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THE ROLE OF SACRED FORESTS AND TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS IN REDD+

Two case studies in Vietnam's Central Highlands

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Introduction

There are about 300 million indigenous people living around the world, in about 5000 distinct cultures. It is estimated that these indigenous peoples inhabit 22% of the world's surface and live in areas occupied by 80% of the planet's biodiversity and ecosystems. Furthermore, 11% of the world's forest land is legally owned by indigenous communities (Sobrevila, 2008). The natural environment forms an integral part of the livelihoods, cultures, world views and identities of these peoples, and is essential for their survival and well-being. However, dependence on natural resources and living in rural areas pose a significant challenge for many of these communities in an age of climate change and globalization. These challenges make indigenous and local communities the most vulnerable on earth to global climate change (Berkes, 2008; Macchi et al., 2008; Salick and Ross, 2009).

The Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation programme (REDD+), which was initiated in 2007, set out to combat global climate change by using a relatively simple premise: developed countries would pay developing countries to conserve forests and in return the developed countries would receive carbon credits, by way of financial compensation. Even though no country is yet fully 'REDD+ ready', countless REDD+ pilot projects and readiness activities have been undertaken. Currently, the two main multilateral readiness platforms for REDD+ are the United Nations' Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) and the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). Various international

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and non-governmental organizations, as well as governments and private actors, are also involved in REDD+.

Climate change is a global phenomenon with impacts and implications on local scales, so REDD+ was created according to the same measures. Since many indigenous people occupy forests targeted for REDD+, they will be affected in various ways. Research is now needed to find ways in which indigenous peoples, their shifting cultivation practices and livelihoods, can be incorporated in REDD+ in an ecologically, socially and culturally sound manner.

This study explores the role that may be played by sacred forests in implementing REDD+ programmes, as a way of integrating local people into REDD+ policy, when the central question is: 'To what extent are sacred forests important for REDD+ implementation, and how are traditional livelihood practices implemented in REDD+?' Two REDD+ pilot sites in Vietnam's Central Highlands were chosen to test the hypothesis that sacred forests are traditionally well protected and conserved, and fulfil not only ecological, but also livelihood, social, cultural and spiritual functions. If proven correct, acknowledging and utilizing the role of sacred forests could be one of the many ways in which REDD+ goals can be reconciled with the interests of indigenous communities and the livelihoods of their people.

REDD+ and indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples have long considered themselves to be the victims of neo-liberal and market policies (Reed, 2011). Recent studies on Payment for Environmental (or Ecosystem) Services (PES) and REDD+ (Castree, 2008; Redford and Adams, 2009; Corbera, 2012) mention current trends of commodification of ecosystems and the 'neo-liberalization of nature', and their implications for conservation and development. Corbera (2012) argues that REDD+ promotes a global commodification of ecosystems, carbon storage and sequestration built on market-based conservation and neo-liberal utilitarian principles. While the conservation ethos in the past was mainly based on morality, powerful stakeholders in nature conservation have changed their ethos in terms of monetary profits, supply-and-demand principles and opportunity costs. How does this revaluation of nature and ecosystems, caused by PES and REDD+, affect local and indigenous communities?

Kosoy and Corbera (2010) argue that the commodification of ecosystems has various implications for the way nature is perceived; how people interact with nature and how unequal social relations are reproduced. PES and REDD+ disregard the complexity of ecosystems in order to: 'facilitate market transactions based on a single exchange value' (Kosoy and Corbera, 2010, p1234). REDD+ imposes a trend towards monetary and market-driven conservation. However, this monetary valuation fails to take into account other socio-cultural values of ecosystems. For many indigenous and local communities forests are perceived in a holistic way; beyond carbon fixation and its monetary values (Berkes, 2008). Kosoy and Corbera (2010) also argue that when ecosystems are commodified, new socio-economic hierarchies are created and

existing social actors repositioned, with the emergence of other, often more powerful actors and the reproduction of unequal power relations in terms of access to wealth and natural resources.

