SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS OF FOREST CONTRACTING
REVIEW – HA GIANG PROVINCE, DECEMBER 1999

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Introduction

This is a summary of the report produced in December 1999 by Sheelagh O’Reilly entitled ‘Report of Commune and Village Forest Management and Protection in Ha Giang Province under MRDP and HPM’ which was submitted to Bjorn Hansson, CTA, MRDP in December 1999. This document should be read in conjunction with the report of the second visit of Rolf Gilliusson dated December 1999. It has been prepared for submission to the HPM programme and contains the material of direct relevance to that programme, including a number of recommendations (in addition to those in Rolf Gilliusson’s report) with respect to the forest contracting process in Ha Gaiig. Further details of the MRDP model are contained in the above report and in the ‘Report of Commune and Village Forest Management and Protection in Yen Bai province, November 1999.’

A summary of the itinerary and the conditions in the villages visited is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

HPM Forest Contracting

The HPM Forestry component has followed a different process with respect to the development of forest contracts with villages. This contracting process has been described by Rolf Gilliusson (April 1999) but the outline is shown in Figure 1. This issue is discussed in further detail in Gilliusson, December 1999 as further clarification of the process and criteria were obtained during the review.

This report will therefore examine some of the key issues raised within the HPM Forest Contracting programme. When examining these key issues a number of suggestions will be made which may assist the process to increase its efficiency and to assist in the development of long term sustainability once the current funding from HPM (5 years x 50,000/ha/year) ceases. It will also highlight issues of a more general nature which need clarification in order for community level management to work effectively. This will include some issues of national policy which influence the way the contracting process is applied. There are also issues of general forest management which are important given the large scale allocation of forest land under Decree 02 (Red Book). In the districts visited the level of land under red book classified as forest land far exceeds that which is available for village forest contracts.
**Figure 1:** HPM Forestry Component Forest Contracting Process (see Appendix 4 in Gilliusson, April 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>General PRA (not held in all villages due to budget constraint)</td>
<td>Forest Protection Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Detailed design work on status of forest including compartment mapping, standing timber and management designation e.g. protection</td>
<td>Forest Protection Province/District and sometimes commune. Copies held only at Province and District Forest Protection office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Detailed design document submitted to the Province Peoples Committee for approval of the budget allocation. Formal letter issued.</td>
<td>Province Peoples Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Contract agreed with village</td>
<td>Forest Protection Province/Village representative. Contract issued on behalf of HPM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Monthly monitoring visits by Forest Protection staff to forest.</td>
<td>District Forest Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Payment of money on a 6 monthly basis following approval of protection process by monitoring team.</td>
<td>Village representative and Forest Protection and HPM co-ordinator for District.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Key Issues Raised by the current HPM Forest Contracting Process**

1. Criteria for selection of areas – this is still unclear with conflicting comments made although a provisional list is given by Rolf Gilliusson, December 1999.  
   **Recommendation:**  
   Publishing clear criteria and use this when evaluating each potential contact site.

2. Given the area of forest land that has been allocated to households in Ha Giang what area is available for forest contracting under HPM or 661?  
   **Recommendation:**  
   Review the current land allocation statistics for each district with particular respect to the level of forestry land (land with forest, potential for forest and bare land) that has been allocated and clarify the quantity remaining and its status.

3. **Post HPM Strategy?**  
   What happens at the end of the HPM 5 year funding period?  
   **Recommendation:**  
   A full review of the issues raised by contracting and the community involvement be undertaken by Ha Giang. This review should examine the issue of the relationship to long term sustainable forest management to current national and provincial policies, laws and institutional structures.

4. **Harvesting in Watersheds?**  
   The issues of level of harvesting (timber and NTFP’s) from less critical, critical and very critical watersheds is seen to be of key importance in the long term viability of both community and household management of forest land. What can and cannot be taken, how permission is granted and how harvesting models could be developed needs to be considered in more detail. HPM must however work within current National and Provincial guidelines.
**Recommendation:**

a. The clauses in the contract relating to harvesting should be expanded to give more detail concerning the level of harvesting that can be undertaken under the specific constraints within each contract area. Blanket harvesting recommendations are usually not capable of dealing with particular situations well.

b. HPM works with other agencies including the Policy Department of MARD to review the current classification and harvesting levels. Consideration should be given to establishing, with a suitable Forestry Research Institution, long term trials on harvesting methods and the impact on soil/water conservation as well as livelihood development.

