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LETTER OF THE CHIEF EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Community Forestry is a form of forestry management that has been existing and developing in line with the development of human being. But only in recent 3-4 decades, the concept of community forestry or social forestry has been defined and it has become a very important and interesting issue to discuss, research and train for institutions, projects and for policy makers involved in the renovation in Vietnam.
The Social Forestry Development Project Song Da has put a priority on researching traditional experiences of community forestry in order to develop and propose a model which can be applied in the area in line with natural and social conditions as well as local customs. The Newsletter No 4 is the first information on research and experiences with community forest management in the Da river watershed. We would like to encourage our readers who work in the same field, in administration or policy makers to comment and point out their views and experiences. We will consider these contributions as when organizing a National Workshop on community forestry in 2000.

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COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT: AN APPROPRIATE OPTION FOR THE SONG DA WATERSHED

Dr. Ulrich Apel
SFDP Community Forestry Advisor

The Song Da watershed is one of Vietnam's poorest and least developed regions, but due to the hydroelectric power generated by the large dam in Hoa binh it is also one of the most important in Vietnam. It is also the most mountainous area of the country, with altitudes ranging from 300 to 3,000 m above sea level. The watershed is inhabited by 22 different ethnic groups of which the Thai and H'mong represent about 65% of a total population of approximately 1.2 million living in a few cities and towns and in more than 2000 villages.

The watershed covers a total area of 2.6 million hectares, of which 2 million hectares are classified as forest land (slopes > 25o) but according to a 1991 survey by FIPI only 300,000 ha were covered with existing forests (12% forest cover). In order to sustain the ecological balance in the watershed and to effectively protect the Song Da reservoir from sedimentation the Government assumes that about 1 million hectares of forests or 40% forest cover are needed.

There are many reasons for the deforestation in the past decades and not only local people can be blamed for it. However, unsustainable land use can only be solved through addressing its main causes: rural poverty and insufficient food production. Only a 2-way approach which leads to higher food production and cash income for farmers in a more sustainable manner and, secondly, to an increased forest cover through natural regeneration, plantation and forest management activities can be successful.

In recent years there are promising developments in the Song Da watershed. Participatory land use planning and land allocation, followed by increased agricultural production, and the involvement of the local population in forest protection enabled natural regeneration on large areas of forest land. According to 1999 data from Son la and Lai chau provinces, forest cover has increased from 12% to 20%, which means that in the recent 8 years 200,000 ha of new forests have been established. It is noteworthy that afforestations have only contributed some 20,000 ha or 10% to these newly established forests. 180,000 ha were established by natural regeneration, raising the total existing forest area in the Song Da watershed to 500,000 ha.

These new forests are largely maintained by local communities. Forest protection contracts made within the framework of the forest land allocation process have effectively involved local people into forest protection. In general, the definition of forest areas for protection and natural regeneration and the establishment of forest protection groups with clear responsibilities have a positive impact on forest protection and on forest cover. At village and group level, different forest protection and use regulations are being formulated, addressing the particular situation of the group or village involved. The protection fees paid by national programs and government institutions have clearly contributed to this fact. However, local people depend on timber and non-timber forest products for their subsistence needs but they still enjoy limited rights to utilize the products of the
forests they protect. It appears to be necessary that further management responsibility including the utilization of forests is gradually handed over to local communities.

SFDP works since 1993 in the Song Da watershed and from its very beginning, it has promoted community forest management as an appropriate option for forest development in this region. The project is convinced that community forest management can combine protection of critical watersheds and utilization of protection forests for subsistence needs as well as to establish new forests. By strictly following the 2-way approach mentioned above, it seems possible to achieve a forest cover of 40% by the year 2010 in line with the targets set by the “5 million ha programme”. In order to sustain the positive trend in forest development it has to be backed up by improvements in the field of agriculture and rural development. Income generation through forestry activities for farmers can only be complementary to income generation from agriculture and other sectors.

