

Conflicts Over Land and Forest Induced by Reforestation Project in Lao Cai Province of Vietnam

Hai Nguyen Tien, Holm Ubrig

Introduction

Land and forest are critical resources for the rural population in mountainous area. Yet, understanding of local use of these resources is missing.

This study is to harmonise local land and forest use and customary tenure with state reforestation programme and legal framework. Specific objectives are to:

- Diagnose the current land and forest use of Hmong ethnic minority group;
- Analyse the procedure and outcome of governmental reforestation project;
- Examine the conflicts associated with governmental reforestation project;
- Provide scenario for harmonising local land and forest use with state programme and legal framework.



Study site

3 sedentary villages of Hmong people in the North of Vietnam.

Methods of data collection

Combination of qualitative and quantitative methods:

- Rapid Rural Appraisal (Documentation, Interview, RRA tools);
- Land Use Inventory (Transect walk, Sketch map);
- Forest Inventory (Temporary sample plot survey); and
- Household Survey (Questionnaire interview).

Conceptual framework

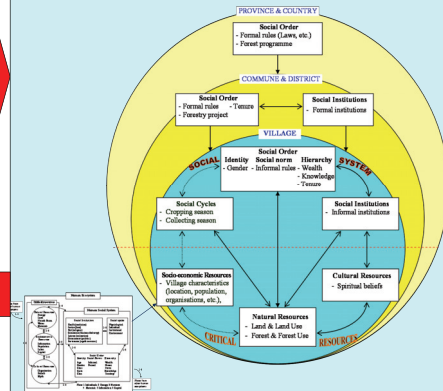


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the research
Source: Adapted from Machlis et al. (1997, p.352)

Results

Land use system in Hmong villages

- Major land-use types: Agriculture, Forest, Homestead, Rocky land and Others
- Agriculture makes up the highest proportion of the land area, followed by forest and other land-use types (Table 1)

Table 1: Land use system in the study villages

Land-use types	Village 1	Village 2	Village 3
Agriculture (%)	56.8	78.4	69.8
Forest (%)	33.2	16.9	25.0
Homestead (%)	9.4	2.3	1.4
Rocky land (%)	21.2	1.3	3.0
Other (%)	1.3	1.1	0.8

Forest use in Hmong villages

- High proportions of households in the villages make use of forests for timber, fuelwood, bamboo stalks, bamboo shoots, medicinal plants, etc. (Figure 2)

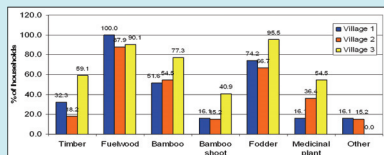


Figure 2: Forest products used by households in the study villages

- These forest products are crucially important for the villagers for home consumption (shelter, fuel, food and medical treatment) and less important for cash income generation (Table 2).

Table 2: Importance of forest products in village 1 (example)

Uses	Timber	Fuelwood	Bamboo stalks	Bamboo shoot	Fodder	Medicinal plants	Other
Home consumption	2.6	2.6	0.7	0.2	1.1	0.2	0.0
Cash income	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1

Importance level: 0 = not important; 1 = slightly important; 2 = important; 3 = very important

State Reforestation Project and its outcome

- Project objectives: Establishment of protection forest & Improvement of local living
- Project planning:
 - + Entirely done by state institutions without concerning local pattern of land and forest use and tenure;
 - + Lack of local participation (no meeting & consultation with local people)
- Project outcome:
 - + Except in village 3, few households in the villages have gained money paid by project for forest protection and plantation
 - + Local benefits in terms of forest products, cash income and other are not identified.
 - + Failure in forest plantation (survival rate of all 35 ha of plantation forest of the project in Village 3 is < 20%; survivor rate of plantation forest in other village is < 70 %).

Conflict over land and forest associated with the state forest project

Conflicts between state forest institutions and Hmong villagers over land and forest have arisen in all villages under study (Table 3).

Table 3: Conflicts over land and natural forest in the study villages

Land-use types	Village 1	Village 2	Village 3
Area of resource	99.4 ha of natural forest	27.3 ha of natural forest 7.5 ha of land	4.0 ha of natural forest; 35.0 ha of land
Actors	Forest institutions vs. households & village	Forest institutions vs. clans & households	Forest institutions vs. clans & households
Issues	Tenure: state vs. customary ownership Uses: Protection vs. products production	Tenure: state vs. customary ownership Uses: Protection vs. product production; agriculture vs. forest	Tenure: state vs. customary ownership Uses: Protection vs. product production; agriculture vs. forest
Manifest	Confiscation, Local protest	Local protest	Local protest
Resolution	Coercion & Avoidance	Coercion & Avoidance	Coercion & Avoidance

Conclusions and recommendations

- Land and forest are critical resources in the village of Hmong people.
- Top-down implementation of state forest programme/policy does not bring out local benefits but entails conflict over land and forest.
- Customary tenure of land and forest should be recognised and legitimated by the prevailing legal framework concerning land and forest management.
- Participatory land use planning and forest management planning should be considered as prerequisite for implementation of state forest programme at local level.
- Human ecosystem model (Machlis et al., 1997) can be employed to provide conceptual basis for understanding local pattern of land and forest use in holistic manner.