5. **Community Silviculture Development**

At present (and related to 4 above) harvesting guidelines have not been specified well. There is a strong need to relate technical silvicultural issues to community level management. This is an important area for the long term management of the forests and there is a need to develop community based management and harvesting programmes which can be implemented with technical support from Forest Protection and other relevant agencies.

**Recommendation:**

Continue collaboration with MRDP on issues of community forest management, including the development of technical training relating to community silviculture.

6. **Biodiversity and Forest Protection:**

For areas of natural forest which are both being allocated (‘red-book’) and contracted then the issue of Biodiversity protection arises. It is likely that the current clause on harvesting is likely to lead farmers to plant exotic species as these are easily identified from local trees.

**Recommendation:**

a. This recommendation is closely linked to 4 and 5 above. It requires a much stronger emphasis on the development of harvesting guidelines which focus on the rational use of material which has developed as a result of natural regeneration and assisted natural regeneration rather than through direct planting. Direct planting – even of exotics – has a role in watershed protection, but the issue of biodiversity protection must also be taken into account. Liaison with MRDP (and other agencies) on the development of appropriate methods is highly recommended in this area as there is a need to combine scientific knowledge concerning forest ecology with village level requirements for livelihood development as well as meeting wider objectives with respect to wider watershed management.

b. Examine ongoing research in Ha Giang with respect to the use of indigenous tree species for reforestation of the bare limestone areas. Work is on-going through MRDP with Yen Min State Forest Enterprise in Dong Van and DOSTE Ha Giang is attempting to work in this area as well.
7. **Involvement of people in the Forest Contracting Process**  
This is vitally important to ensure that local people understand the process, understand the rights and responsibilities that they are signing up to for the contract period. Also development of community based management is more likely to lead to more effective long term management of the forest. Communities with a long term economic interest in the forest are much more likely to protect and develop their assets.  

**Recommendation:**  
Rolf Gilliusson’s report of December 1999 indicates a procedure to move the current HPM procedure into a more people focused method by involving villagers in a *joint planning process*. I would concur with these recommendations to ensure that villagers are more involved in the process. This would assist in changing attitudes towards the forest from ‘state forest’ to community forest. The final contract document should include details of local rules and regulations.

8. **Design document:**  
If the approach described in Rolf Gilliusson’s report is adopted then considerable work will be required to reformulate the Design document so that it becomes a joint document of the village and Forest Protection. This is after all the document covering the long term management of the site, and will (it is assumed) still be in force after HPM has finished. A copy should be kept in the village, and where literacy is an issue then care is needed to simplify the document as far as possible – including the implications for failure to achieve agreed targets.  

**Recommendation:**  
Forest Protection review the current documentation and process in line with Rolf Gilliusson’s report. Advice should be sought (e.g. from MRDP) on how to document the forest in a way that meets the needs of villagers and Forest Protection.

9. **Process of Modification of Documentation:**  
The current monitoring process is mainly designed to meets the needs of the disbursement of money to households. However, there is also a need for villagers to be involved more fully in the process and ways sought to enable them (and forest protection) to amend the rules governing the contract over its duration.  

**Recommendation:**  
Forest Protection Department and the Province/District Peoples Committee review the current monitoring process and document within the contract the procedure that can be used if modifications are required to the contract to meet changing policies, harvesting rules and other factors over the lifetime of the contract.

10. **Gender**  
In none of the villages visited had the contract been signed by a woman. The involvement of women in the Forest Contracting Process is extremely limited especially as those villagers who are involved tend to be those with official positions. However, in many ethnic groups women play a significant role in harvesting and management of forest areas. It is imperative that women are more directly involved in the process of forest contracting.
Recommendation:
The process as recommended by Rolf Gilliusson should be adopted with the proviso that during consideration of Village Organisation and the regulations full (and documented) attention is paid to the role of women in forest management. Women should be facilitated through training and other measures to play a full role in the mapping and decision making processes. The use of local language interpreters would facilitate this process.