The term community forest management is understood by SFDP as the involvement of local communities and/or groups and/or individual households in management, protection, and utilization of forest land. The use of this term is roughly equating to a more restrictive usage of community forestry or social forestry defined as "umbrella terms denoting a wide range of activities linking local people with forests and trees and the products and benefits to be derived from them" (Arnold, 1992). Defining community forest management to exclude trees on agricultural land appears to be useful in recognition of the different types of tenurial arrangements, management regimes, institutions involved in extension and management support, and the different policies and regulations which characterize agricultural and forest land in Vietnam.

The communities referred to are in most cases the entire population of villages, only in a few cases it might refer to groups of households or to entire communes, which form a user/protection group.

Community forest management appears to be an appropriate option in particular for the Song Da watershed for the following reasons:

1. In remote areas like the Song Da watershed where subsistence economy still dominates and farmers depend on forest resources in many ways for their livelihood, a flexible and decentralized management of forests is more appropriate than state management and it is easily adaptable to local needs and the particular local conditions. State capacity to enforce forest regulations and to implement state programs tends to be weak there;
2. Most communities in this area have lived in their local environment for several generations and are likely to maintain institutions and local knowledge which can support community forest management. Local people show a high community sense and interest in community forest management;
3. Community involvement in forest protection and management leads to a stabilization of degraded forest eco-systems like in the Song Da watershed and enables natural regeneration. Forests managed by communities can be elements of ecologically balanced land use systems contributing to better water and climatic balance of larger areas.
4. Community forest management is proving to be a cost-effective, socially acceptable and environmentally sound approach of forest management. It provides short-term and long-term benefits to farmers as well as to the state. Objectives of watershed protection and sound utilization of forests can be combined in large parts of the Song Da watershed.

Although traditional forms of community forestry have always been present in Vietnam, community forest management is a relatively new approach in Vietnam. Positive experiences with this approach in recent years have been recognized by government institutions and the concept is gaining acceptance on national policy level. A danger for community forest management as an approach lies in overloading it and trying to achieve too much too quickly. It is, therefore, necessary to set a realistic set of objectives to avoid exaggerated expectations.

In view of the current framework conditions and based on SFDP's experience in the Song Da watershed, community forest management should be seen as an approach to reach mainly two objectives:

- to protect existing forest resources to ensure watershed protection and to facilitate a sound utilization of forest resources for subsistence needs, and
- to enable natural regeneration on forest land without existing forest to raise the forest cover and to restore productivity of forest lands.

The necessary elements to achieve these objectives are:

1. To finalize forest land allocation in the whole area and to concentrate funds and efforts on this issue.
Forest land allocation should focus on communities and groups of households instead of on individual households. Clear and secure access rights of local communities to forest resources are one precondition for community forest management. Local control over forest resources can be improved by land use planning and land allocation, in particular through defining the boundaries between villages and communes.

2. To improve forest protection regulations and to steer them towards management regulations. Regulations have to be applicable and enforceable and need to be flexibly adapted to specific situations. Community forest management has to be based on enforceable forest protection regulations. After several decades of open access situations to forest resources, management responsibility can only be gradually handed over to local communities on the basis of effective forest protection.

3. Forest protection contracts and the money paid for forest protection have to be related to the performance of forest protection and should become real incentives for forest protection. Given the opportunity and proper incentives local people are capable to manage their forest resources and to distribute work and benefits in an effective way.

4. Forest cover should be mainly raised by means of natural regeneration. This is a very cost-effective and labor extensive option to establish forest, in particular protection forest. Natural regenerated stands ensure very effective soil and watershed protection and are able to provide all necessary forest products to meet subsistence needs of the local people.

5. Forestry activities can hardly generate cash income for farmers which could compete with income from agricultural activities. Forestry in the Song Da watershed needs financial inputs and subsidies. The utilization of forest products for subsistence needs is vital for local communities. However, income generation from forestry activities can only complement the income from agricultural production. Forest development can only be achieved within the framework of rural development. Main income for farmers is generated through agricultural activities. It is crucial to improve agricultural technologies and to increase productivity on agricultural lands.

