating financial profitability when a project or a plantation is initiated but a striking shortage of good *ex-post* analyses of the financial results of forestry carried out by households or communities. The unfortunate result is that the forest extension staff in the field have limited empirical data to draw on, and end up praising the general virtues of forestry and exhorting farmers to engage in forestry for both their own and the common good, whether it is economically advantageous for them or not. Over the past ten years, the present authors have been involved in four attempts to find out whether forestry is profitable for farmers. Unfortunately, the researchers did not encounter a sufficient number of cases covering the full management cycle for plantations or natural forests to allow them to draw valid conclusions regarding financial viability of such enterprises.

There is a further extension-oriented difficulty with household or community management of natural forests: the fundamental difference between such forestry and large-scale, commercial forestry. All rules specifying the rights and responsibilities of the local forest managers prepared so far, both decision 178 by the Prime Minister and those agreed for Thuy Yen Thuong village, are based on an assumption that the non-State unit will manage a natural forest in the same way as the State, i.e. by selective cutting of a given share of the trees at intervals of a few decades, obtaining relatively large amounts of logs at each harvesting occasion. For each such occasion, the local managers of the forest must forward an application to the nearest forest authority, with the formal permit given by the provincial People's Committee, a comparatively high level authority.

Cutting of relatively large amounts of logs at comparatively long intervals is almost certainly *not* the best way for a household or a community to use its forest. It would normally be in their interest to harvest quite frequently, obtaining small amounts of logs at each occasion. It may also be helpful for them to be able to harvest some logs at an earlier date, rather than wait until the forest as a whole is deemed by the authorities to be "mature." On the other hand, at other occasions they might well postpone harvesting beyond the "suitable time," saving money, as it were, in the forest until it is needed for a special occasion, such as a wedding or the building of a new house. Two issues emerge here, the first being a practical one. The formal rules for local management of natural forests need to be changed, allowing households or communities to use the forests in a way that is more valuable for them. As there will be strong local demands for such a change, the authorities are likely to stick to the "spirit" of the rules rather than to their "letter," allowing locally adapted management regimes to emerge. After experience has been obtained from a number of such cases, the formal rules will likely change.

The second issue is more scientific in character, relating to the limited knowledge base in the branch of forestry that might be called the "silviculture of small-scale community forestry." While many farmers do know how to manage their small-scale forests and most have a rather good idea of how to make them yield useful goods and services, many government forestry extension workers do not have a background in community forestry production systems. By not possessing a relevant knowledge of this field, extension staff, forest inspectors, and specialists whose duty it is to guide the farmers, may actually provide unsound advice. In order to avoid such counterproductive extension from these authorities, much learning is needed by the extension workers themselves. More knowledge in the field of small-scale community forestry would also increase the respect for the farmers and for their ability to manage household or community forests for their own good and also for the good of a larger community, further facilitating creative interchange of ideas between farmers and State agencies in the forestry sector.