A situation analysis of social forestry development in Viet Nam

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Since the introduction of the "Doi Moi" policy in 1996, the Forestry Sector of Vietnam has applied decentralised management and the national economy has moved in a market-oriented direction under the management of the Government. In this situation many economic sectors have been able to become involved in forestry activities. Individuals, households, and socioeconomic organisations were allocated land and forests for sustainable forestry development. Farmers and the community are getting more and more active in forestry activities. Social Forestry was established and has developed gradually in Vietnam. It is forestry by the people and for the people.

A fundamental characteristic of social forestry is that it attracts the participation of farmers and communities in the whole process. A situation analysis of social forestry development in Vietnam identifies advantages and obstacles to participation of farmers in forestry development. Below are results of an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Vietnamese forestry.

Strengths:

1. In new forestry policies, management is decentralised in order to meet farmers' needs and attract different stakeholders in forestry activities. Consistent laws and policies, especially in land and forest allocation have greatly motivated people to participate in forestry development.
2. Priority was set for mountainous and rural development, environment protection and bio-diversity conservation, development of ethnic mountainous communities, gender development etc. This formed favourable conditions for social forestry development.
3. At present, different individuals, organisations and economic sectors participate in forestry development, specifically in land allocation and forest contracting.
4. Many Government programmes/projects invest in forestry and rural development, poverty alleviation, permanent resettlement and cultivation.
5. Many international government and non-government organisations give priority to investment in forestry and rural development programmes/projects.
6. Participation of farmers and communities in forestry activities increases gradually. Many appropriate approaches and tools have been applied to get more people involved in forest resources management.
7. State-owned forest enterprises and forestry institutions play an important role in supporting and encouraging different economic sectors to participate in forestry development.
8. A national agriculture and forestry extension system was established for different levels, from central to district level.
9. Community organisations, steering committees and project management boards for forestry programmes and projects funded by international organisations were established and work effectively.

Weaknesses:

1. Some Government policies in forestry development are not clear. Farmers, particularly those in rural mountainous areas
have little understanding of the policies. Their trust in the policies is limited. As a result, laws and policies have not affected farmers' lives.

2. Basically, the current socioeconomic environment does not provide favourable conditions for social forestry development. Low living standards and difficulties in local consumption markets limit farmers' participation in forestry development.

3. Insufficient master planning has blocked development planning at local levels. Weak service and support systems as well as poor transport systems have been obstacles to the development of people forestry. Though the number of individuals, households and organisations involved in land allocation is increasing, the figure is still low.

4. The communities' roles and functions in forest management have decreased.

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6. Farmers' participation in social forestry development has improved. However, it is still at a low level, particularly in the programmes/projects funded by the Government. Top-down management and token motivation of participation still exist in some programmes and projects.

7. Extension systems at commune and village levels have not been working effectively in the Vietnamese government-run projects.

8. The roles and functions of research and training institutions in social forestry development are still limited.

9. Local organisations for social forestry have yet to be identified.

10. Projects funded by the Vietnamese Government make unequal investment, with low input for training on forestry extension and human resources development.

Opportunities:

1. The Government's continuous priority to agricultural, forestry and rural development, especially for rural mountainous areas, programmes for poverty alleviation and infrastructure development for remote areas provide favourable conditions for farmers to participate in forestry development.

2. International organisations continue to give priority to forestry development projects and programmes.

3. The programme of reforestation of five million hectares provides farmers with opportunities for more effective and comprehensive participation.

4. National economic growth continues increasing therefore strengthening social forestry development.

Threats:

1. Farmers' livelihoods are still low. People in remote mountainous areas still lack food and firewood. This is one of the most potential threats resulting from low levels of farmers' participation in forestry development activities.

2. Unstable socioeconomic environments will be an obstacle to the forestry activities of farmers and their communities.

3. Unsustainable development of projects due to the lack of interest in training, human resources development and research and development of community organisations will have impacts on the development of social forestry.

4. Lack of master planning and identification of markets for forest products in different areas leads to the fact that programmes/projects will not receive farmers' support and participation.

Vietnamese forestry can develop sustainably only if there is active participation of farmers and communities. In order to attract farmers’ participation, the Government should complete its legal systems, policies and create favourable conditions by improving project management, strengthening service support systems and completing a collaboration mechanism for production, training and research.

References:


