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Institutional Structures and Performance of Community Forest Management: the Case of Vietnam

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Abstract

In the last decades, in respond to the increasing rate of forest cover loss, community forest management (CFM) has been widely considered as a promising forest management system in many developing countries. In this context, local institution (rule) systems for forest management have gained considerable attention of many scholars. However, the debate on what institutional structures are appropriate for community forest management is still going on. In Vietnam, CFM models are rather diverse in origin and can be grouped into two major institutional structures. The first is village forest management (VFM), in which all households of a village belong to a forest management group. The second is forest user group (FUG), formed by a small number of households, a subset of a village. The objective of this study is to comparatively analyse the performances of CFM models under these institutional structures and to identify the determinants affecting the performance. Eleven CFM models were selected at Hoa Binh, a mountainous province in the North of Vietnam. In-depth comparative case study was chosen as the research approach, and both Rapid Rural Appraisal and household interview methods were employed. Multi-criteria approach was applied for evaluating the performance in aspects of efficiency, equity, and sustainability. The study results show that the performance of the FUG models is higher than that of the VFM models. Group size and linkage between local groups and local authorities are two key determinants. The communal forests governed by the small-sized groups, which are nested under the control of local authorities are better managed than the forests governed by the large sized groups operating almost independently. From the findings, it is recommended that under the context of the study area, the FUG institutional structure is more appropriate, and supportive participation of local authorities is necessary for the success of community forest management.

Keywords: Community forest management, institutional structure, Vietnam