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Alternative Livelihood Strategies of Forest Dependent Ethnic Minorities Within a REDD+ Implementation Area in Bac Kan Province, Vietnam

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Abstract

Natural forests have played an important role for rural livelihoods in the upland of Vietnam. However, the primary forest area is continuously declining. Forest plantation and regeneration are urgently needed. This study examines alternative livelihood strategies of forest dependent ethnic minorities through a study in Bac Kan province, Vietnam. The data was collected in four communes at Ba Be and Nary districts. Participatory wealth ranking, income portfolio scoring and willing to access methods were applied, followed by a structured household (n=240) survey. Student's t-test and ANOVA were used to test income differences among the groups. The share of forest environmental income in total household income was used to obtain a mutually exclusive choice of livelihood strategies of households. The average forest environment income contributes to household livelihood was 22%. Livelihoods of the selected households were classified into less, moderate, and highly dependent on forest. Around 51% of households choose “less dependent on forest” livelihood strategy with 16.5% of forest environment income on average. With an average forest income share of 26.8%, 47.5% households select “moderately dependent on forest” livelihood strategy. There are only 1.5% households pick “highly dependent on forest” livelihood strategy. The forest environment incomes mainly support current consumption and the dependence on forest differs among households. The poorer households are more dependent on forest than wealthy households. And the level of forest dependence of local people has been reduced overtime. A proposed REDD+ regime provides an opportunity for sub-national actors to address the issue of poverty in resource rich forests regions. The benefit sharing mechanism needs to be framed appropriately and transparently, in order to overcome the livelihood issues in REDD+ implementation area.

Keywords: Bac Kan province, benefit sharing ethnic minorities, livelihood strategies, REDD+