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Livelihood and Integration of Indigenous People in Natural Forest Management: Case of Dak To State Forestry Company, Kon Tum, Vietnam

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Abstract

Most of the remnant natural forests in Vietnam are located in mountainous areas where indigenous communities reside. The majority of indigenous people are poor. They heavily depend on the forest for subsistence and livelihood. Forests in Vietnam are state-owned assets assigned to various forest owners for management, such as the State Forest Enterprise, or the so-called State Forestry Company (SFC). The management of natural forests by SFCs is currently facing three main problems: low profitability, forest degradation, and conflict over land and forest use by local people.

This research investigates the importance of forests to the livelihood of households, the levels of integration between the SFC and households, and the perception of households on forest management practices. The research is based upon a case study of Dak To SFC in Kon Tum province of Vietnam. Sixty-two households from five villages were surveyed. Key informants were also interviewed to gain an understanding of the local situation.

The research findings reveal that the income of the migrant group (Kinh and others) is 4.2 times higher than that of the indigenous group (Sedang). The main income source of the migrant group is from business and service (62.6%), while the indigenous group gets their income more from agriculture (mainly of Cassava, constituting 48.9%). By contrast, the indigenous and low income household groups have greater access to forest and depend on it as their source of income, accounting for 5.8% and 14.9% respectively. The migrant and the high income groups show almost no income from the forest, 0.4% and 0.6%. The difference in forest dependence is of high significance ($p < 0.000$). The SFC acts solely in planning forest management without the participation of locals. The total land owned is not much different, an indigenous household owns 1.2 times more than a migrant household. However, conflict over land is reported by 38.5% of the indigenous group members.

Another field of conflicts is the lack of consideration of local people in operation planning and the lack of trust in the SFC's management ability. Recommendations for conflict resolution are to involve indigenous people in planning and improve forest management.

Keywords: Dak To, indigenous people, integration, livelihood, natural forest management, state forestry company, Vietnam