

Policy**brief**

Community Forest Management in Vietnam Challenges & Way Forward

Community forest management (CFM) has been legally recognized in Vietnam since 2004, and was among the priorities in Vietnam's Forestry Development Strategy 2006-2020. Under this strategy, forest land allocation and projects to stimulate local communities to be involved in forest management have been implemented across the country. Significant progress has been made, but overall implementation has ambivalent results.

Key messages

- 1 An institution or department in charge of CFM within the government's forest administration is crucially needed to ensure sustainability of CFM efforts.
- 2 CFM should be part of a broader forest management strategy than being regarded as a donor or government-funded project.
- 3 Policies and legal regulations should be further developed in order to enable implementation and development of CFM.
- 4 Sufficient technical and financial support from the government and other stakeholders is critically important for successful CFM.

Challenges to CFM

- There is no specific forest institution or department responsible for CFM. As a consequence, CFM is often put on the side line.
- CFM support is generally implemented within a project nomenclature with specific timeframes.
- Comprehensive policies and legal framework enabling CFM are absent.
- Implementation of forest land allocation to communities is lagging behind.
- Low capacity of forest communities to effectively manage forest.
- Forests allocated to communities are often in poor condition with few immediate economic benefits to local people.

Institutional Set-up

Currently, there is no institution or department specifically in-charge of CFM within the structure of the Vietnam Administration of Forestry; however, almost if not all, line departments (Figure 1) are in one way or another, involved in CFM despite their lack of clear mandate.

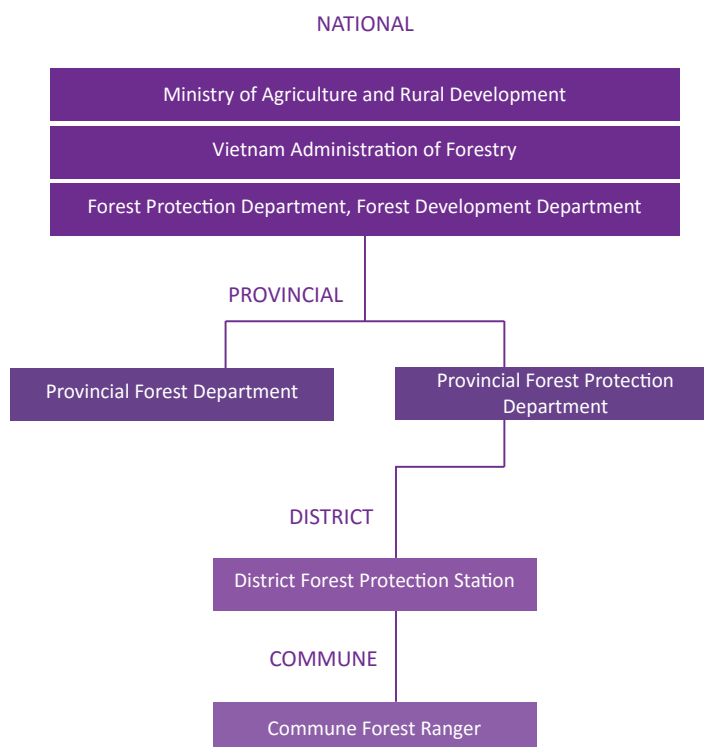


Figure 1: Governmental forest institutions involved in CFM

Policy and Legal Framework

Vietnam has had CFM-related legal framework and policies, including the Law on Forest Protection and Development in 2004 and other legal regulations such as on forest allocation, investment, forest exploitation and utilization, and benefit sharing.

Legally, a village community is recognised as an entity eligible to be allocated with forest for protection and management. It has rights to exploit forest products for consumption, and to enjoy the benefits from the forest.

But a comprehensive policy on CFM is still missing. CFM-related policies are mentioned separately as one chapter or article of cumbersome legal regulations, which are often difficult to follow.

Implementation of CFM

- Record keeping on CFM and its activities is generally lacking. Only 500,000 ha of forests allocated to communities (4 % of the total forest area in Vietnam - Figure 2) have been recorded by the Forest Protection Department. This is also linked to the slow forest land allocation process. Data on forests traditionally managed by communities and the number of communities involved, is also lacking.
- The outcome of CFM varies depending on forest attributes, community capacity, law enforcement, government incentives, etc. Communities benefit in terms of the harvested timber and non-timber forest products, which are either sold or consumed by the household, but in many cases, communities have almost no economic benefit as the forests allocated to them are often in poor quality.
- Many communities are able to manage their forests effectively while others are not due to lack of management skills and financial capital. Success in CFM is very much dependent on sufficient support from government forest institutions and foreign-funded projects (see Box 1).



A Community Forest Management board in Quang Tam commune, Tuy Duc district, Dak Nong province

