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Differentiation in Benefits from Forest Devolution in Daklak, Vietnam

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Abstract

Proponents of devolution typically presume that local people benefit from devolution. The rationale is that devolution provides local people with access to and control over forest resources that make important contributions to local livelihoods. This paper subjects this assumption to empirical analysis through a study of two villages in Dak lak province, central high land of Vietnam, where (part of the) local forest has been devolved to local ethnic people for long term (50 years) management. The study's main objective is to examine the (material) benefits generated by devolution of forest for local households as a whole as well as the differentiation of benefits among local households, including both recipient and non recipient groups living in the same village.

The study gives attention to both the distribution of benefits and the mechanisms that differentiate benefits between households. It employs qualitative as well as econometric tools in the course of data analysis. In general, results from the study demonstrate that benefits from forest devolution may significantly differ between villages. Devolution has generated insignificant benefits from timber but significant benefit from cultivable land in one village. By contrast, in the other village significant benefits from timber but insignificant benefit from cultivable land were observed. In addition, household displayed stark differences in their capacities to benefit from forest devolution. Power relations, wealth differences, and forest link (i.e. traditions and previous production activities by local villagers with regard to the devolved forest) have been the primary factors influencing the acquisition of benefits by local households from devolved forests.

Keywords: Differentiation, forest devolution, power relation, Vietnam