Above all, effective community forest management requires a supportive policy environment on national and provincial level. Further success will depend on revision of forest land allocation policies which currently not yet allow for allocation of forest land with red book certificates to communities. Providing land use titles for forest land to villages or groups of households would legally recognize community forestry as a management option in forestry and enhance the de facto situation of communities claiming the responsibility for management of natural resources on which they depend. Giving local people long-term rights over forest resources would certainly improve their commitment to forestry activities and provide security that they can enjoy the long term benefits.

**SDFP's STRATEGY TOWARDS COMMUNITY FORESTRY**

_Trieu Van Co_  
_SDFP Community Forestry Unit_

The term "community forestry" was introduced in Vietnam in late 80s. That was when Vietnam launched its "doi moi" policy, encouraging the development of a multi-sectoral economy. In forestry, various stakeholders began to take part in forest protection and development, resulting in a shift from state to social or community forestry. The Social Forestry Development Project started in 1993 with a mandate of developing social or community forestry in the Song Da watershed, which is home to Vietnam’s biggest hydropower station and was then the lowest in forest cover. Against this context, SDFP’s community forestry strategy was formulated with due regard to ensuring a harmony between benefits of locals residing in the watershed area and the common good for the whole nation. It can be said that while protecting their natural resources, local people in the area are actually guarding for the lower basin and at the same time helping to ensure water supply for the hydropower station.

The first step in SDFP’s community forestry strategy is participatory land use planning and land allocation whose outcome is clear demarcation of different land types, either for protection or production or grazing land. The results of this process are land use right certificates (often referred to as Red Book Certificates), which give people the required security to think about forest management and protection options.

Based on the results of land use planning and land allocation, the next step is divided into two different measures: organizational and technical interventions. The organizational measures include the forming of commune and/or village management boards and setting up a functioning structure for forestry extension in particular by defining the tasks and responsibility of forest extension staff on commune level. The technical measures that are taken include the testing of silvicultural options for community forest management and training for staff and farmers on technical skills in forest management (see also the following graph).
Organizational and management measures

These options are aimed at enhancing village and commune institutions so that they are capable of supporting local people to formulate and implement forest protection regulations. In all Village Management Boards that have been set up during village development planning, there is at least one member in charge of forestry issues. Presently, there are about 80 Village Management Boards in the project area. In places where local management capacity is lower, e.g. in Tua chua district, SFDP has set up 2 Commune Agro-forestry Management Boards in Muong bang and Sinh phinh communes on an experimental basis. The task of these management boards is to raise forest protection awareness among local people and to upscale forest management and protection activities to the whole communes. This can be said to be "the most effective forest protection unit" at commune and village levels.

To achieve the goal of the "Five million ha program", a network of commune level forestry extension is to be set up. But it remains a big task to make it functioning, especially in a region like the Northwest, where three-fourth of the area is forestry land but there are hardly any forestry extension staff. Therefore, what awaits SFDP in the coming time is how to define the duties and functions of forestry extension staff at district and commune levels.

Technical measures

"Seeing is believing". The project has established a number of experimental and demonstration plots to demonstrate management options to local communities. These are trials in testing species, natural regeneration with intervention, enrichment planting and others. They have been set up on forest land already allocated to local people and of course, with their agreement. Local people have been participating in establishing, monitoring and protecting these plots and have received technical training from the project right in the field.

After these organizational and technical options have been identified, the third step is to develop and test a methodology for community forest management that can be applied on a wider scale. In 1999, it became very
clear that this methodology had to be divided into 2 sub-methodologies:

1. methodology for formulating forest protection regulations at village level, and
2. methodology for community forest management planning at village level.

The 2 methodologies are developed and tested in the pilot areas of SFDP in Yen chau and Tua chua. After finalizing the methodologies and handing them over to the provinces, in the forth and final step, the project supports their wider application. Support is given through training on the methodologies, through cooperation contracts with local institutions and by supporting the Son la – Lai chau Community Network, which has been set up recently.

