



Tropentag 2013, Stuttgart, Germany
September 17-19, 2013

Conference on International Research on Food Security, Natural Resource
Management and Rural Development
organised by the University of Hohenheim

Conflict in Natural resource management in Central Vietnam: The role of collective action in protecting community benefits

Nguyen Thi Hong Mai^a

^aJustus Liebig Universität of Giessen, Institution of Project and Regional Planning, Senckenberg str. 3, 35390 Giessen

Introduction

Speed of economic growth of Vietnam during recent years has highly appreciated. Industry sector contributes more than 40% while contribution of agriculture sector is about 20% of Gross Domestic Product (VPC, 2011). As a consequence of the quick economic development, natural resources are over exploited and in the contested tenure status between the local people and the outside investors. This negatively effects to the local community's benefit nearby the resources and conflict in utility and management of such resources among groups is inevitable.

In such cases, collective actions are often formulated basing on "action taken by a group in pursuit of members' perceived shared interests" (Marshall 1998). However, the challenge for collective actions is that whether or not they can achieve compromises with the stronger group or they lose their voice and lose their benefit from the conflict. Therefore, understanding conflict escalation and underlying cause of the conflict and potential actors for conflict management is fundamental for solutions to reinforce the collective action of the local community.

Material and Methods

This research based on the data collected from key informants and a survey with 36 households closed with the natural forest. Qualitative analysis is main method. Responses and perspective of the local people on forest use and exploitation of the silicate company are discussed to address conflict escalation. The role of potential stakeholders in conflict management is analysed through vein diagram and One-Sample T test about the perception of local people.

Results and Discussions:

Background of research site and the role of the common resource:

Pho Trach-one ancient village of Phong Binh commune belonging to Phong Dien district is a typical case for maintaining the customary law in natural forest management. This village has been established over 500 years. It has about 400 ha of sandy interior area with 250 ha of natural forest. This sandy forest is considered as a shield protecting live of local people, prevents sand moving, flood, drought, and storm, providing fuel wood and medicine herbs for local people, a place local people maintains their ancestor graves. Inside the forest, there are two natural reservoirs around 100 ha enough water for irrigation of the village (430 ha) in dry season.

Since 1975 after the country unified, Pho Trach cooperative has been established and taken in charge of managing agriculture production, providing agriculture services and managing this sandy forest and natural reservoirs for irrigation. Local people contributed to make dam, dikes and embankment for the natural reservoirs to reserve water. Annually, the local people have contributions for maintaining irrigation system.

Early 2005, the anxiety of Pho Trach villagers has been increasing when one sand mining company came with the permission of Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment (MONRE) and Thua Thien Hue Provincial People Committee (PPC) for sand exploitation in Phong Dien district. Since that time, issues have emerged and been more and more complicated.

Escalation of conflict and negotiation process

* *Sand exploitation encroached the natural forest.* To deal with local people, the sand mining company conducted inventory of destroyed trees. With low economic value and scattered of destroyed trees, the compensation was rather low. According to law, the natural forest belongs to commune, so this compensation is contributed to school building instead reinvestment to forest development or agricultural production. Therefore, without land use certificate (LUC), the community has no voice during the negotiation and has to accept the low compensation, while environmental value of the natural forest was ignored.

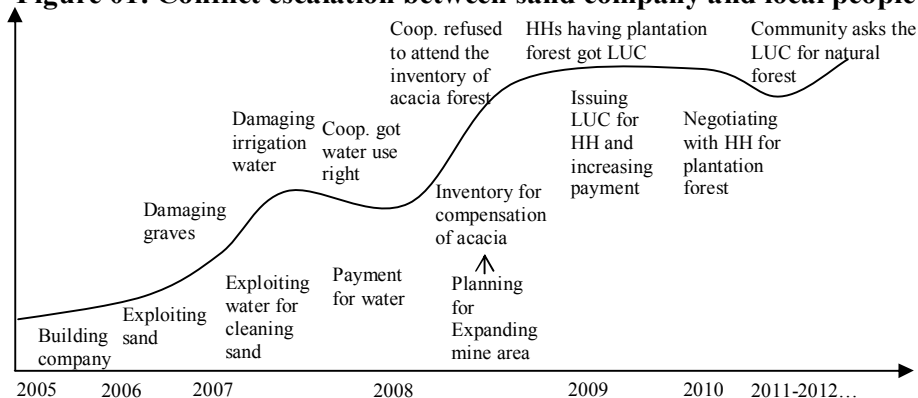
* *Water use and compensation.* Sand company took water from natural reservoir for cleaning sand with permission of Department of Natural Resource and Environment (DONRE). Be aware this activity can damage its irrigation water, the Co-operative sent application to DONRE for water use right of these reservoirs. After get water use certificate, Pho Trach cooperative required company some compensation for water use. This compensation is enough only for bumping water from the river to rice fields during the dry season. Sand exploitation created big and deep holes which absorb water from natural reservoirs and water usage of sand company affected to gardens closing with the forest. The traditional mat weaving of women in the area is also harmful because the material fields are dryer. These issues have never been mentioned by sand company.

* *Grave compensation and spirit of local people.* Sand exploitation invaded the graveyard of local people, place of hundred-year-old graves. Only a small compensation is paid for the destroyed graves. Many graves near the mine area were damaged, but the company did not discuss with local people about this issue and also had no commitment for the safe of graves from company activities. Therefore, many clans had meetings to petition to company and require it stopping the exploitation near the graveyard and forest areas of community.

* *Plantation forest compensation and land lost.* The sand exploitation needed 50 ha of plantation forest of the local people. Without land use certificate (LUC), the compensation for the plantation forest was too low. The cooperative and local people did not agree to hand over this area to the company. Then the compensation was suggested with higher level. However, many people in forest plantation group are not ready for receiving the compensation even higher than before. The company promoted issuing LUC to HHs participated in forest plantation to pursue each HH leaving this forest land for the company. Unfortunately, local people are aware that after sand company finish sand exploitation this area will be sunken like a reservoir so they will completely lost their.

From issues above, the conflict escalation can be summarised as follows (figure 01):

Figure 01: Conflict escalation between sand company and local people



Underlying conflict causes in the area:

* *Ignoring the informal property rights:* conflicts appear when the outsider comes with legal right to use local resources which are used to belong to local people. Ignoring indigenous rights, local culture and no negotiation with local people for their benefit from local resource are underlying conflict causes in this case.

* *Lack of the consistency among the government authorities:* With the characteristics of this natural forest, it is considered as the protection forest (according to law) and managed by local authorities, the community can only sign the contract to protect and get a small compensation. While keeping this principle when refusing to issue the LUC for local people with their forest, the provincial authorities issue the permission for the sand mining company for sand exploitation nearby the natural forest which damaged the forest and negatively affected to local livelihoods.

* *Interest of outsiders vs. local benefits:* The sand company concerned only sand volume to exploit, while its benefit damaged the local livelihood opportunity. The control of sand company created negative impact on the community in using the common resources. Awareness of long-term benefit from forest related to economy and environment, the local people disagreed with the decision of the government to withdraw land and allocate to company for sand exploitation.

Collective action and conflict management:

The formulation of collective action in Pho Trach village was originated the awareness of the local people on their weak voice in negotiation process with the sand company. Confront with issues created by sand company, the community had organized many meetings and send its representatives to negotiate with company. Without legal rights, the local people collected proofs on their customary law related to natural forest and considered these as their foundation for claiming the LUC and negotiating for their benefit.

As a result of survey in table 01 and 02, in process of looking for the supports from the local authorities in conflict management, local people are aware that it is difficult to find out solution of conflict resolving related common resources use (t=5.292 and respective P=0.0001). They also confirmed that each HH cannot resolve conflict between sand company and local people. Pho Trach cooperative was identified as their representative for negotiations (t=2.935 and respective P=0.006). Whereas Commune People’s Committee (CPC) has low trust from local people to be representative for them in conflict management, although in practice this is legal and power organization closest to local people.

The power organization that can involve in the conflict management is District People’s Committee (DPC) and Provincial People’s Committee (PPC). However, DPC or PPC seem to be far to access and request for help (p=.096>0.05).

