

FOREST ALLOCATION POLICY AND LEVEL OF FOREST DEPENDENCY OF DIFFERENT ECONOMIC HOUSEHOLD GROUPS: A CASE STUDY IN NORTHERN CENTRAL VIETNAM

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INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, part of forests has been handed over to local forest-related households (HHs) for years. The government expects the recipients to comply the forest protection policy not to overuse the forest, and earn income from sources other than the forest. This study was designed to examine how local forest-related people, who have different economic conditions, have used forestland and forest resources under the policy; and to determine their level of dependency on forests.

An upland forest-related community named Khe Kien in Northern centre of the country, where the policy has been introduced, was chosen for the study. Two field surveys were conducted in June and September 2006. Data derived from 78 randomly-interviewed HHs were used for this paper. The interview HHs were equally divided into four groups based on their total annual income.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forest land use:

Of the 78 interviewed HHs, 66 HHs (84.6%) have been allocated *production forestland*, while 12 HHs (15.4%) have not. More importantly, 8 HHs (42.1%) of these non-allocated ones belonged to the Very-low-income group.

Allocated forestland in the High group was considerably larger than that in the Very-low group (6.3 ha versus 3.4 ha, on average). However, swidden area being cultivated by HHs in the High group is smallest compared to other HHs.

Lending and borrowing forestland and swidden activities were popular in the community. Fifth-teen HHs have lent 26 ha to others, while 21 HHs used 17.1 ha of borrowed land for swidden.

Number of HHs presently practicing swidden in the forest (74) was larger than number of HHs which were legally allocated forestland (66). Total area being used for swidden practices exceeded 58 ha compared to quota preset by competent authorities.

Contribution of different income sources:

The High- and Moderate-income groups had more income sources (8) than the Low (6) and Very-low (5).

The High group had 31.3% of its annual income from the forest sources and 68.7% from the non-forest ones, while the Very-low group had 75.7% from the forest and only 24.3% from non-forest sources. Swidden income was especially important for the poorer HHs, while income from timber fell more to the High-income HHs.

Although less dependent on the forest, total income (in value) of the High group was still much higher than that of the Very-low group (6.7 mil. VND versus 3 mil. VND).

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the new policy of forest allocation, local people in Khe Kien village still used the forest with accommodating and unruly manners: one easily lent or borrowed forestland from others for swidden cultivation. The problem commonly occurred in number of households, regardless they are rich or poor, such the present swidden cultivation area was much larger than its limited quota. This shows a sign of poor compliance over the forest policy of the villagers.

The community inhabitants were still heavily dependent on forest resources and forestland. However, level of dependency on forests varies between income groups. The poor, especially very poor, households were more heavily dependent on forests for their living, compared to the richer households.

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Table 1. Number of HHs and area of production forestland in each HH group

Household group	Having been allocated ^a		In which lending to others ^{b,c}		Presently cultivated ^b		In which partly or fully using others' forestland ^d		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
High (n=19)	No. of HHs	17	2	6	11	18	1	5	13
	Area	106.4	-	11.0	-	11.0	-	4.7	-
	Mean area	6.3	-	1.8	-	0.6	-	0.9	-
Moderate (n=20)	No. of HHs	19	1	5	14	19	1	2	17
	Area (ha)	99.0	-	8.2	-	33.5	-	1.0	-
	Mean area	5.2	-	1.6	-	1.8	-	0.5	-
Low (n=20)	No. of HHs	19	1	3	16	20	0	6	14
	Area (ha)	103.5	-	5.6	-	36.4	-	4.8	-
	Mean area	5.4	-	1.9	-	1.8	-	0.8	-
Very low (n=19)	No. of HHs	11	8	1	10	17	2	8	9
	Area (ha)	37.0	-	1.2	-	22.3	-	6.6	-
	Mean area	3.4	-	1.2	-	1.3	-	0.8	-

^a: Source: DoNRE (2006); ^b: Source: Field survey (2006); ^c: Among HHs having been allocated forestland only; ^d: Among HHs presently practice swidden only.

Table 2. Contribution (%) of the various income sources in each HH group

HH group	Forest derived income				Non-forest derived income							
	1	2	3	Sub-total	4	5	6	7	8	Sub-total		
High	21.6	8.8	0.9	31.3	3.5	31.9	13.8	13.9	5.7	68.7		
Moderate	35.2	3.5	1.0	39.7	4.1	24.3	9.1	14.4	8.5	60.3		
Low	60.3	4.3	1.2	65.8	4.6	15.1	0.0	0.0	14.6	34.3		
Very low	72.1	3.6	0.0	75.7	0.0	11.6	0.0	0.6	12.1	24.3		

Source: Field survey (2006).