Man is the central element of the Forest – Tree – People system. Knowledge and awareness of local staff on community forest management are still very limited. Quite a few of them are not yet familiar with SFDP’s methodologies. That’s why the project is taking priority in training on community forestry so that in a near future, the local staff themselves can be able to devise and implement sustainable forest management strategies for the Da river watershed.

PARTICIPATORY FOREST PROTECTION REGULATIONS - EXPERIENCES FROM SFDP SONG DA

Pham Van Viet
SFDP Community Forestry Unit

For local people who are living nearby or in the forest, forest protection regulations are very important, because people depend on the utilization of forest resources for their subsistence needs and on the environmental benefits the forest provides to the local ecosystems. These are the main reasons, that there have always been traditional regulations for forest protection and management on village level. Some of them are still functioning, others cannot cope anymore with the contemporary situation.

In the Northwest, local people depend very much on forest resources. The area has a difficult mountainous topography and is home to more than 20 ethnic groups with different culture and different cultivation systems. The main ethnic groups are the H'mong and Thai. The H'mong are practising shifting cultivation where forest is often cleared for agricultural production. After abandoning the fields the forest can recover, but with increasing population pressure more and more forest land is converted into agricultural land. The Thai people practise a completely different form of land use. They cultivate more paddy fields in the valleys along rivers and streams and have upland fields only at the foot of the hills. In the past, they protected forests on the top of the hills quite effectively with a so-called chom pa system which has been abandoned in 1954. The forest on the hills is very important to protect water resources which are crucial for wet rice cultivation. But without the traditional regulations the forests have been over exploited and exhausted in the past decades.

Faced with this situation it is necessary to provide solutions on how to protect and restore the limited forest resources as well as to provide guidelines for appropriate management and utilization of forests. The Government has also recognized this issue and issued a circular for establishing forest protection regulations on village level and also MARD issued the directive 56 on formulation of forest protection regulations on village level. But the question is: which methodology is suitable to formulate effective regulations for forest protection, management and utilization in all communes and villages in the Northwest?

Working in Son la and Lai chau provinces, SFDP has from its very beginning considered forest protection regulations as very important. In particular if community forestry is introduced, it increases the number of actors in forest resource use. Without regulations for protection and utilization which can be monitored and enforced there is high risk of unsustainable management. Thus forest protection regulations are the basis for community forest management. In the beginning, the regulations which were introduced focussed more on law enforcement and fines applied to violations. Over the years, the regulations have been continuously revised and do include now also guidelines for sound forest management and utilization.

Such advanced regulations for forest protection and management were first tested in 4 communes in Yen chau district. The villages of these four communes are quite representative for Son la province comprising H'mong and Thai people, remote villages and villages near the road and markets, villages with abundant and with scarce forest resources. The formulation of the regulations was a participatory process. The villages were actively involved in the process. Later, the regulations were approved by the concerned commune and district authorities. In the process of implementation there are still shortcomings, but SFDP was able to draw a lot of
lessons from this test.

In the end of 1999, Son la province has requested SFDP to support the development of a methodology on how to formulate forest protection and management regulations. A working group under the leading responsibility of the Forest Protection Department has been established and based on the experiences from the 4 communes in Yen chau a draft methodology has been developed. This methodology provides detailed guidelines for the elaboration of regulations in a participatory way. The methodology can be used by forest staff on district and commune level facilitating the formulation of forest protection regulations. Using a methodology rather than pre-formulated regulations will ensure participation of local people and the adaptation of the regulations to the specific local conditions.

The working group on forest protection regulations has presented the draft methodology on the meeting of the "Community Forestry Network Son la & Lai chau in Dien bien" and received valuable comments. The methodology will be finalized in the first quarter of 2000 and SFDP will support its application in 6 districts in Son la. It was also decided to establish a working group in Lai chau to start the same process like in Son la, benefiting from the existing experiences.