Many scholars, such as Griffiths and Martone (2009), have criticized REDD+ processes for poor involvement of indigenous and forest communities in negotiations, and for a lack of clear commitments in intergovernmental REDD+ proposals to address the rights and equity of local people. For this reason, various major indigenous peoples' organizations made the following announcement during a workshop before the 2011 United Nations' Climate Change Conference (COP17) in Durban, South Africa (Lang, 2011):

We call upon all people committed to climate justice to support life, and we implore the global community to take responsibility for reducing emission of greenhouse gases at the source and to reject REDD+ as a false solution that breeds a new form of climate racism.

These organizations rejected REDD+ for the following reasons:

1. It is a neo-liberal, market-driven approach that leads to the commodification of life and undermines holistic community values and governance;
2. Corporations and powerful stakeholders will have more incentives to grab forest lands that traditionally belong to indigenous peoples;
3. Its policies could undermine traditional forest-management systems, institutions and customary laws;
4. It may hinder peoples' ability to access forests and their products;
5. It will not address the real drivers of deforestation;
6. It could promote higher growth of monoculture tree plantations;
7. Large, polluting corporations will be able to continue to release greenhouse gasses if they are able to compensate for their emissions with REDD+ schemes; and
8. REDD+ is undermining the climate regime because it will most likely be incapable of dealing with problems associated with reference levels, leakage, permanence, monitoring, reporting and verification (Lang, 2011).

In response to the criticisms of indigenous peoples and their organizations, UN-REDD (nda) stated:

There is wide recognition that REDD+ will succeed only with the full participation and ownership of indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities. This is especially relevant at the local level, where land and other natural resource-management decisions are ultimately made.

UN-REDD has adopted an approach to the programme that involves cooperation with indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities. This will include active representation of indigenous peoples and civil society organizations (CSOs) on the governing body of the UN-REDD programme, global and national outreach and consultations, and support for the establishment of a CSO advisory group to provide independent advice and guidance about the programme. This approach is underlined by principles of representation, transparency and access to information, accountability, participation and inclusion (UN-REDD, nda). However, these initiatives and others are not legally binding policies that will ensure full ownership and free prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples affected by a REDD+ project. As a consequence, many indigenous and civil society organizations have rejected REDD+ because they fear that it will eventually have a negative impact on their lives and livelihoods (Lang, 2011).

The role of sacred forests

Berkes (2008) points out that for many indigenous peoples, traditional ecological knowledge and practices have a deep social, spiritual and ecological significance. This significance is related to world views, cultural survival, ownership of knowledge, empowerment, control over land and resources, cultural revitalization and self-determination. The sacred or spiritual dimension has often been overlooked by scholars studying traditional ecological knowledge and practices. They tend to focus narrowly on ecological knowledge and ignore the wider socio-cultural context. This does not mean that traditional ecological knowledge and 'scientific' knowledge are strictly separated, but the former has a socio-cultural dimension that is just as important as any other aspect of traditional knowledge (Agrawal, 1995; Wiersum, 1997; Berkes, 2008).

Van Leeuwen (1998) has identified different types of world views, related to traditional ecological knowledge, that are adopted by many indigenous peoples around the world. It should be noted that indigenous peoples are by no means a homogenous group, so the following world views are not necessarily applicable to all of them. The first world view is described as the *giving environment*. The



Aquilaria crassna Pierre ex
Lecomte [Thymelaeaceae]

The most popular species logged by the people of Hieu, a study site for this chapter, despite their care for community forests. This species is one source of Agarwood, a resinous heartwood used for perfume and incense.

giving environment is seen as continuously and unconditionally providing peoples' subsistence needs. The second world view is classified as the *reciprocating environment*. In this case, the environment continues to provide peoples' subsistence needs, but the people have to invest in it in order to achieve an ecological balance. The third world view is the *disposable environment*. When people face stress and shortage they tend to destroy their immediate surroundings in order to survive and shift their management practices to pure exploitation. The natural environment is perceived as something temporary, which will eventually be destroyed. The fourth world view is the *prohibiting environment*, in which the natural environment is protected by taboos for spiritual or religious reasons.

