

Forest Tenure Policy and Response of Forest Tenants A Case Study in Nghe An Province, Vietnam

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I- INTRODUCTION

Owing to typical characteristics of Vietnam's mountain region where flat land which is suitable for agricultural activities is limited, farmers in this area have heavily lived on forest resources and forestland. Forestland and forest products have been the important sources for daily living of local people. However, it is seen that people's activities toward forests are harmful to the sustainable development of the forests. Vietnamese government, therefore, issued a forest tenure policy named Decree 163/ND-CP (in 1999) to put forest-related people into a "limited frame" of use of forest resources. Under the policy, production and protection forests are to allocate to individuals (for production forests) and to community (for protection forests), with clear terms of tenure: volume of particular forest products can be gathered at a time and at a given season, salary for protection work, sanction, and the like.

To see the effectiveness of the tenure policy itself, and to expose how forest tenants have responded to the policy, a community named Khe Kien in Nghe An province, Vietnam was chosen for the study. The policy has been implemented in the community since 2002.

The study was conducted in June and September of 2006. On-desk analysis of secondary data, focused group discussion, direct observation, in-depth interview are techniques used for the study. Besides, questionnaires were also used to interview 84 out of 273 households of the community.

II- FINDINGS

Regarding forest tenure policy implementation:

- Officers in charge of allocating production forests to tenants did not do it in the field. They stood far from the forests and pointed out an area for the recipient. Most of tenants when interviewed, therefore, did not know exactly demarcation lines of their allocated plots (77 out of 84 informants - 91.7%).
- Certificate of forest land use right (Red book) was issued right in 2003 (one year after implementing the policy) but still not yet delivered to a single forest tenant. Therefore tenants did not feel secured without the certificate, and their right of mortgage was not handed over to them. This was explained that because there were conflicts among tenants about use of forestland for swiddening.
- Majority of forest tenants did not understand clearly about tenure system (terms in the policy) (74 out of 84 informants - 88.1%). 100% of (84) informants answered they did not feel happy with the policy, in which 63 (75%) said owing to the policy they could not plant enough cereal crops for their family's own consumption; while 72 (85.7%) said they had to spend more labour for swidden activities and livestock raising. 66 informants (78.6%) answered their household economic conditions worsen after the implementation of the policy.

Regarding forest tenant responses:

- 80 out of 84 respondents (95.2%) replied that their most important income sources (both in cash and in kind) were still from the forest.
- Illegal logging activities happened rampantly. Even the community vice chairman still joined illegal logging group often. They logged anywhere possible, regardless kinds of forest.
- There were no any households investing on forest.
- Although swidden areas were shrunk, forest tenants continued to reclaim new fertile forest areas for cropping. Swidden fields which have been seen harmful to forest sustainability, were still abundant.

III- CONCLUSIONS

The forest tenure policy of Decree 163/ND-CP, implemented in the community of Khe Kien in Nghe An province for 4 years (2002-2006), was not really succeeded. Forest-stand areas still continued to be reclaimed for cropping by forest tenants. The policy did not help improve economic and living conditions of the forest tenants, thus in most areas they continued to rampantly extract forest resources.

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