



Deutscher Tropentag, October 11-13, 2005, Hohenheim

“The Global Food & Product Chain—
Dynamics, Innovations, Conflicts, Strategies”

Accessing to Forest Products: A Commodity Chain Analysis on Timber in Northern Uplands of Viet Nam

XUAN PHUC TO

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Department of Resource Economics and Social Sciences, Germany

Abstract

Property relations in the Viet Nam took a sudden turn after the implementation of ‘Open Door’ policy — when Viet Nam shifting from central-planning economy to market-oriented one - in 1986. Regarding forestry, under the forest land allocation policy, the Vietnamese government allocated forest land to individual households. By giving more control over the land to local people, the government hope to improve existing forest conditions and at the same time to strengthen local livelihoods.

This paper applies commodity chain framework to analyze how the timber is exploited in the village and brought to the lowland market for sell. It looks into who actually benefit from timber, and how. The paper shows that villagers in a northern upland village locating in a critical watershed area is still heavily engaging in timber logging regardless government policy which bans timber exploitation. Timber is then brought to the lowland market through a completed web of checking points set up by government to stop transportation of timber. During the chain, there are many different actors involved, and there has been an unequal benefit sharing among different actors — villagers/loggers, transporters, middlemen in the uplands, and sellers in the lowland market, and various government officers who are working at checking points or are serving in forest-related institutions. In this process, villagers are the ones who benefit least.

The paper questions the linkage between private property and forest protection in a post-socialist country. It shows clearly that the defined rights and obligations on forest determined by private property (under the implementation of forest land allocation) do not help protect existing forest resources as villagers still believe forest resources are common property. This form of property provides villagers access to forest resources particularly timber. In this legal pluralism context, access to timber of the household is determined not by property rights defined by the government, but mainly by access to water buffalo and labour availability in the house.

Keywords: Commodity chain, property, timber, Uplands, Viet Nam