



# ASSESSING FOREST GOVERNANCE IN VIET NAM

IDENTIFYING KEY CHALLENGES AND INTERVENTIONS TO STRENGTHEN GOVERNANCE

Policy brief



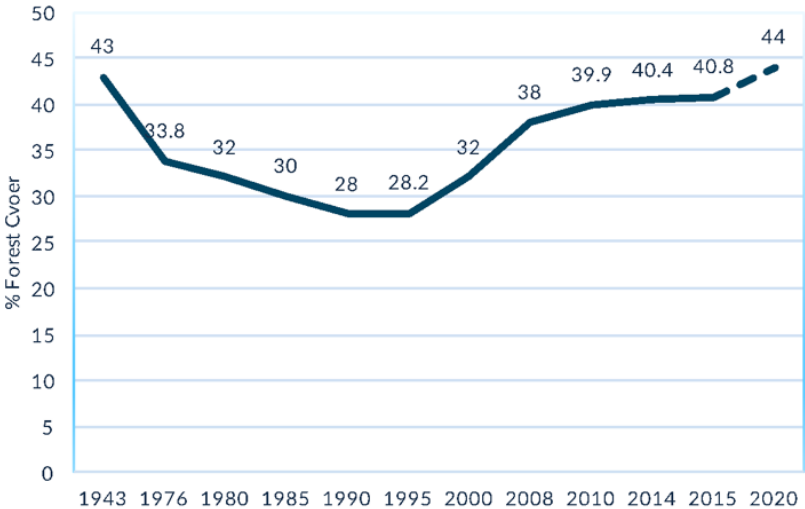
## Summary

Viet Nam remains home to great numbers of vulnerable and poor people, especially among the rural population and ethnic minorities - many of whom depend on forest resources. These forests face numerous pressures including illegal logging, infrastructure development and agricultural expansion. RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests, working with civil society partners as part of the European Union-funded Voices for the Mekong Forests (V4MF) project, is seeking to better understand the governance challenges and opportunities in Viet Nam’s forestry sector, as well as putting forward a programme to address these through the empowerment of non-state actors (NSAs). To this end, a participatory forest governance assessment was carried out in late 2017 and early 2018. The findings, outlined in this brief, reflect the participants’ perception that forest governance in Viet Nam is facing many challenges, in particular in relation to stakeholder engagement processes, but also that windows of opportunities exist. The project partners will work with various stakeholders, particularly NSAs including civil society, to implement a programme to address the challenges and opportunities identified.

## Viet Nam’s forest sector

Viet Nam is the only country in the Mekong region to have reported a continuous increase in its forest cover over the last three decades, from 9.4 million hectares in 1990 up to 14.06 million ha by 2015, accounting for 40.8 percent of the territory (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The government in 1990 decided to reverse the trend of deforestation in previous decades, aiming to restore the forest cover, conserve biodiversity and protect the environment, with the so-called Greening Bare Hills, or Programme 327,<sup>2</sup> and its flagship the 5-Million-Hectare Reforestation Program, or Programme 661.<sup>3</sup> The government has built on these programmes through the National Forest Protection and Development Programme (2011-2020) and the National Target Programme on Sustainable Forestry Development for 2016-2020, in combination with the National REDD+ Action Programme to the year 2030 (NRAP).<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1. Forest transition in Viet Nam, including government target for 2020<sup>5</sup>**



While the overall cover of forest has increased at national level, the problem of forest degradation persists despite a range of policies and measures. Degraded forests were estimated at 10.2 million ha in 2005, or 80 percent of the total forest estate. According to the Viet Nam Forest Reference Emission Level submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as of 2010, over two-thirds of the country’s natural forests were considered poor or regenerating, while rich and closed-canopy forest constituted only 5 percent of the total.

There has also been an observed increase of planted forest area for commercial purposes. Of the country’s 14,377,682 ha of forests, natural forests account for about 10,242,000 ha (71.2 percent), with the rest being planted forests, mostly for timber (MARD, 2017)<sup>6</sup>.

1–FAO, 2017. Forest change in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS): An overview of negative and positive drivers. Bangkok: FAO.  
 2–Decision 327-CT of the Prime Minister dated 15 September 1992, on the use of bare land, denuded hills, forests, alluvial flats, and water bodies.  
 3–Decision 661/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister dated 29 July 1998, on the objectives, tasks, policies and organization for the Five Million Hectare Reforestation Programme.  
 4–Decision 419/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister dated 5 April 2017, approving the National Action Programme on the Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions through the reduction of Deforestation and Forest Degradation, Sustainable Management of Forest Resources, and Conservation and Enhancement of Forest Carbon Stocks (REDD+) by 2030.  
 5– McNally, R., Phuong, V. T., Chien, N. T., Phuong, P. X., Dung, N. V., 2017. Analyses: Policies and Measures – Support for the Revision of Viet Nam’s National REDD+ Action Programme. Jakarta: Forest Carbon.  
 6– Decision 1819/QĐ-BNN-TCLN of the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development dated 16 May 2017, on the National Forest Status in 2016

With regards to their management, around 3,118,952 ha (21.7 percent) of the forests are temporarily managed by Communal People's Committees (CPCs), while the remaining 11.3 million ha have been allocated to groups such as forest management boards (35 percent), households (20.4 percent), state forestry enterprises, (11.2 percent), village communities (7.8 percent) and other organizations and enterprises. This means that the private institutions of households and communities between them currently manage only just over 28 percent of forests, with the rest being dominated by state organizations. This raises concerns for the fair management of these commons, and the threat of illegal exploitation and encroachment of the natural forests.

The key drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in Viet Nam are logging (legal and illegal), conversion of forest lands for infrastructure, monoculture or annual crops, and forest fires. Further underlying causes are poor governance, lack of tenure rights for local communities, ineffective enforcement of laws, and increasing market demand for agricultural crops and monoculture products.

In theory, forest governance in Viet Nam is sound enough. There are major legal frameworks, laws and regulations in place. The government in general is proactive in meeting forestry targets, and there is no shortage of relevant policies, strategies and engagements. However, many challenges and gaps persist, among them: unclear land use boundaries and land tenure; inequity in forest land allocation; limited allocation of resources compared to other sectors; regional disparities in forestry investment; and a sustained drive to establish industrial plantations.

The government is investing in strengthening governance including through the National Forestry Development Strategy (2006-2020), which sets ambitious targets for policy reform and financial support to forest protection, as well as through other ongoing forestry initiatives, such as the national-level Payment for Forest Ecosystem Services (PFES) initiative, the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan, and the UN Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+). One of the important features of the strategy is the emphasis on greater clarity in the ownership of forest lands. The strategy also advocates for an increased engagement of local communities in forest governance.<sup>7</sup>

The new Forestry Law of Viet Nam is set to come into force on 1 January 2019, replacing the 2004 Forest Protection and Development Law (FPDL). The new law will improve forest governance, clarify the rights and responsibilities of different types of forest owners, provide for more extensive ownership for forest investors, and safeguard the rights of local communities to their spiritual or sacred forests. It will formalize the policies for the PFES system as well as sustainable forest management and certification, and restructure state management in the forestry sector.

In financial terms the country's forests are extremely valuable, with exports of forestry products valued at US\$8 billion in 2017, up 10.2 percent from 2016.<sup>8</sup> This gives Viet Nam a 6-per-cent share of the world market in forestry-product exports, putting it first in ASEAN, second in Asia and fifth in the world. The value of these exports is forecast to increase to more than \$11 billion by 2020. The government is also exploring opportunities to support the export trade through certification targets, including for smallholders to better engage local farmers.

Viet Nam is at the forefront in the Greater Mekong Subregion on the development of PFES in several watersheds. These mostly involve hydropower operators and water-supply companies paying for water services and soil conservation. The PFES does have its own issues, notably in relation to the mechanism for benefits distribution. But it has generated over \$50 million of payments to hundreds of thousands of forest owners in upland areas, including many rural and ethnic households, to protect almost 6 million hectares of forests, or 45 percent of the country's forest coverage.<sup>9</sup>

Current international initiatives also provide opportunity and incentive to strengthen governance. The FLEGT action plan and REDD+ both require inclusive and transparent multi-stakeholder participatory processes and legal and institutional reforms.

In relation to FLEGT, Viet Nam is the only country in the Greater Mekong Subregion that has concluded Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) negotiations with the European Union as of May 2017.<sup>10</sup> As per the conditions, the country has developed a Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS). The general view, including from civil society, is that this is an opportunity to improve forest governance in relation to illegal logging, unregulated timber trade and rampant corruption. An association called VNGO-FLEGT Network was created to bring the voice of civil society to the VPA negotiations. Now, the group focuses on developing the capacities of civil society, smallholders and local communities to understand the principles around VPA, including the definitions involved in the TLAS, and to assess the impacts of the agreement on local livelihoods. The network also advocates for a five-year FLEGT-VPA strategic plan for civil society organizations (CSOs), and to be part of an independent forest monitoring system.

