

# KEY STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN PROTECTED FOREST AREA MANAGEMENT IN VIET NAM:

## Status and Trends

### Policy Brief



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#### Key Messages

- “Forest resources conservation” in Viet Nam involves does not effectively key stakeholders in Protected Area (PA) management.
- Benefit sharing is an important factor to encourage their participation in PA management.
- Indigenous knowledge and culture play an important role in supporting PA participatory management.
- Engaging with local people will improve if Management Board (MB) enhances their administrative approach.

#### Summary

Over 100 protected areas (PAs) spread from North to South Viet Nam. Although efforts are being made to protect forests, management in almost all of the PAs is not effective. There is a lack of in cooperation and participation by stakeholders living in and around PA. This is a weakness and also why biodiversity is still being degraded in PAs and livelihoods of local people are negatively affected. To involve key stakeholders, especially local communities in PA management these obstacles must be overcome, in particular the ineffectiveness of current management. Other constraints are outdated concepts of conservation, inadequate benefit sharing, disregard for local knowledge, weak capacity in engaging with local people, and conservation approaches that do not support rural development. This leads to the question, “How do we involve local people in effective protected forest management?”

#### Outdated concepts of conservation

One global conservation concept is managing the relationship between human and natural resources, in order to obtain the best profit for the current generation and keep natural potential alive for future generations. The reality in Viet Nam is that most Government policies concentrate on special-use forest protection and completely ignore development trends and reasonable use of natural resources.

#### Box 1: Contradiction between stipulations and implementation in Viet Nam

In the new Regulation for Special-use Forest Management, there is one category for species and habitat protection areas. The substance is partial protection so only some species or landscapes are protected; others are permitted to be used sensibly but under close supervision.

There is a contradiction in this regulation; it specifies that exploitation activities are completely prohibited in special-use forests, including species and habitat PAs. In practice, it is difficult to implement this regulation because it does not reflect the policy of protection combined with development and it is difficult to discern the implementation and support of the local people (Strengthening Protected Area Management in Viet Nam Project - SPAM, 2002).



Photo 1: Administrative Management, PARC<sup>(1)</sup> project, 2002



Photo 2: Co-management, Cao Ly, 2006

(1) Creating Protected Areas for Resource Conservation Using Landscape Ecology Project

## Benefit sharing from conservation is an important factor

In many Viet Nam PAs, local people are slightly or not involved in conservation and satisfactory benefit sharing; as such, their needs are not being addressed. Some activities involve the participation of local people, but they are either hired as laborers or they are not awarded appropriate income. Hence, local people refuse to participate or find other work at a higher income. They have little or no interest in coordinating with MBs for managing PAs.



Photo 3: Handy craft as hired labor, Quoc Binh, 2003

## Traditional cultures and experiences are disregarded

It is common for policies to ignore indigenous knowledge and customs, which leads to lack of success in implementation. Traditional culture plays an important role but MBs still manage PAs in a top-down fashion and

### Box 2: Contract on forest protection in three national parks in The central highland of Viet Nam

Three national parks—Chu Mom Ray, Yok Don, and Chu Yang Sin—signed contracts with local households to protect some forest areas inside the park area for 100,000 dong/hectare/year (before 2007 this was 50,000 dong/hectare/year). The average area contracted to households was about 20–30 hectares/per household. The average income from this activity was about 6% of household gross income. In reality local people just give a cursory check of the forest and the forest fire situation and inform the MB. Although most of the forest area has been allocated to local people to protect for a long time, to date some of them do not even know where their PA is located. Hence, local people are deemed as hired labor, they have no role in management, they are always on the defensive, and do not display any willingness to cooperate with the MB.

tend to ignore it. Many indigenous “rules” related to the environment are side-stepped because they do not conform to the current conservation policy of the Government.

### Box 3: Local customs and experiences In using forest resources and customary laws

#### Use of medicinal plants, food, and firewood from the forest

Almost all ethnic minorities, living in or around PAs use forest herbs and products for making medicine or as food for subsistence. Nowadays, nearly all of the villages have small markets and dispensaries, but the local people still enter the forest to collect Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs). Firewood collection is another daily activity among local people.

#### Customary laws

Most of the customary laws for ethnic minorities in the Central Highland of Viet Nam demand permits for hunting, NWFP collection, and felling of trees for household needs, but stipulate that forest resources must not be depleted, for example: Young animals may not be hunted or trapped, likewise young trees may not be cut. When PAs were established, local people were forbidden from carrying out their usual activities under new laws, however they carried on not only for personal use but for commercial benefits as well; cattle continue to graze in PAs.

## Weak capacities in engaging with local people influence on efforts of participatory conservation

Most of the village’s forest protection regulations usually were set up by forest guard’s direction based on regulations, decisions, policy of the Government. They strictly forbid forest exploitation to protect forest resources. These rules carry strict punishments for violations and pay little or no attention to the needs and habits related to local forest product use. The local people are expected to accept them passively, and so periodic top-down communication meetings are not effective.



Photo 4: Discussing with community, CaoLy

#### **Box 4: Cases from the buffer zones of three national parks—Chu Mom Ray, Yok Don, and Chu Yang Sin**

All of nine of the villages in parks had forest protection regulations, established by the forest guards of the PA and local community. Usually they were not written in the local language on signboards placed in the village hall. Thus local people could not read and understand the information. Interviews revealed that 80–90% of households in villages attended periodic information dissemination meetings held by PA staff or village authorities. However they still continued to collect NWFPs for their needs.

According to information from the Forest Protection Department (FPD) from January to October 2008, 53 households living in the buffer zone of Yok Don National Park (NP) violated forest protection regulations.

#### **Effective approaches to participatory PA management**

Evidence from around the world suggests that ineffective issues can be tackled effectively by changing approaches in PA management.

The IUCN and WWF have recognized four issues: (1) PAs are only established when their value is significant not only for the Government but also for local people. (2) The rights of local people must be respected; they have to participate in PA management. (3) Indigenous knowledge and traditional experience should be used to contribute to PA management. (4) National governments and management boards of PAs should respect the customs and habits of natural resource use among local people and combine their knowledge with new techniques to propose solutions for biodiversity conservation. These are lessons to be applied in the Viet Nam context.

- **Changing approach**

#### **Box 5: A case of flexible implementing conservation policy in Xixuangbanna Protected Area (China):**

The Xixuangbanna PA was established in 1958, located in place bordering with Myanmar and Laos, area of PA is 2.070 km<sup>2</sup>. The people live in and around this PA are multi-ethnic minorities. Base on fact, policies for this PA were very strict to forbid strictly any activity to approach forest resources. But MB of Xixuangbanna PA was carried out of policies flexibly. The management plan of PA was low conservation in some zones and cooperation with local people to protect strictly in remains zones. Three components of this interactive management approach are: i) conscious dependence livelihood of local people and the traditional relationship between them and natural resources; ii) to encourage to improve and develop socio-economy outside of PA; and iii) A system of regulations and customary laws will be apply and combine in conservation management in PA. Recent developments in this PA have demonstrated that the conservation management policy of PA base on community participation is good (Hoang Hoe collected, 2002).

- **Suitable benefit sharing**

#### **Box 6: Participatory Natural Resource Management in Tonle Sap Lake, Siem Reap (Cambodia)**

The Tonle Sap area had plenty of forest resources to fulfill local needs in the 1970s, but by 1993, was depleted due to over harvesting by commercial users combined with shifting cultivation. A community forestry committee was established with elected members from the community. Responsibilities and a benefit sharing structure were established, with 10% of funds distributed to the commune development fund for implementation of the commune development plan and 90% spent by the community on tree plantations, forest protection, infrastructure development, and assistance for the poorest community members. The success of community forestry is dependent on an appropriate share of the benefit within the community. It has also been important to fund the re-establishment of forest resources to ensure the long-term sustainability of the resource, highlighting that benefit sharing ultimately depends on a resource base that can continue to generate benefits (<http://www.recoftc.org>).

- **Collaborative protected area**

#### **Box 7: Collaborative protected area management - Gurig National Park (Australia):**

In 1981, the establishment of Gurig NP was agreed to by the Northern Territory Government and the Aboriginal traditional owners to resolve a land claim under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. The traditional owner consented to the establishment of the NP in return for regaining title and right of use and occupation. A MB of traditional land owner and state Government representatives prepares management plans, enforces the rights of local owner, determines rights of access to others, and ensures protection of sites important for the Aboriginal population (UNEP-WCMC,2004)

## Recommendations

Human resource development for conservation (PA staff) needs to attach special importance to not only enhancing communication and community development skills among forest guard forces but also among technical staff, managers, and locally employed people.

PA management boards should also be given the responsibility and capacity to engage with local stakeholders in conservation activities. Guidelines related to conservation need to be developed and approved by villages and communes in buffer zones; they should bring a consistent and collaborative approach to conservation and reduce negative impacts on protected forest resources and the livelihoods of local people.

The protected forest management base of the community needs to be developed. It is necessary to revise relative policies and regulations to allow local communities to use protected forest resources sustainably. Recognition of local people's livelihoods based on income from forests is imperative. Management Boards must assist in the guidance and planning of PAs and allow local people to collect some NWFPs for retail and fell trees for personal use; but these activities need to be monitored closely.

The conservation management strategy should address cooperation and support for services, projects, and programs related to conservation or buffer zone development. This will enhance MB staff capacity and communities will be effectively involved in PA management.

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