THE COMMUNITY FORESTRY NETWORK SON LA & LAI CHAU

Nguyen Binh Minh
Director of Son la sub-Department for Forest Development

Community Forestry (or Social Forestry) is a term expressing a large scale of activities that link local people with forest and forest products. Up to now, there is still a lack of a standard definition because community forestry depends very much on the characteristics of each country and each geographical area.

Based on the results of the forest development process in the Northwest, we can define the term as: "community forestry is a series of activities relating to economics, culture and society taking place in a certain period of time and a certain area in order to have direct or indirect impact on forest management, protection, development and utilization. All activities are carried out with local people's participation."

Because of different characteristics of each area, community forestry activities vary having its own strong and weak points as well as options and challenges. By facilitating the exchange of information and seeking useful experience the effectiveness of community forestry activities will certainly be improved.

Therefore, in June 1999, SFDP has initiated the establishment of a local community forestry network in Son la and Lai chau provinces. Members of the Network are institutions and projects which are concerned with community forestry. The Network is thus owned and managed by the institutions joining the Network.

Members of the Network

So far, the Network has about 40 members of 20 different institutions and projects working in the area. For example, Son la Forest Development sub-Department, Son la Forest Protection Department, Lai chau Forest Development sub-Department, and Lai chau Forest Protection Department.

Goal and purpose of the Network

The overall goal of the Network is to enhance the results and increase the efficiency of the work of the participating institutions in the fields of forest protection, forest development, agriculture and rural development, agro-forestry extension as well as education and research related to community forestry. In particular, the Network will support the implementation of the national program "Five million ha".

The purpose of the Community Forestry Network is:

- to provide information to and exchange with institutions joining the Network related to community forestry;
- to improve the documentation of local technical knowledge and existing community forest management practices;
- to promote successful examples of community forestry for application on a larger scale in the provinces;
- to create a better understanding of community forestry and the different aspects involved (economic,
social, ecological, cultural); and
- to strengthen the effectiveness of policies, regulations, and program support as well as to facilitate its harmonization with existing practices.

**First achievements of the Network**

During the first 6 months of operation the Network has conducted 2 workshops and 11 case studies on forest protection and forest utilization by local communities in the area. The case studies were presented recently in a workshop in Dien bien and field trips to case study sites was organized. During this workshop a plan for the year 2000 has been elaborated. It foresees to organize training courses for Network members and to strengthen the activities through cooperation contracts with Network members. The focus of the activities will be in forest protection. With support of the SFDP participatory forest protection and management regulations will be established on a large scale in both provinces. Further case studies will be conducted in the field of Forest land allocation and its impact on forest protection and management. It is planned to hold a workshop on this topic in June in Quang ninh. Furthermore it is envisaged that the Community Forestry Network Son la & Lai chau will take part in activities of the national Community Forestry Working Group which is initiated by the MRC project.

The Network is seeking further support from other organizations and projects. Hopefully, after understanding its goal and purpose the Network will receive more support. The Network is managed by a center which functions as a co-ordinating unit in which all information come together and are re-distributed to the Network members. The Network Center is formed by the Son la, Forest Development sub-Department, the Forest Protection Department Son la, the Forest Protection Department Lai chau, and the Social Forestry Development Project (SFDP) Song Da. For further information, please contact:

**Community Forestry Network Son la & Lai chau**
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**RESULTS OF PARTICIPATORY LAND USE PLANNING AND LAND ALLOCATION IN SON LA**

Pham Van Thi
Son la Cadastral Department

In recent years, Son la Forest Protection sub-Department has cooperated with the Social Forestry Development Project Song Da to develop the Land Use Planning and Land Allocation methodology in Yen chau district, Son la province. Based on the results of the report of the working group presented in a workshop organized in Son la province in March 1999, Son la People's Committee approved to apply “Guidelines for Participatory Land Use Planning and Land Allocation” with the Decision No 532/QHSD-UB. This guideline is now in use for implementing land allocation in the whole Son la province. After the guideline was issued, districts carried out LUP-LA following the provincial Decision. By 10 December 1999, this methodology has been applied in 4 districts outside the project area. They are Bac yen district, Mai son district, Moc chau district and Son la town. Results of the fist evaluation are as follows:

- Completed the land use planning data files of 4 communes (Phien ban commune in Bac yen district, Muong ben commune in Mai son district, Suoi bang in Moc chau district and Hua la in Son la town)
- Implemented land allocation in the field and assessment for provision of Red Book Certificates for households. In detail, there are 3847 households and groups of households fulfilling the pre-conditions to be provided with Red Book Certificate. For the rest of the households, the procedure to provide them with Red Book Certificate will be completed in January 2000. Total land to be allocated is 20130 ha. At present, Cadastral Units at province and district levels are carrying out follow-up steps to complete cadastral data files for 4 communes and to upscale to other communes.

These are only a few experiences with the new LUP-LA methodology but by implementing LUP-LA in 4 communes, it is clear that the Participatory Land Use Planning and Land Allocation methodology receives
Naturally endowed with a tropical climate, the Northwest is characterized by high humidity, abundant rainfall and a multitude of different forest eco-systems. But the region is also well known for its low forest cover, remoteness and scattered population. If afforestation programs are very difficult to implement here, natural regeneration has, in recent years, proved to be an effective and successful option for forest restoration.

Tua Chua district is located in the Southeast of Lai Chau province on an elevation between 600 and 1400m, featuring common climatic conditions of the Northwest and still having good soil for forest regeneration, especially on abandoned shifting cultivation land.

Right in the beginning of its operation in Tua Chua, the Social Forestry Development project Song Da started to explore ways of helping local communities to restore and protect their forest resources. In the past, the 327 and resettlement programs already promoted natural regeneration. Without any silvicultural intervention, these projects were restricted to simple protection with low efficiency and slow rate of forest rehabilitation. With lessons learnt from them, in 1996, SFDP’s Community Forestry Unit initiated several trial plots on natural regeneration combined with silvicultural treatment. The objectives of these plots are:

- To compare the growth and development of forest where silvicultural treatment is applied to reference areas without treatment,
- To demonstrate to local people silvicultural techniques and the effect of natural regeneration combined with treatment,
- To raise people’s awareness in forest protection.

**Plot selection**

With these above-mentioned objectives, the plots were selected according to the following criteria:

- Bare land with timber trees regenerating (over 500 target trees/ha)
- Land allocation already completed
- Area large enough to be divided into 2 parts for comparison (at least 5 ha)
- Convenient location for technical demonstration and study tours

A plot was thereby chosen in Thon I, Sinh phinh commune and at the present it is under management and protection by a group of 12 H’mong households.

**Treatment**

The plot was divided into 2 equal parts: one receiving silvicultural treatment and the other as reference. The level of treatment was identified based on the status quo of the vegetation in trial. For the intervention area thinning, singling, and adjustment of tree density was applied. Target trees were to be maintained and unuseful and diseased or deformed trees were removed.

**Plot management**

The plot was established with local people taking part in setting it up, monitoring and protection. With permission obtained from local authorities, the project signed a contract with the 12 households managing this plot. It was provided for in this contract that they should be responsible for exercising all technical interventions under guidance from the project and should protect the plot. They themselves discussed how to protect and manage the plot. The project was responsible for providing technical assistance through field training, monitoring, annually collecting data and reporting on the trial results.

**Results**
Three years have passed since then and the results gained are encouraging. Data collected in December 1999 show that the most predominant species are Quercus poilanei, Eurya acuminata and Schima Wallichii with a density of about 3000 trees/ha in the intervention area and more than 5000 trees/ha in the reference area. The data also reveal that the diameter (DBH) of trees with treatment is on average 4.9 cm while in the reference area it is only 3.2 cm. The average height of the trees in the treated half is 4.2m while in the other half, it is only 3.5m (see table).

