

land

research findings for development policymakers and practitioners

Land use change and reforestation in Viet Nam

Patterns of land use in Viet Nam have changed considerably, particularly as some farmers have shifted from crop cultivation to reforestation. This shift has occurred alongside national policies which encourage reforestation. However, research illustrates that reforestation is not a direct result of such policies but is a result of a combination of many local factors.

Since the 1980s, forest policy across China, Lao PDR, Indonesia and Viet Nam has focused on reforesting barren lands. Various measures undertaken for this include settlement programmes, land classification, devolving forest management and reforestation. Viet Nam received over US\$200 million from international donors for forest development over the years. In 2006, the General Statistics Office of Viet Nam claimed a significant rise in forest cover (from 29.2 percent in 1985 to 37.6 percent in 2005).

Research from Newcastle University, in the UK, and the French Institute of Research for Development explores the impact of the reforestation policy at a community level. The research investigates local decision-making processes that involved farmers shifting from annual crop cultivation to reforestation. The study applies an Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework to land use patterns. This framework links local and higher levels by analysing decision-making at operational, collective choice and constitutional levels.

Findings show that much reforestation was not a farmers' response to policy interventions. Only two percent of farmers stopped crop cultivation because they preferred to reforest. Reforestation occurred due to many local factors, such as the disruption to local institutions and activities that national policies had caused.

Key findings in understanding land use change include:

- Local and historic factors, specific to geographic areas and individual communities, combine to drive land use change.
- The collective rules local farmers had designed to manage the cohabitation of

cropping and grazing activities were important factors in decisions.

- Poor soil fertility, low yield, and difficulties in balancing grazing and cultivation were some of the reasons why farmers stopped annual cropping. These factors may have resulted from the shift to individual property regimes imposed by the land allocation policy.
- Reasons for choosing to plant trees are separate to those that influenced farmers to stop annual crop cultivation: poor soil quality, fuel wood supply and government incentives encouraged them to choose reforestation.
- A few farmers who stopped cultivating annual crops influenced informal collective agreements about land use, which ultimately led local communities to shift to reforestation.

Although the national level reforestation policy may have had some influence on land use change in rural Viet Nam, it has not directly brought about any change. Various local, individual and collective issues and attitudes combined to make farmers shift from crop cultivation to reforesting agricultural land. Such local issues must be explored to gain a complete picture of the complex factors influencing land use change.

Lessons from this research include:

- An historical perspective is essential in seeing how numerous factors interact and cause a feedback effect, leading to land use change.
- The IAD framework is a useful tool for understanding the factors that lead to land use change.
- Community factors and collective frameworks must be considered



The uplands of Dong Cao Village, Tien Xuan Commune, Luong Son District, Hoa Binh Province, Viet Nam, which was a fieldwork area for the study. The area afforested by villagers appears on the left and upper parts of the photo.
Floriane Clement, 2005

alongside individual households to gain a complete understanding of land use change.

- Studies at a local level show very different patterns of land use change and factors influencing it when compared to national level studies.

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'Linking Reforestation Policies with Land Use Change in Northern Vietnam: Why Local Factors Matter', *Geoforum*, 39 (1), pages 265 to 277, by Floriane Clement and Jaime M Amezaga, 2008

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African women's property rights

Property grabbing from widows and orphans has long been common practice in Africa. With the escalation of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, the social and economic vulnerability of widows has increased.

Research in Zimbabwe by the Food and Agriculture Organization illustrates how forced evictions from marital homes are a new form of gender-based violence against women in southern and eastern Africa. This denies them their human rights to access shelter, livelihoods and property.

Husbands often accuse their wives of infecting them. More commonly, however, women are infected by their husbands, many of whom have become HIV positive as a result of extramarital sexual relations.

The shame attached to HIV and AIDS often puts widows whose husbands have died of related illnesses in a vulnerable position during negotiations over inheritance. A widow's social network that might otherwise help her may fear doing so when she is condemned as a 'witch' who has killed her husband. Relatives of dead husbands may accuse the widow of being

HIV positive and use this as justification to evict her and take her property.

Widows who have lost their husbands to AIDS-related diseases face enormous difficulties:

- Hospital fees and funeral costs leave many women destitute.
- As many widows are themselves infected, their own weakened health makes it harder for them to fight injustice.
- Some property grabbers are relatively wealthy and can take widows to court as a form of intimidation.
- Even if a widow manages to legally challenge property grabbing, relatives may prolong cases hoping the widow will die of an AIDS-related disease before the judge reaches a decision.

It is not just men who deprive widows of their rights. In matrilineal societies in Namibia and Zambia, sisters-in-law are said to be the main perpetrators. However, it may be male relatives who physically remove property from widows and force them out of their homes.

Survivors of property grabbing are often resilient and support groups have set up inspiring initiatives to assist them. However, definitively breaking the vicious cycle of poverty, HIV and AIDS and property grabbing requires action at national, regional and international levels. The author argues for the need to:

- criminalise property grabbing with enforceable punishments while implementing public awareness campaigns to inform people it is illegal
- train judges and police on conventions on women's rights
- ensure African women's property rights are recognised under national laws
- raise wider awareness of the third Millennium Development Goal, which addresses gender equality and the empowerment of women
- pressure donors, national governments, non-governmental agencies and United Nations agencies to respond more effectively
- recognise that legal guarantees of women's rights to property are useless without enforcement mechanisms and affordable legal assistance.

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www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/gbv_&_property_grabbing_in_africa_izumi_gd.pdf

Negotiating complex land rights in West Africa

Land is an increasingly scarce resource in West Africa. As access to land becomes increasingly regulated, conflicts are becoming more common. Who wins and who loses in the struggle to gain access to land?

Land provides a major share of income and employment in many countries, particularly to poorer people. Whilst many livelihoods depend on several activities, access to land and the use of common land is frequently a key component. Land is also important for political reasons and a major asset for people in authority.

Research from the International Institute of Environment and Development, UK, looks at how land rights are changing in West Africa. Most land is regulated by a mixture of local, customary and government rights, often with a lot of confusion and contradiction. Deciding land rights often involves negotiation, with each group using whatever resources, rights and bargaining power they have.

Primary land rights – the ownership of land – are claimed in many different ways. These range from customary claims, which are based on who settles first in a region, to the direct allocation by governments.

Secondary land rights – rights to use land owned by others – are also complex, but rental and shared farm arrangements are common. The research shows that in nine

sites across six West African countries, more than sixty percent of people are involved in a land transaction of some sort. In many cases, people lease land to one person and rent it from another.

Migrants often rely on secondary land rights. In the 1970s and 1980s, five million Sahelian migrants grew coffee and cocoa in Ivory Coast. These sectors now face difficulties, however, and many Ivorians are seizing back the land they lent or sold to migrants.

Across West Africa, conflicts such as these are having an impact on land rights.

- Land that used to be available on long-term loans at little or no cost is now being rented out for annual payments.
- Land is becoming more focused on money; where people used to pay 'in kind' (for example through work), land owners now demand cash.
- In many areas, land is being used as an asset, for example being mortgaged to raise credit.
- Local people are increasingly asserting their land rights, even when this disagrees with legal systems.

Although these trends are complex and vary between regions, they all create difficulties for poor people trying to gain access to land.

The researcher concludes:

- Donors focus their attention on primary land rights, but it is important to recognise the range of rights associated with land and natural resources in West Africa.
- Secondary land rights must be built on the wide diversity and flexibility of local arrangements.

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