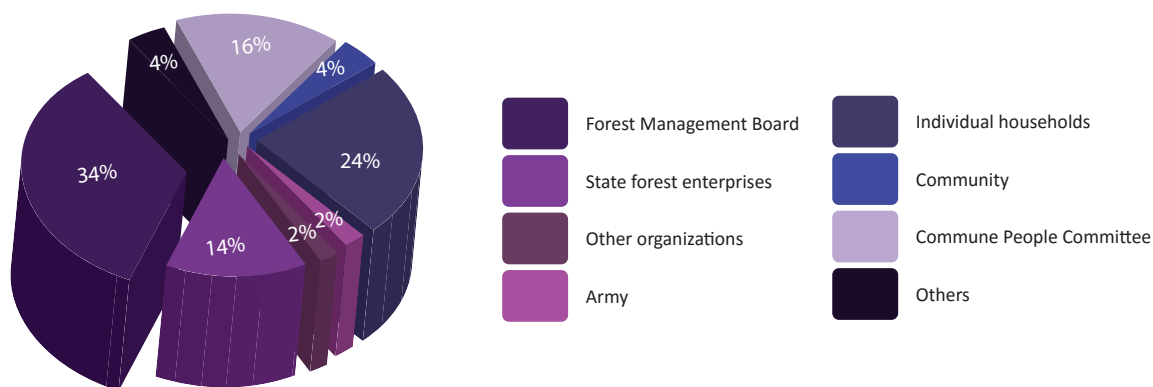


Figure 2: Forests allocated to different entities

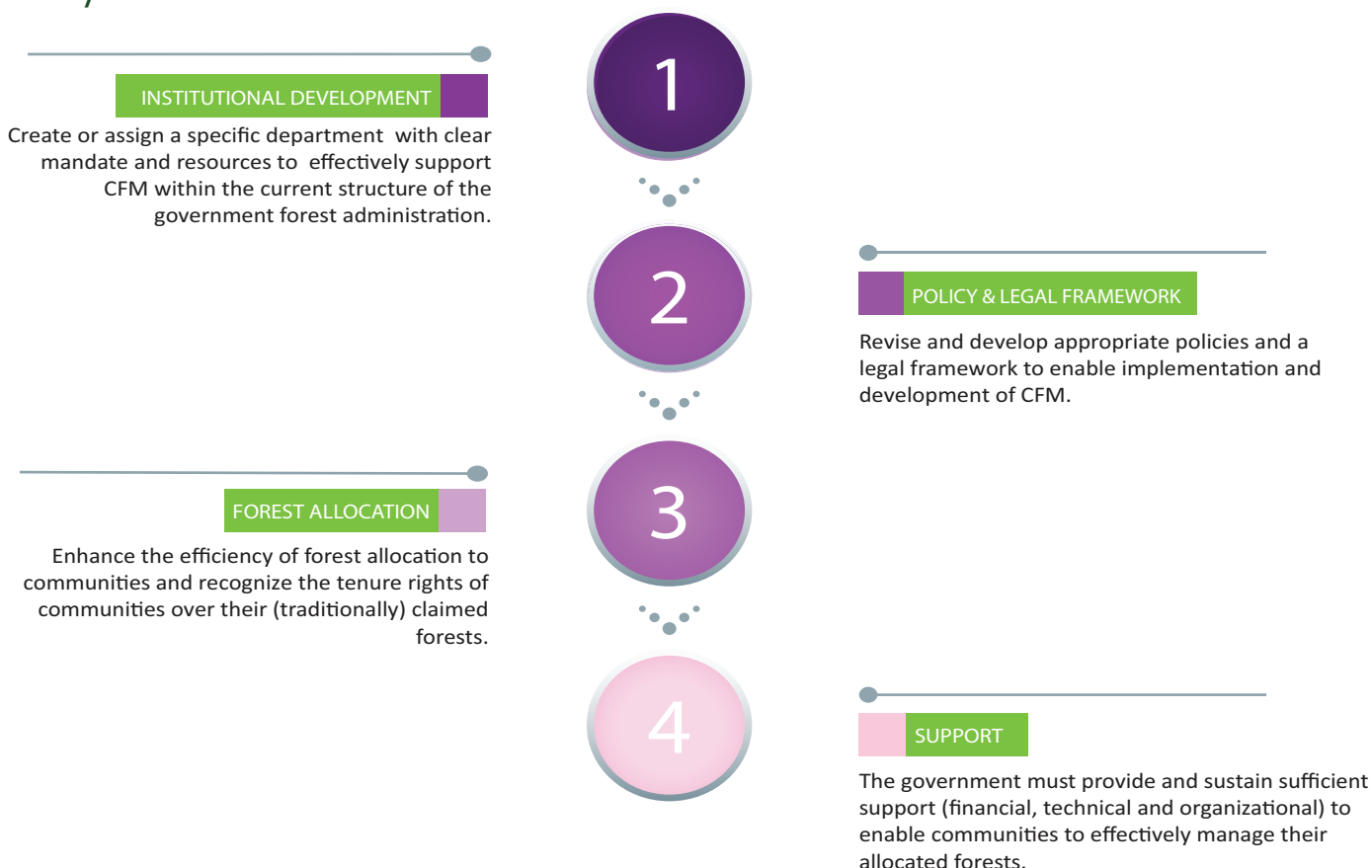
Box 1: Successful and Unsuccessful CFM models

With support from an ODA project and District Forest Protection Station (DFPS), Bu NDar A-B village in Quang Tam commune, Tuy Duc district, Dak Nong province has received 1,016 ha of natural forest with a red book certificate. The project and DFPS helped the village to establish a Village Forest Management Committee (VFMC) and Forest Protection Groups (FPGs), develop a forest management plan and regulation, harvest timber for use and sale, as well as to access payment for forest environmental services and sanction violators. As a result, the village was able to manage and protect their forest effectively. The forest was well maintained and the quality was improved.

In contrast, some villages in Ea Sol commune, Ea Hleo district, Dak Lak province were not able to manage and protect their allocated forests after the project ended. Without continuing support from state forest agencies, village forest management boards had no funds to continue with their activities, and were eventually dismissed. Forest patrolling was no longer carried out by FPGs. Consequently, their allocated forests were heavily damaged.

- Much of the support for CFM is given via government and/or donor-funded projects that have specific timelines - the notion of CFM being someone's project rather than an adaptive process and life-long endeavor creates challenges to the sustainability of CFM.

Way forward





Implication for other ASEAN countries

- CFM has real potential to contribute to effective forest management, poverty reduction, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation.
- Besides legal frameworks and supportive policies, an appropriate institutional set-up needs to be in place to effectively support CFM.
- Partnership among ASEAN countries, international organizations and NGOs would also contribute to the growth of in-country CFM programmes.

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