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dbh in cm</td>
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<td>10/1996</td>
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The standing volume of the trees in the intervention area and the reference area is almost the same, due to the high tree density it is even higher in the reference area. But most importantly, the quality of the trees is much better with silvicultural treatment and many trees will provide for house building timber in the future whereas in the reference area only fuel wood and a few poles can be obtained.

Now the point is how to upscale the results of the trial, which is sometimes referred to as a "demonstration model". What we would like to share with you is that we must never establish a "model" from our point of view without any regards to the local traditions, customs and their interest. Will our promoted technical options be suitable to local people's needs and preferences? All these questions were carefully considered by SFDP when the plot was designed.

Many study tours and field training courses have been organized for the 12 households and other people in the village, the commune and even neighboring communes. As a result, the plot has been replicated in other places in Tua chua, e.g. the 16.5 ha plot in Muong bang, another 4 ha plot in Thon I. In particular, between 1998 and 1999, the Debt Swap project - an investment project for forest restoration in Tua chua - has taken over these results to promote natural regeneration in other communes of Tua chua (Trung thu, Muong bang, Xa nhe) very effectively with a total area of 435 ha, in which 30 ha are natural regeneration combined with enrichment planting. In 2000, Debt Swap plans to expand to another 800 ha in neighboring communes: Tua thang, Muong dun, Sa nhe.

With its persistent and proper approach, SFDP has convinced leaders, specialists and local people of how to restore forest in a natural way. The people are always the heart of the matter. If we know how to protect and utilize our resources in an appropriate manner, the resources can be ours from generation to generation. And natural regeneration can very well be the right solution for restoring forest resources in the Northwest in general and Tua Chua in particular.

**FOREST PROTECTION COMBINED WITH FOREST RESOURCE UTILIZATION - AN EFFECTIVE SOLUTION IN AWARENESS RAISING FOR LOCAL PEOPLE IN FOREST DEVELOPMENT**

Le Quang Hanh – Ha Thanh Binh
Forestry Experts - SFDP District Office Yen chau

Passing the North-western area on its winding lanes perching over high tops, glancing over immense mountain ranges, one would inevitably wonder "Where have all the forests gone?". The green patches that can still be seen are so modest as compared with the once so densely covered heights. With the current forest cover of 23% (1998) in the whole province, Son La has projected 40% by 2010. But it does not seem so easy.

**How to make people living in proximity to the forest responsible for forest protection and at the same time entitled to benefit from it? How to promote community forestry? What to do?.. These are the questions that have been plaguing the minds of all people concerned.**

In the 3rd quarter of 1998, the Social Forestry Development Project Song Da started to support villages to make their forest protection and utilization regulations on a trial basis in 4 communes of Yen Chau district, namely Chieng dong, Chieng sang, Chieng khoi, Chieng hac. As a start, 10 villages were selected. Discussions were made with villagers on the status of the village's forest, the implementation of state
regulations and investment in forest protection (under 327 or regular protection by Kiem lam) to map out a village regulation. This regulation was approved by district authorities before being applied to other villages. After 6 months, initial evaluation has proven that through their participation in the process, villagers’ sense of responsibility has been raised and the self expression of their wishes and concerns can help to ensure democracy and transparency.

Based on this experience, in the 3rd and 4th quarter of the year, together with forest protection staff, the project continued to support villages to make their own regulations. By now, 37 villages have built themselves a regulation that suits their specific conditions with clear zoning of the forest into watershed area, water supply area, which need to be strictly protected, upland fields, and finally areas where fuelwood and other products can be extracted for daily subsistence needs. The penalty levels are also specified and are in line with state regulations. What makes the biggest difference here is the participation of villagers not only in setting up the regulation but also in monitoring its implementation. Many villagers are confident enough to voluntarily accept to protect certain forest areas even without financial compensation. The quality of forest has since been remarkably improved, forest fire incidences in the dry seasons notably dropped and free logging is practised no longer. This regulation will combine responsibilities and benefits that people have in protecting the forest, thus stimulating broad participation of villagers in forest resource protection and development. Meanwhile, with support by SFDP 5 villages have also started to make community forest management plans aimed at sustainable extraction of resources and, based on the village's potentials, develop forestry as a form of employment.

In the final words, it is hoped that the village-based forest protection and utilization regulations can, in the coming time, serve as a force to speed up forest development and soon, passers-by and visitors to the Northwest will again see the comeback of the hills once so green.

TRAINING IN THE FIELD OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY

"Supporting local communities to manage and use their natural resources in a sustainable way to improve the living conditions of the local population and to protect Song Da watershed" is the goal of the Social Forestry Development Project (SFDP) Song Da. In order to reach this goal, the SFDP in cooperation with local communities tested and developed some methodologies for natural resources management among them is community forest management. But how to upscale and hand over the methodology to local communities? Training is a tool to fulfil this task.

Only in 1999 the SFDP carried out 60 training activities related to the methodologies which have been developed, including 18 training activities on community forestry, which accounts for 30%. Thus it is clear that training contributed partly to achievements of Community Forestry activities in this year.

Firstly, 2 courses on "introduction to community forestry" for 50 trainees including teachers and students of Mai son Agro-forestry High School and staff from Thuan chau and Quynh nhai Forest Protection Unit and Thuan quynh Protection Forest Management Board were implemented. For most trainees it was the first encounter with community forestry and why it is so important in the Northwest. Furthermore, the strategy of SFDP towards community forestry development was made clear to the trainees. Based on experience and feedback information from trainees collected in these courses, training documents are being revised.

The study tour to Dak Lak also achieved good results. There was a change in the awareness of participants concerning community forest management in existing forest after carrying out discussions and sharing experience with staff from the MRC project and other foresters in Dak Lak.

At the end of June 1999, the first workshop on community forestry was organized and a Community Forestry Network Son La & Lai Chau was established with the members from 20 different institutions and organizations in the project area. Within 6 operating months, the Network carried out 12 case studies which were presented in the second Network workshop organized in December 1999.

Different types of training activities e.g. coaching, study tours, workshops and discussions do not only provide knowledge and skills but also change the awareness of local staff in implementing and applying all the methodologies, particularly in community forestry, and to adapt them to local conditions.
In the remaining two years of the third phase, to support the implementation of community forestry strategy, the project's training activities will focus on training of local trainers and collaborate with Maison Agro-forestry High School to compile and revise training documents. Step by step, the subject community forestry will be integrated with the school's curriculum and the number of local trainees will increase.

On the basis of the achievements in the year 1999, it can be expected that community forestry will further develop.

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**Major highlights in the second half of 1999:**

- LUP-LA (Land Use Planning and Land Allocation): After the methodology has been authorized by the provinces it is applied in Son La in 4 districts outside the project area with national funds.
- VDP (Village Development Planning) methodology was tested outside the project area with good results. In Son La, a provincial Working Group has reviewed the methodology and proposed it for provincial authorization.
- Methodology for elaborating Village Forest Protection Regulations and for making Village Forest Management Plan are reviewed and refined. The regional Community Forestry Network is an active exchange forum.

**Major issues for the first half of 2000:**

- The approval of the Village Development Planning methodology is expected in Son La by March 2000. Wider application in 2000 is anticipated in coordination with "13S Programme" requirements.
- A focus on Lai chau is required to facilitate review of the VDP methodology there.
- The methodology for elaborating Village Forest Protection Regulations can likely be finalized and its implementation can be substantially expanded.
- A stronger focus will be put on structured training as approved by Steering Committee. A new international advisor is expected in this field.
- We welcome the new SNV advisor on agriculture and extension in Yen chau - Mr. Mike Lord. Together with Mr. Wim Spieringhs in Tua chua, he will strengthen the agricultural efforts.

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**Picture 2:**
Forest Protection Regulations in one village

**Picture 3:**
Thinning for fuel wood - one option to develop forest