Issues for further clarification and development
The Forest Contracting system currently being utilised by Ha Giang is certainly a major step forward in the management of forest resources in the Province. However, given the current level of forest and bare land allocation to households in the province it is possible to ask if there are other areas of forest land management which require serious attention in order to help make the Forest Contracting process viable in the long run.

1. Revegetation and reforestation of ‘bare land’.
   Given the wide scale of forest and bare land allocation within Ha Giang province, there is a serious requirement to review the range of activities and institutions that will be required to facilitate bringing this land into a situation of long term effective productivity. The utilisation of this land in a more effective manner would also reduce the pressure on the remaining areas of natural forest which are seen as critical in terms of watershed protection. To this end there are a number of areas which need support.
   **Recommendations:**
   a. Review the development and control of village nurseries for replanting and revegetation work. The more work that is under local control the better. This however also requires technical training and support from the relevant authorities.
   b. Fuelwood issues for the development of red book land need to be explored. Alternative sources of energy could be utilised where possible to reduce demand. However for the remoter areas the development of allocated forest land for effective fuel wood production is a major requirement (both for direct household consumption and for sale).
   c. Coherent development of farm and village land use plans should be explored in a participatory way.
   d. The issue of extension associated with the use of trees needs a major review. The technical knowledge of Forest Protection is important, but the delivery of this knowledge and its integration with local practices needs to be developed. The use of Agricultural Extension for this work would also be fruitful especially where the linkage between forest/tree based production and other agricultural enterprises was being examined e.g. livestock production.

2. Institutional Issues
   It is not only in terms of extension that the issue of responsibilities for forest management and protection need clarification. This is a national level role as there appears to be some concerns over possibly conflicting responsibilities
between Forest Development Department, Forest Protection Department and other agencies. Clarity is required on this especially in the area of technical support and monitoring. Farmers, villages and communes should be able to know exactly who is responsible for what, and who they should approach for advice and support.

**Recommendation:**
Within Ha Giang Province a full review of the responsibilities of the different agencies involved in Forest Land management could be undertaken and published. This would enable gaps in the current service delivery to be highlighted and measures then taken to ensure that these gaps are filled.

3. **Poverty Alleviation**

The national and provincial government indicators from a range of communes and villages in Ha Giang indicate that there are many which still suffer from routine food insecurity and high levels of poverty. In many of these villages the utilisation of the natural resources of the village provides an opportunity for households to develop diverse livelihood strategies which may increase their welfare. However, it is clear that the forest resources are currently under strict control with respect to harvesting due to their classification for watershed protection. The development of sustainable utilisation strategies is therefore curtailed by this approach. However, the development of sustainable harvesting and regeneration strategies for watersheds is possible provided that government policies and institutions are developed to facilitate this.

**Recommendation:**
HPM should examine more closely those aspects of policy development indicated above which would facilitate the wider use of the natural resources in Ha Giang. HPM should liaise closely with the Province to ensure that the field experience is transmitted to MARD Policy Department. This experience is valuable and can be of benefit when developing new policies and looking at the implementation of programmes such as the 5 million hectares.

4. **Gender**

It is apparent that the current allocation of red books for agricultural and forest land is made to the head of household only. None of the red books seen had the name of both husband and wife. It is important that in terms of status and the development of women that the land allocation is seen to be to both partners. It should not be assumed that the head of household is the only figure of importance within the household. This would lead to the protection of women’s rights in the event of any dispute or divorce in the future. In addition many women do not speak Vietnamese and therefore are excluded from discussions with extension and other staff as a consequence.

**Recommendation**

a. All red books contain the names of both partners in the household to whom the land is allocated.

b. All extension staff either speak the local language or the use of translators is becomes routine. It may be necessary at times to have women only training to facilitate attendance.
5. Protection of very critical watershed, management, finance and long term management?

During the visit to Forest Protection in Meo Vac an issue was raised concerning funding and management over the long term of very critical watershed. The linkage between the 661 programme and HPM seems to be a little unclear and it is possible that some important areas of forest may not be covered by the new programme.

**Recommendation:**

HPM assist the Forest Protection Department to review the plans for the protection of Very Critical Watershed forest areas within Ha Giang. Following this review clear long term (up to 50 year) plans should be drawn up with respect to the responsibility of management and funding arrangements.