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7--During the five years of implementation of the Forest Protection and Development Plan 2011-2015, the area of forest allocated to village communities increased from 298,984 ha to 1,110,408 ha (MARD, 2017. Report on Forest Protection and Development Plan 2011-2016).

8--Le, C., 2018. Timber Export Reached \$8 Billion: Great Success in 2017. GoViet Magazine, Volume 97(1), p.16.

9--Shivakoti, G., et al., 2017. Natural Resources Dynamism and Management Concerns in Central Vietnam. In: G. Shivakoti et al., eds. 2017. Redefining Diversity and Dynamics of Natural Resources Management in Asia, Volume 3. pp.3-12. Singapore: Elsevier.

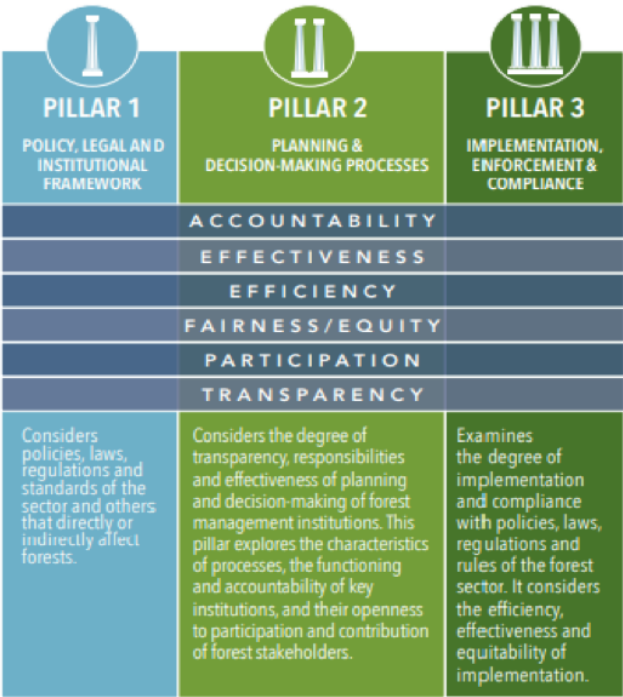
10--Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (2017).

REDD+ is central to the National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS). The National Action Programme on REDD+ to 2030, approved by the Prime Minister in April 2017, is the current framework for REDD+ implementation. The UN-REDD Programme is a leading initiative to enhance the country's ability to benefit from results-based payments for REDD+ and to undertake transformational changes in the forestry governance. In parallel, Viet Nam is participating in the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), which endorsed the country's REDD+ Readiness Package in 2016, and then selected its Emission Reductions Programme in early 2018 as the subject for negotiation and implementation of the Emission Reductions Payment Agreement.

### Assessing forest governance in Viet Nam

RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests, working with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Center for People and Nature Reconciliation (PanNature), conducted a forest governance assessment to better understand the challenges and opportunities for strengthening forest governance in the country and the Greater Mekong Subregion as a whole. The work was carried out as part of the EU-funded V4MF project. Based on this increased understanding, the project is putting forward a programme for addressing the identified issues.

The assessment used the Enabling Environment Assessment Tool (EEAT) developed by WWF, based on the PROFOR Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance.<sup>11</sup> This framework assesses a series of indicators, divided among six cross-cutting principles and three pillars of governance (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Forest Governance Assessment and Situational Analysis Framework<sup>12</sup>**

First, the assessment team reviewed the indicators and tailored them to the situation of forestry in Viet Nam. Then the team conducted the assessment by collecting inputs from various stakeholders from government departments and NSAs who contributed at national and landscape levels (in the Central Highlands, Quang Nam and Kon Tum Provinces).

Following this, the capacity development needs of relevant institutions was assessed, in relation to the challenges and opportunities identified in the quantitative and qualitative assessments. The assessments are then used as the basis for the development of a capacity development programme particularly focusing on NSAs, mainly CSOs.

Participants were asked to give their perception of the strength or success of various institutions, frameworks, policies and implementation measures connected to forest governance, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "failing", 2 is "weak", 3 is "fair", 4 is "good", and 5 is "close to best practice". Qualitative comments were also collected.

Nearly 100 individuals participated in the research. Emphasis was on a participatory and consensus-building process. This aimed to create an environment of shared understanding, as well as to secure stakeholder buy-in for the research stage and commitment for the subsequent capacity development programme.

11-- PROFOR and FAO, 2011. Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance. Rome: FAO.

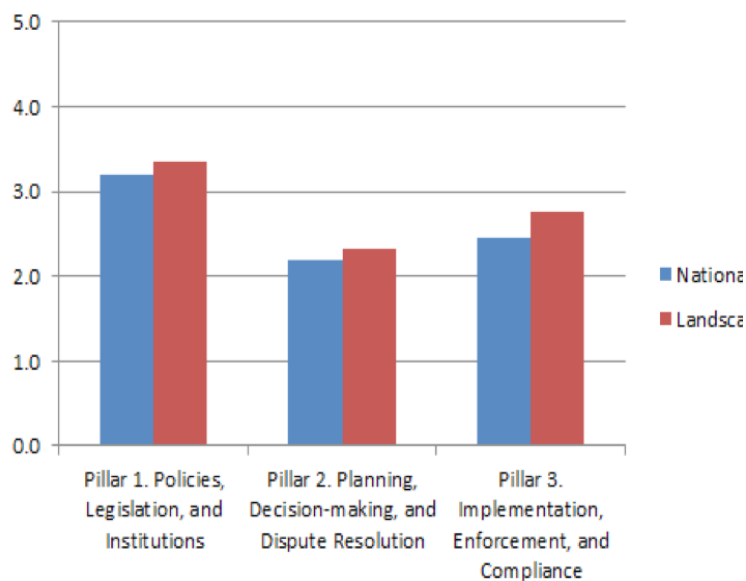
12-- PROFOR, 2017. Assessing Forest Governance in Mozambique: Identifying Key Challenges and Interventions to Strengthen Governance

## Results

### General findings across pillars

Participants agreed that forest governance in Viet Nam is facing many challenges but that windows of opportunities also exist. While there is a great deal of efforts by various actors to improve the situation, there is still a long way to go. The general perception of performances in forest governance showed similar patterns at national and landscape levels (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** The three pillars of governance ranked at landscape and national levels



A number of indicators in Pillar 1: Policies, legislation and institutions achieved fair scores. Indicators related to Pillar 2: Planning, decision making and dispute resolution were on average categorized as “weak... with definite problems”. Pillar 3: Implementation, enforcement and compliance, was perceived to be a bit better but still unsatisfactory. At national level in particular, it seems that bureaucracy and top-down decision making are seen as impediments.

The general trend shows gaps between the stated intentions at policy level, the details of planning and decision making, and ultimately the implementation on the ground. This general perception is corroborated by other forest governance-related studies.<sup>13</sup>



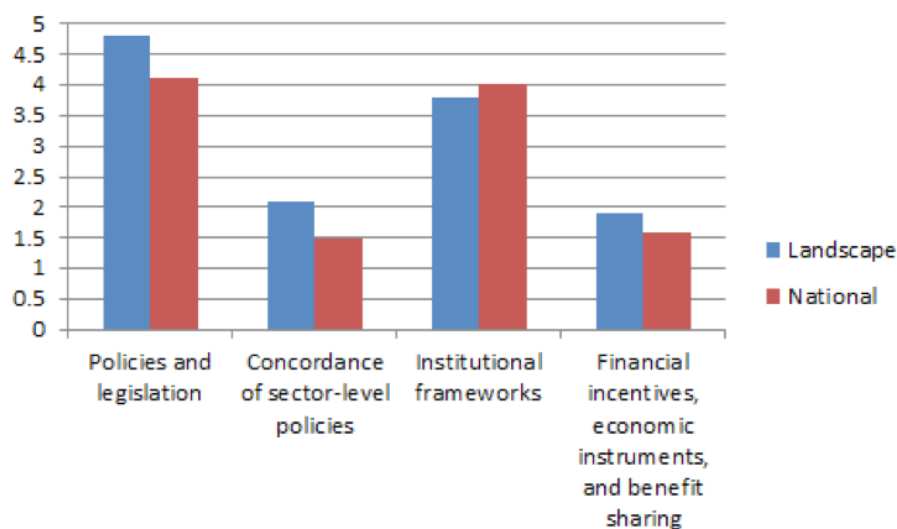
13--PROFOR and FAO, 2011. Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance. Rome: FAO.

## Pillar 1: Policy, legal and institutional framework

Overall, the scores under this pillar were in the higher range at both national and sub-national levels (Figure 4).

The feeling is that Viet Nam has no shortage of forest-related policies and legislation (including inter-sectoral) in place, well-crafted economic instruments to incentivize forest production and conservation, and mechanisms to distribute benefits between stakeholders, such as the PFES. There were lower scores for specific components, e.g. regarding institutional frameworks, at both national and landscape levels.

**Figure 4.** Average score per component of Pillar 1



### *Policies and legislation*

**Strong legislation:** Participants gave a general thumbs-up to the existing policy and legislative arsenal. The FPDL and its successor the Forestry Law clearly state and regulate the roles and responsibilities of all actors, from the state's administration and management agencies to different forest owners, as well as timber traders.

**Customary laws need more recognition:** However, it was felt that the customary laws of ethnic communities on forestry management and practice are not officially recognized. But it was noted that the forthcoming Forestry Law (Article 5) provides for the management of spiritual and sacred community forests under the category of special-use forest.

**State dominates forest ownership:** Some improvements notwithstanding, the new Forestry Law does not change fundamental issues of forest ownership, as all natural forests remain under the legal control of the State as per the Constitution. This threatens the security of access to those resources for communities in and around such forest areas. Without clear provisions for co-management, there is tension between those communities' rights, and the legislation.

**Uncertainty around modalities of new legislation:** Participants also expressed concern that the effectiveness of laws depends on how they are interpreted, verified and expressed in decrees and circulars. The MARD will be developing a set of four decrees and seven circulars ahead of the 2019 implementation of the Forestry Law. This is an opportunity for NSAs, business and local communities to engage in consultation during their drafting.

### *Concordance of sectoral-level policy*

**Good level of inter-sectoral concordance:** The concordance of sector-level policies scored well at both national and landscape levels. Participants cited strategies that holistically cover the three official types of forest use: special-use forests, protection forests and production forests. The FPDL, Forestry Law and Forestry Development Strategy 2006-2020 all promote integrated and sustainable forest management. This ranking could reflect the fact that all national policy drafts now have to go through various consultations between sectors and ministries, public hearings and sometimes independent reviews. They also have to be reviewed by the Ministry of Justice to avoid any conflict with other policies or regulations. The process is guided by the Law on Issuance of Legal Documents.

**A few areas of conflict:** However, some conflicts persist, for example regarding the overlap on decrees on the management of endangered species or the inconsistencies between some plans for protected areas and others for biodiversity conservation.

### *Institutional framework*

**Excessive top-down hierarchy:** There is a hierarchical system from the central to the provincial, district and communal levels, to guide and oversee the implementation and compliance of the legislation. The weaker scores may reflect poor collaboration between state agencies from different sectors. The following were cited as common perceptions:

- State ownership of forests prevents a sense of local ownership, attachment and stewardship. This is exacerbated by legal barriers to block locals' access to special-use and protection forests. In particular, native ethnic minority communities see themselves as the legitimate owners of the forest according to customary laws.
- There is overlap of the functions of state forest owners, local forest rangers and district/communal authorities, as well as police and army forces. This leads to unclear leadership and worsens inter-agency collaboration, which in turn prevents effective measures against corruption or other illegal activities.
- There is a lack of incentive for stakeholder participation around forest management and conservation: For example, there is no stakeholder consultation when weighing up the benefits of converting natural forests to economic production for short-term gain.
- Sustainable forest management and certification carries high opportunity costs for smallholders. This means local communities are unable to benefit from the exceptions provided for in the recent logging ban, and can hardly pursue any form of commercial timber exploitation.
- The pivotal role of institutions that are outside of the administrative hierarchy is perceived as interfering in processes.

### *Financial incentives, economic instruments, and benefit sharing*

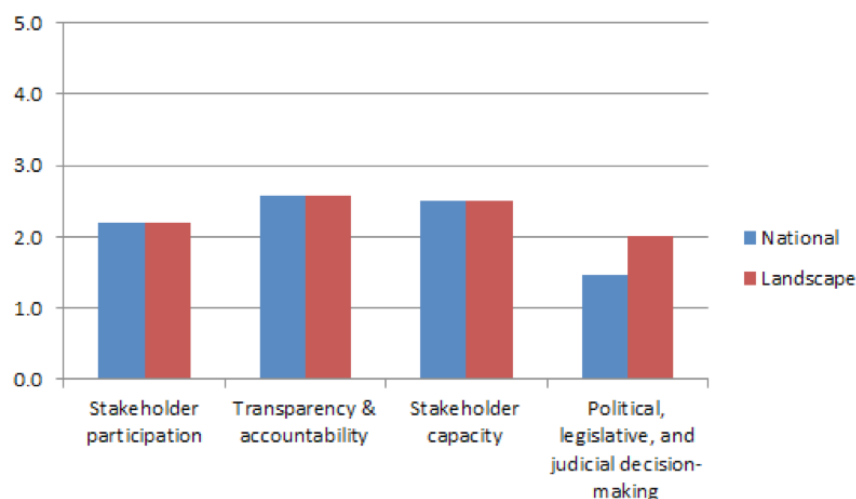
**Uncertain tenure:** It was felt that present legislation does not secure tenure and ownership rights for private investors. This makes long-term returns less certain, and is a disincentive to investment in forest property. Also, state incentives tend to promote investments in land-based activities and infrastructure projects, which do not favour local rights or the forests' health.



## Pillar 2: Planning and decision-making processes

The scores under this pillar came up the lowest of the assessment (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Average score per component of Pillar 2



### Stakeholder participation

**More participation in principle than in practice:** Participants acknowledged the provisions for public participation, in particular regarding the role of local authorities to respect those provisions. But they said participation was in practice much more limited and uneven than provided for in the rules.

**Procedural obstructions to stakeholder capacity:** In general, opportunities to give an opinion usually go to other state agencies rather than to affected communities and the public. Women and vulnerable groups are particularly marginalized over forest management decisions. This is in part due to procedural obstacles: nominating and putting forward representatives for consultation is not straightforward for local communities, CSOs or non-governmental organizations. In most cases, participants feel at best they are kept informed, and somewhat consulted, but nowhere near enabled to influence decisions or actions.

**Some organizations representing stakeholders:** Several political and social mass organizations are better placed to engage with decision-making processes, such as the Fatherland Front, the Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), the Farmers' Association, and the Women's Union, as well as the Viet Nam Forest Owners Association (VIFORA). VUSTA is in particular has potential to influence forestry policy processes. VIFORA helps members support their governance, protect their rights and legitimate their interests in accordance with the laws.

### Transparency and accountability

**Little transparency over upcoming decisions:** This area received low scores. Participants noted several institutions supporting transparency and accountability, and there is good public access to some information, such as the roles of key forestry management bodies. But much less is available on ongoing or upcoming decision processes. Participants cited in particular the processes relating to forest land allocation, lease and withdrawal, and conversion of forest use. Such decisions are not necessarily made public and can be taken without adequate participation and agreement of local communities. There was more reaching out to stakeholders over environmental impact assessments, particularly affected households and local authorities.

### Stakeholder capacity

**Low knowledge levels of stakeholders:** Importantly, the assessment revealed tremendous gaps in knowledge, skills and capacities of actors and stakeholders of the forest sector, at both national and landscape levels, to improve governance. NSAs have low understanding of the principles of forest governance and their determinants integrated in policy and regulatory frameworks, and thus cannot apply them in the context of FLEGT or REDD+.

### Political, legislative, and judicial decision making

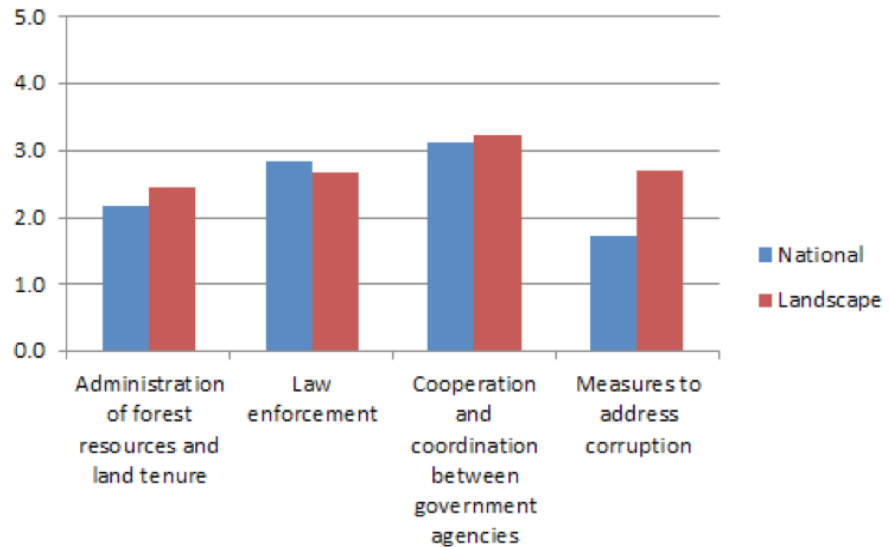
**Obscure, top-down decision making:** Forestry decisions need to follow the procedures. But participants noted they can be highly influenced by politics, as policy makers are appointees. In addition, the approach is usually hierarchical and top-down, with the options of lower-level officials limited to the scope of their roles, while provincial authorities have more latitude. There were also perceived institutional barriers against the effective participation of NSAs and local communities, and against transparency and accountability in forestry decision-making processes.



### Pillar 3: Implementation, enforcement and compliance

The score under this pillar is slightly higher than for Pillar 2, in particular regarding cooperation and coordination. Scores were lower for the administration of forest resources and land tenure, law enforcement and measures to address corruption (Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Average score per component of Pillar 3



#### Administration of forest resources and land tenure

**Some administrative successes:** Participants cited some successes of the forest administration: the gradual increase of forest cover; the expansion of forest plantations and forest production; the increase in revenues from the wood industry; and the launching of PFES, regarded as one of the most successful forestry policies.

**Local stakeholders overlooked:** In contrast, some recent decisions made by central or provincial authorities are perceived as detrimental to the health of the forest estates and the well-being of forest-dependent people: the expansion of rubber plantations; carbon emission offsetting projects; the conversion of protection forests into production forests; and hydropower in forested areas. **Benefits not reaching local communities:** Participants cited the logging ban, and the reforms of state forestry enterprises to return land to villagers, but said those projects are yet to demonstrate tangible achievements. The effectiveness of the financial support given to ethnic minority communities for their involvement in forest protection is so far unclear because of the projects' limited budget, they said.

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### **Law enforcement**

**Ineffective enforcement:** Law enforcement is perceived as weak; laws and regulations are not strictly followed, and sanctions are not strong enough to act as a deterrent. Reports by the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) show that the rate of forest law violations is declining, but thousands still occur annually.<sup>14</sup> The enforcement of laws related to illegal logging in particular does not seem to be very effective.<sup>15</sup>

**Weak monitoring systems:** The government's own monitoring is perceived to be purely administrative, leaving room for graft. Viet Nam has a legal framework for complaints, but awareness is minimal, costs substantial, and the documentation requirements are high, which discourages people and communities from bringing any. Most forestry-related complaints are about conflicts in land-use rights.

### **Cooperation and coordination between government agencies**

**Fair inter-agency coordination:** Cooperation on forest-related policy, planning, and practice scored fair, particularly between the MARDC and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MONRE). It should be noted that other studies have found collaboration among state agencies over forest and land resources to be poor, due to a lack of human and financial resources.

### **Measures to address corruption**

**Mixed response on corruption:** Perceptions of performance regarding anti-corruption measures was rather mixed. While there is a good legal framework, implementation was seen to be weak, in particular on illegal logging.



14--Hong T.Q., Thanh P.N., and Lan L.V., 2017. Forest Governance in Viet Nam: A Literature Review.

15--Sikor T., and To, P. X., 2011. Illegal Logging in Vietnam: Lam Tac (Forest Hijackers) in Practice and Talk. *Society & Natural Resources*, Volume 24(7), pp.688-701.

## Priority issues and suggested interventions

The results of this participatory assessment, conducted together with an accompanying capacity development need assessment (CDNA), highlighted a number of priority issues and targeted interventions to improve forest governance.

### Integrate local perspectives in the development of policies and plans

- Promote community members' rights to access forest products and use forest lands during consultations for the implementation of specific forestry legislation.
- Engage CSOs to integrate community rights in consultations over the forthcoming amendments to the Land Law, the Law on Environmental Protection, and the Biodiversity Law.
- Provide targeted comments on the implementation of the PFES, in particular regarding its benefit distribution system, and accelerate the participatory PFES monitoring and evaluation.
- Help build and promote an independent monitoring system for the FLEGT-VPA, for the Participatory Governance Assessment for REDD+, and for other sustainable forest management initiatives.
- Facilitate stronger partnerships between the private sector and local communities to achieve equitable benefit sharing and encourage value added processing.

### Clarify mandates and improve cooperation between actors of the forest sector

- Review and where appropriate scale up multi-stakeholder initiatives for sustainable forest management. These could include an adaptive collaborative management approach with Forest Management Council models.
- Develop capacity to integrate forest co-management into PFES implementation and monitoring in special-use and protection forests.

### Improve stakeholder participation

- Strengthen existing and establish new multi-stakeholder networks, with appropriate monitoring of capacity development programmes.
- Support local NSAs to participate in the development of provincial strategies (e.g. green growth, climate change) and provincial action plans (e.g. REDD+).
- Support a civil society-led initiative to monitor forest governance and activities by VNGO-FLEGT or Forest Land Coalition (FORLAND) networks at national level.

### Improve processes related to land-use planning and allocation of land units

- Boost public participation in land-use planning processes at provincial and district levels, in particular processes involving the reallocation of forest types, or the use of land for commercial production.

### Secure forest tenure

- Strengthen compatibility between statutory and customary laws, in particular the respect of traditional boundaries and practices related to forest management and protection.
- Increase the security of forest and land tenure rights for local communities, including through the provisions of the new Forestry Law. This will also incentivize them to invest in and protect their forests.
- Support the reallocation of forests currently managed by communal authorities to the ownership of local communities, with linkages to forest landscape restoration activities.

### Review the value chain and licensing of forest products

- Help smaller, local enterprises understand and apply the rules on sustainability, for example furniture makers seeking certification under FLEGT. Safeguard their interests in the international market, and consider possible challenges arising from the FLEGT-VPA.

### Improve law enforcement

- Improve effectiveness and coherence of law enforcement through clear implementation guidelines, to include details on coordination with other relevant legislation.
- Promote more vigorous media investigation of forest crimes, violations of community rights, land-use conflicts, and corruption in the forestry sector.

### Foster forest information exchange and forest monitoring activity

- Strengthen networking between NSAs through a platform on forest governance operating at national and landscape levels, with appropriate material and communication products.
- Promote independent forest monitoring mechanisms with NSAs as watchdogs to ensure that timber trade complies with legality and sustainability requirements.
- Strengthen independent monitoring of the distribution of revenue from PFES and REDD+, land use reallocation, land dispute resolution, compensation for lands seized for infrastructure and development projects, and REDD+ project performance.

### Improve forest actors' capacity to engage in forest governance

- Improve NSAs' understanding of forest governance and local people's fundamental rights, to make them less vulnerable to land use malpractice, unsustainable development programmes, and violations of guidelines on FLEGT-VPA and REDD+.
- Increase the technical and legal capacities of CSOs, local communities and smallholders on FLEGT-VPA, and TLAS, enabling their legal production of commercial timber.
- Improve the communication capacities of NSAs, enabling them to formulate their concerns to authorities in a coordinated and strategic manner, and improve their traction on policy and planning.
- Strengthen NSAs' skills in forest policy analysis, forest monitoring, participatory land-use planning, public consultation, policy briefing, and conflict resolution and business cooperation.
- Develop a learning network for sustainable economic forest management, connecting the state, enterprises and communities.

### Promote non-state actors as forest stewards

- Promote co-management models at village, commune and district levels, leading to the re-allocation to local communities of forests currently under communal authority management.
- Pilot and demonstrate communities' self-made policy and decision-monitoring models on forestry, focusing on institutionalizing community tenure of spiritual and sacred forest under the category of special use as per the new Forestry Law.
- Promote collaborative community forest protection and management initiatives.

The Voices for Mekong Forests (V4MF) is a 5-year project funded by the European Union that aims to strengthen the voices of non-state actors (NSA) to improve the governance of the forests in the Mekong region, particularly in the context of FLEGT-VPA and REDD+ processes. V4MF is implemented by RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests with eight regional and national partners in three trans-boundary landscapes across the five Mekong countries.



RECOFTC's mission is to enhance capacities for stronger rights, improved governance and fairer benefits for local people in sustainable forested landscapes in the Asia and the Pacific region.

RECOFTC holds a unique and important place in the world of forestry. It is the only international not-for-profit organization that specializes in capacity development for community forestry. RECOFTC engages in strategic networks and effective partnerships with governments, nongovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, local people and research and educational institutes throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. With over 30 years of international experience and a dynamic approach to capacity development – involving research and analysis, demonstration sites and training products – RECOFTC delivers innovative solutions for people and forests.

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