Table 01 and 02 : Opinion of local people on the role of stakeholders

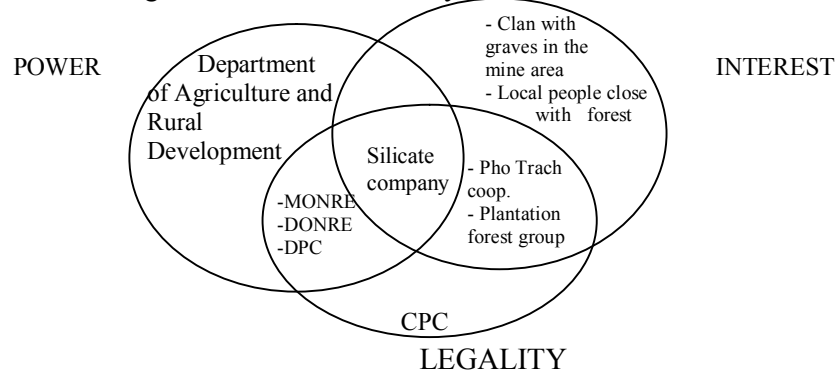
Role of Actors in conflict management	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Difficult for conflict management	36	.83	.378	.063
HHs resolve conflict with company	36	.00	.000 ^a	.000
Co-operative involving	36	.72	.454	.076
CPC resolves conflict	36	.47	.506	.084
DPC/PPC resolves conflict	36	.69	.467	.078

a t cannot be computed because the standard deviation is 0.

Actors	Test Value = 0.5 (One-Sample Test)					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Difficult for conflict management	5.292	35	.000	.333	.21	.46
Cooperative involvement	2.935	35	.006	.222	.07	.38
CPC involvement	-.329	35	.744	-.028	-.20	.14
DPC/PPC involvement	1.711	35	.096	.139	-.03	.30

Through discussions with state bodies on power, legality and interest of stakeholders involving in conflict management, we can see that actors involve in conflict management in different levels. In which groups have low voice are in grassroots levels such as Pho Trach cooperative, forest-plantation group, Clan with graves in the mining, local people close with forest. Sand company with benefit directly relating to sandy forest has power and legal rights to sand exploitation. From salience of actors involving in conflict management and put these actors to Venn diagram (figure 02), we found that groups have high interest have no power or legality, while groups have high power or legality often have no relationship to those resources. Then to manage conflict in this area, it needs involvement of actors with high power in conflict management between local people and sand company.

Figure 02: Venn diagram of stakeholder analysis



Why supporting to collective action?

The pressure of economic growth and natural resource use for many development activities has created conflicts. Normally, marginalized groups (weak voice, poor, no legal rights on resources) are often left behind of the development. In this case study, the outcomes of conflict are collective action, increased awareness and governance of the community in its resources management. So far, it completely lacks mediators to be bridge between local people with company. This can push conflict to go further. Therefore it is necessary to get the involvement of stakeholders and to find solutions for conflict management to improve livelihood of local people and sustainable resource management.

Conclusions and Outlook:

Pho Trach village of Phong Dien district with strong customary regulation in managing natural resources is considered as typical case study for collective action to protect their benefit.

Case study of Pho Trach village, in Thua Thien Hue province, Central Vietnam showed that:

- Without legal recognition on property rights, local people often face with risks to lose their resource and getting low compensation once the outsiders occupy those resources.
- Contesting tenure and benefits may created conflicts between local people and outsiders.
- Collective action as a outcome of conflict helps community in protecting their property rights on common resources.
 - ↳ Recognising legal rights for local people on their indigenous resources can facilitate a more sustainable management of natural resources and better livelihood of local people.
 - ↳ involvement of actors with high power and legality in conflict management.

References:

- Marshall, G., 1998. A dictionary of sociology. New York: Oxford University Press.
- VPC, 2011. Vietnam Productivity Report 2010 (http://vpc.org.vn/Desktop.aspx/Bao-cao-NS/Bao-cao-nang-suat/Bao_cao_nang_su)