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Local Perceptions in Agroforestry Opportunities and Constraints to Address Food Security in Northwest Vietnam

MAI PHUONG NGUYEN¹, TIMOTHY PAGELLA², NGUYEN LA³, FERGUS SINCLAIR⁴

¹World Agroforestry Centre, Vietnam Office, Vietnam

²Bangor University, School of Environment, Natural Resources and Geography, United Kingdom

³World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), Vietnam

⁴World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)/ Bangor University, Agroforestry Systems, Kenya

Abstract

Annual crop cultivation provides the most significant source of food for smallholder farmers in the mountainous areas of Northwest Vietnam. This practice has caused serious erosion and degradation on sloping land which cover 75 % total area of the region, resulting in very low productivity and insecure food provision. Integrating agroforestry systems into these degraded landscapes has the potential to build more resilient livelihood systems. There is a lack of knowledge on local perceptions in opportunity and constraints on agroforestry adoption including gender and ethnicity. Therefore, this study was conducted in six villages of Kinh, Thai and H'mong groups in Northwest Vietnam to understand local aspirations and preferences for agroforestry options. Two villages for each ethnic group with 60 farmers in total were selected for semi-structure interview. The result first identified the local knowledge of different ethnic group on ecological interaction between soil erosion and tree growth associated with tree productivity. Although having deep knowledge on the roles of tree in soil conservation, local people holds different perceptions on benefits of agroforestry adoption. While H'mong people want to increase income and utilise resources, Thai people highlight food and income provision with soil erosion reduction; Kinh people are motivated by high income and soil fertility improvement. Challenges for adopting agroforestry vary among those three ethnic groups and gender due to their location of origin, accessibility to market and different cultivation tradition. Thai group expressed their specific need for market linkage, mostly from women. H'mong group was lack of access to information and technique support. H'mong women need a special communication approach in visual or audio formats. This study suggests that gender and ethnicity should be considered in any activity towards to improving their livelihoods such as supporting policies or extension programs. Ignoring these elements is likely to adversely affect the adoption.

Keywords: Agroforestry, aspirations, constraints, ethnicity, gender, local knowledge