One important example of the prohibiting environment is the concept of sacred forests. These are forests in which exploitation is prohibited (or prohibited to a certain degree) due to spiritual, social and cultural taboos, rules and customs (Wiersum, 1997). All over the world, indigenous and local people have created sacred or prohibiting forests and groves. Examples have been reported in Tibet (Miehe et al., 2003), North America (Berkes, 2008), Indonesia (Wadley and Colfer, 2004), India (Aisher, 2007), Vietnam (Bayrak et al., 2015), Thailand (Trakansuphakon, 1997) and Hong Kong (Marafa, 2003). A sacred forest has a cultural and ecological significance, and represents a part of the cosmology of its users.

UN-REDD in Vietnam

Vietnam has been one of the nine original partner countries in the UN-REDD programme since September 2008. Funded by the government of Norway, phase 1 began in 2009 and ended in June 2012. Its long-term objective was to 'strengthen [the] institutional and technical capacity of [the] relevant organization [Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)] at central, provincial and local levels to ensure that by the end of 2012, Vietnam was REDD-ready and able to contribute to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation' (UN-REDD, ndb, p6). The national implementing partner was the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Di Linh and Lam Ha districts in Lam Dong province were selected as REDD+ pilot sites. The outcomes of phase 1 included the establishment of a national REDD+ network with six associated sub-technical working groups responsible for measuring, reporting and verification; a benefit distribution system; local implementation; governance; safeguards; and private-sector engagement. A national REDD+ steering committee was established, along with a Vietnam REDD+ office and inter-agency REDD+ steering committees at provincial level. Through its government ministries and Provincial People's Committees, Vietnam also attempted to begin mainstreaming REDD+ into socio-economic development plans and strategies.

The UN-REDD Vietnam phase 2 programme began in July 2013 and was scheduled to last until the end of 2015. Its overall goal was '[t]he forestry sector contributes to the 2020 target for agricultural and rural development emission

reductions (MARD Decision 3119 of 2011)’ (UN-REDD, 2012, p6). Its objective was to: ‘enhance Vietnam’s ability to benefit from future results-based payments for REDD+ and undertake transformational changes in the forestry sector’ (UN-REDD, 2012, p6). The programme also envisaged the following planned outcomes (UN-REDD, 2013):

1. Capacities for an operational national REDD+ action programme are in place;
2. Six pilot provinces (Lao Cai, Bac Kan, Ha Tinh, Binh Thuan, Lam Dong and Ca Mau) are capable of planning and implementing REDD+ actions;
3. A national forest monitoring system for measuring, reporting and verification and a national REDD+ information system on safeguards are operational;
4. Stakeholders at different levels are able to receive positive incentives;
5. Mechanisms to address the social and environmental safeguards under the Cancun Agreement are established; and
6. Regional cooperation is enhancing progress on REDD+ implementation in the Lower Mekong subregion.

FFI-REDD+ in Vietnam

Various non-governmental organizations are also implementing REDD+ projects and programmes in Vietnam. This study covers two REDD+ pilot projects: a UN-REDD pilot project and the Asia-Pacific Community Carbon Pools and REDD+ Programme (CCP). The latter was implemented by Fauna and Flora International (FFI) in cooperation with the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme for South and Southeast Asia (NTFP-EP) and Pan Nature. Within this programme, FFI is undertaking pilot-project activities focusing on forest land allocation to communities, and is supporting the development of REDD+ community carbon pools in Indonesia, the Philippines, Cambodia and Vietnam.

In Vietnam, FFI implemented its REDD+ project in Hieu commune in Kon Tum province. The main goal of this project was ‘to reduce deforestation and forest degradation through improved forest governance and the development of finance and incentive mechanisms that provide benefits to forest-dependent local and indigenous people’ (Dang and Rosengren, 2012). Specifically, the objective was to build the capacity of local communities and government agencies to actively participate in REDD+ pilot projects. Lessons learned could be applied to the development of national mechanisms on benefit sharing and measuring, reporting and verification at sub-national, national and regional levels. Through the national REDD+ network and its sub-technical working groups, policy dialogues could help to structure the implementation of UN-REDD and other REDD+ activities throughout the country. In its phase 2 activities, FFI focused mainly on REDD+ governance, free prior and informed consent, benefit sharing, community rights, safeguard mechanisms, community forestry and forest land allocation. It was also offering legal advice on community carbon rights, permitting and licensing systems and benefit distribution systems in Vietnam (Dang and Rosengren, 2012).

FFI undertook pilot activities that were focused on forest land allocation to communities, and supported the development of REDD+ community carbon pools in Hieu commune. The targeted forest area covered 17,893.6 hectares. The project started in 2011 and lasted until 2014, and consisted of four components: stakeholder consultation; community forest management and forest governance; carbon accounting; and assessment of environmental and social impacts associated with access.

Research sites

Two REDD+ pilot sites were chosen for this research: Hieu commune (FFI) and Kala Tonggu village in Bao Thuan commune (UN-REDD) (Figure A2-1). Both sites were the traditional territories of indigenous forest-dependent communities that were engaging in REDD+ pilot activities, such as free prior and informed consent and community forestry. However, neither site had begun to benefit from carbon payments. Therefore, this study focused mainly on the context in which implementation was taking place. A household survey covering both sites was conducted from June to August, 2014, involving a total of 102 households.

Case study 1: The M’nam of Hieu commune

The Xo Dang or Sedang people are subdivided into five subgroups: Xo Deng, Ca Dong, To Dra, Ha Lang and M’nam. The Xo Dang are concentrated

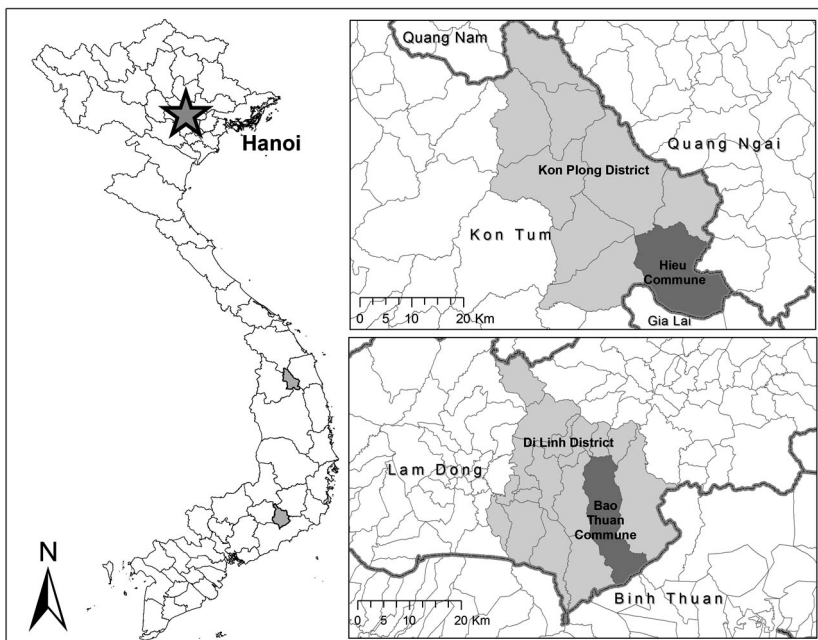
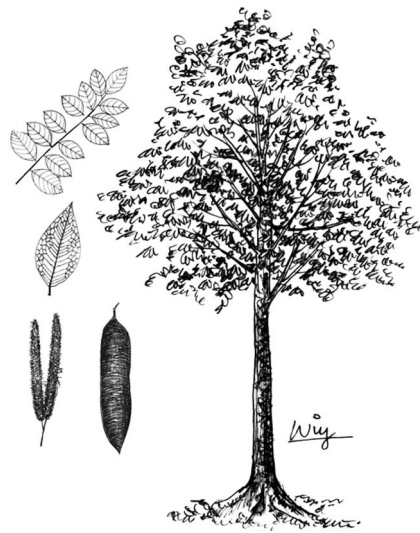


FIGURE A2-1: Location of the research sites in Vietnam's Central Highlands.

mainly in Kon Tum province, although there are some communities in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces. Their language is part of the North Bahnaric Mon-Khmer linguistic group (HEDO, 2009; Cheeseman et al., 2013). The households in the survey belonged mainly to the M'nam subgroup, numbering 6000 people in 2007 (Ethnologue, 2014). The M'nam people adhere to animistic beliefs and base their livelihoods and socio-cultural systems on the natural environment.

Each M'nam village has a delineated area (*cheam beng*) that is recognized by surrounding villages. A typical M'nam village has a communal house (*rong*) that is shaped like a giant axe-head, facing the sky. Traditionally, the village patriarch and elders are considered to be the most important people in the village and customary institutions govern village life. Groups of households live in clusters to share their water wells. The M'nam also make storage houses (*nha dan*) near their fields to store their produce and they live in these houses during harvesting seasons (Hickey, 1967; HEDO, 2009; Dang and Trinh, 2012).

The M'nam traditionally practise swidden agriculture. Land tenure in each village is decided by the village elders and the patriarch. Swiddens are private property and anyone wanting to make use of someone else's field has to seek permission via the customary institutions and compensate the owner. The M'nam grow upland rice in their swiddens and, when searching for new areas of forest to open for cultivation, they look for black or greyish soil and thick vegetation. The men cut the trees and the women and children clear the shrubs and grass. The swidden cycle is practised communally so that the entire community is on hand to keep fires under control when slashed vegetation is burnt. Harvesting often takes place in November and all able-bodied household members are expected to take part. As well as rice, the M'nam cultivate maize, yams, bananas, sugar cane, pineapples, watermelons and squash. Swiddens are cropped for two or three consecutive years before being left fallow for as long as seven to 10 years. Crops that are grown on fields other than swiddens and in village gardens include cotton, vegetables, fruit, chillies and tobacco. Other livelihood activities include livestock rearing, hunting for wild animals, collecting non-timber forest products, fishing, weaving, knitting, forging and blacksmithing (Hickey, 1967; VOV, 2006).



Erythrophleum fordii Oliv.
[Leguminosae]

These giant leguminous trees can grow up to 30 metres tall and yield valuable timber. The species, which is threatened by overexploitation, made up a small percentage of the trees cut from forests by the people of Hieu.

The M'nam classify their forests into various types: exploitation, watershed protection and sacred or ghost forests. The dead are buried in the ghost forests, and any exploitation of this type of forest is forbidden by customary law, in order to keep the ghosts and spirits at peace and to avoid bad luck in the community, such as illnesses, deaths or unspecified 'troubles' (Dang and Trinh, 2012).

Subsistence-based livelihood strategies

Hieu commune, consisting of 11 villages, is located in Kon Plong district, Kon Tum province. In 2012, it was home to 2783 people living in 660 households. Of this population, 96.4% were indigenous, and of these, 98.3% belonged to the M'nam group. Those who were earning less than 400,000 Vietnamese dong (US\$19.17) per month were regarded as being in poverty, and 75% of the population fell into this category in 2012. Unfavourable ecological and climatic conditions meant that most of the land in Hieu was unsuitable for the cultivation of perennial crops (Dang and Trinh, 2012).

Our survey of households in Hieu (n=52) (Figure A2-2) revealed that 98.1% of them cultivated wet rice; 73.1% practised shifting cultivation; 51.9% reared livestock; 11.5% had intensive cultivation plots and 7.7% grew coffee. Furthermore, 57.7% collected non-timber forest products, 65.4% logged wood for housing and 86.5% took part in forest monitoring activities in their allocated community forests. The non-timber forest products included firewood, various types of mushrooms, bamboo shoots, *Centella* (*Centella asiatica*), honey, *kim cuong* leaves



Anoectochilus setaceus Blume
[Orchidaceae]

Known locally as *kim cuong*, this orchid species was a popular non-timber forest product for the people of Hieu.



FIGURE A2-2: Household interviews in Hieu commune, with a background landscape of livelihood activities.

(*Anoectochilus setaceus*) and wild vegetables. The animals caught or hunted by the villagers included mice, birds, ferrets, squirrels and frogs. The people of Hieu said that the tree species they logged from forests included *Aquilaria crassna* Pierre ex Lecomte (30.8%); *Michelia mediocris* Dandy (25%); *Tetrameles nudiflora* R.Br. (21.2%); *Lithocarpus ducampii* (Hickel & A. Camus) A. Camus (13.5%); *Dacrydium elatum* (Roxb.) Wall. ex Hook. (5.8%); *Dalbergia tonkinensis* Prain (5.8%); *Cupressus torulosa* D. Don (5.8%); *Erythrophleum fordii* Oliv. (3.8%); and *Toxicodendron succedanea* (L) Moldenke (1.9%).

The average monthly income in Hieu was 807,692 Vietnamese dong (US\$38.70). Most of this came from wet-rice cultivation and coffee plantations. The households received a fee for monitoring their community forest, but this was sufficient to cover only their patrolling costs, and amounted to an average of 609,189 dong (US\$29.19) per year, or 6.3% of average annual income. Most households stated that they could not engage in planting coffee because they lacked land or legal land title (Red Books) and because of government policy. As mentioned earlier, the ecological conditions at Hieu didn't allow the households to plant and nurture coffee crops. Even though the community was still largely subsistence-based, there was a high risk of local deforestation and forest degradation. Since Hieu commune consisted mainly of rich natural forests, more and more households were seeing the benefits of selling wood and non-timber forest products to outside buyers, due to a lack of other market-based livelihood alternatives. Therefore, Hieu was chosen as a REDD+ pilot site, since it was high in biodiversity but also faced significant threats of deforestation and forest degradation.

Continuing importance of customary forest-management systems

The villagers identified three types of forest classifications in their commune:

- Formal classifications defined by the State: protection forests (recognized by 51% of households) and special-use forests (25.5%);
- Mixed (both formal and customary) classifications: shifting cultivation/production (88.2%), watershed protection (35.3%) and community forest (78.4%);
- Customary classifications: ghost or sacred forests (88.2%).

The households had received, or were in the process of formally receiving, areas of community forest, which they would patrol once or twice a month. One village (Vi Chrinh) had received a community Red Book in 2008, and other villages were engaged in a negotiation process involving Fauna and Flora International (FFI), the local government, Mang La State Forest Enterprise and Thach Nham Watershed Management Board on forestland allocation conforming to customary forest boundaries. At the time of writing, this negotiation process was still in progress. Our research showed that customary forest classifications still played an important role in Hieu, since the most recognized classifications were either mixed or customary in nature.

Table A2-1 shows the different forest classifications recognized by households in Hieu commune and the activities pursued in each. Four conclusions may be drawn from this table. First, customary forest management systems still matter and ghost forests have been relatively well protected. Only 10% of households made use of their ghost forest for collecting non-timber forest products. Furthermore, households refrained from catching or hunting animals or logging for timber in their ghost forest. In the past 20 years, activities in the ghost forests have barely changed. This proves that ghost forests have always been well protected under M'nam forest-management and traditional ecological knowledge systems. Second, protection and shifting cultivation forests have



Centella asiatica (L.) Urb. [Apiaceae]

One of the more popular non-timber forest products harvested in Hieu commune. A wetland plant, this is used as a salad vegetable or to make drinks. It also has medicinal uses.

TABLE A2-1: Activities in different forest classifications in Hieu commune over time (%).

<i>Activities and classifications</i>	<i>Now (location known)*</i>	<i>Now (total)</i>	<i>10 years ago</i>	<i>20 years ago</i>
Collecting non-timber forest products				
Protection forest	73.1	37.3	56.9	54.9
Special-use forest	61.5	15.7	25.5	27.4
Watershed protection forest	55.6	19.6	27.4	29.4
Ghost forest	11.1	10.0	11.8	11.8
Shifting cultivation forest	62.2	54.9	49.0	39.2
Community forest	57.5	45.1	31.4	23.5
Hunting/catching animals				
Protection forest	19.2	10.4	20.8	20.8
Special-use forest	15.4	4.2	4.2	4.2
Watershed protection forest	16.7	6.25	8.3	8.3
Ghost forest	0	0	2.1	0
Shifting cultivation forest	22.2	20.8	16.7	12.5
Community forest	17.5	14.6	6.2	6.2
Logging timber				
Protection forest	46.2	23.1	67.3	75.0
Special-use forest	15.4	3.8	9.6	11.5
Watershed protection forest	50.0	17.3	23.1	25.0
Ghost forest	0	0	0	0
Shifting cultivation forest	44.4	38.5	38.5	38.5
Community forest	27.5	21.2	21.1	1.9

Note: * This refers to people who recognized this particular classification.

been a major source of non-timber forest products, wild animals and wood species for the households. However, there has been a decline in exploitation of protection forests over the past 20 years, from 75% to 23.1%. Third, watershed protection forests in Hieu have been relatively well protected: only 17.3% of villagers exploited them for timber. Fourth, there has been a growing trend of collecting non-timber forest products in community forests. It can be concluded, therefore, that formally owning forests has allowed communities to reap more benefits from non-timber forest products.

Case study 2: The K'ho of Kala Tonggu village

The K'ho people, like the Xo Dang, are subdivided into major groups: Sre, Cil, Nop, Lach and Kodon. Those who live in Di Linh district belong mainly to the Sre group and, to a lesser extent, the Cil group (Hickey, 1967; Pham, 2013). The K'ho Sre are concentrated mainly in Di Linh, Duc Trong, Lam Ha and Lac Duong districts of Lam Dong province. Their language belongs to the South Bahnaric Mon-Khmer group (Thomas, 1966; Waddington, 2002; VOV, 2010). Most of the K'ho people have converted to Christianity, but they have retained some animistic traditions, such as animal sacrifices, the sacredness of their gongs, and the importance of spirits and ghosts in the natural environment.

Historically, the Sre are known as wet-rice cultivators, whereas the Cil, Kodon and Nop are mainly swidden farmers. This is partly because agricultural colonization has been taking place in Lam Dong province since colonial times, starting in the mid-19th century (Déry, 2000). According to tradition, the paddy fields of the Sre are individually owned and the transmission of ownership rights is governed by inheritance rules. While they are known as wet-rice cultivators, the Sre are also swidden farmers. Swiddens, both fallows and those growing crops, are the property of the family group that has made, or is making, use of them. A traditional Sre village is surrounded by a territory in which its villagers enjoy exclusive rights to farm, hunt and fish. The institution regulating the village's territory is the village patriarch (*tom bri*), who is chosen by the people. The patriarch is responsible for allocating new swiddens, in order to ensure that there is no illegal encroachment (Hickey, 1967).

Because the study site is located near the Dong Nai river, the Sre villagers are able to have extensive paddy fields. These



FIGURE A2-3: A REDD+ sign in Kala Tonggu village, written in English and Vietnamese.

are ploughed and harrowed twice with the aid of buffaloes before the crop is planted. The Sre grow several varieties of wet rice, both non-glutinous (regular) and glutinous. In the hills, they clear swiddens in the dry season and upland rice is planted in the rainy season. As well, the Sre practise animal husbandry, weaving, bamboo and rattan knitting, forging of farm tools and primary weapons and ceramic production (Hickey, 1967; Pham, 2013).

The traditional cosmology of the K'ho has a variety of spirits and ghosts that take various forms, such as rice, the earth, the sun, the mountains, fire, forest and the gongs. The village patriarch is in charge of festivals in which animals are sacrificed to please these spirits and ghosts. The gong has a particularly important position in K'ho beliefs. They believe that the gong spirit will punish those who do not treat the gongs with respect. Among other things, the K'ho consider watershed forests to be sacred (VOV, 2010; UN-REDD, ndc). With the arrival of Christianity, other institutions, such as priests and pastors, arrived in the village (Waddington, 2002). In Kala Tonggu, the focal point of the village is not a communal house, but the local church.

The coffee plantations of the K'ho

Kala Tonggu village is located in Bao Thuan commune, Di Linh district, Lam Dong province and, in 2014, it consisted of 196 households, most of them ethnic K'ho, with a total of 820 people. Only four households were considered poor in Kala Tonggu. The village had a total territory of 838.4 hectares, of which forest land covered 537ha. The rest of the area was taken by coffee (*Coffea canephora*) fields, residential land and other agricultural land. The village was allocated a community forest covering 500ha in 2011, and villagers were paid to patrol it under a Payment for Environmental Services (PES) scheme. All 196 households were involved in the community forestry and PES programme. As well, UN-REDD pilot activities had been conducted in the village, including free prior and informed consent, training sessions, workshops and community-forest monitoring (Forwet, 2013).

Our survey of households in Kala Tonggu (n=50) showed that they were clearly more integrated into the market economy than their counterparts at Hieu commune. Main livelihood activities included coffee cultivation (98%), wet-rice cultivation (98%), collecting non-timber forest products (50%) and livestock rearing (28%). The villagers claimed not to use shifting cultivation for growing upland rice, although they used fire to clear shrubs and bushes on their swiddens for planting coffee. Most villagers held a Red Book (legal land title) for their coffee plantations (79.6%). The average time for which they had held this title was 14 years. Survey respondents claimed they no longer logged for timber or hunted or trapped animals. However, they collected firewood, mushrooms, wild vegetables and bamboo shoots from their forests. Those households that admitted to hunting and logging said they hunted or trapped mice, birds and deer and cut mainly natural pines trees (*Pinus kesiya*). Of the Kala Tonggu households surveyed, 96% said they engaged in monthly

monitoring activities in their community forest.

Being more firmly integrated into the market economy, the households of Kala Tonggu had a significantly higher average monthly income (2.5 million dong, equivalent to US\$117.34) than the households of Hieu. Highest sources of income in Kala Tonggu included coffee (20 million dong per year) (Figure A2-4) and wet rice (6.7 million dong per year). For this reason, the villagers were less dependent on their natural forest than their counterparts at Hieu. Furthermore, the forests at Kala Tonggu were mainly degraded or barren, and therefore afforded fewer benefits for the village households (Forwet, 2013).



FIGURE A2-4: A Kala Tonggu villager struggles along a muddy track, his motorcycle laden with fertilizer for his coffee plantation.

Forest classifications of the K'ho

The households of Kala Tonggu were asked the same questions as those at Hieu, about forest classifications in their village and commune. They mentioned mainly formal forest classifications, including protection (56%) and special-use (4%) forest, and mixed classifications such as community (64%), watershed protection (8%), and shifting cultivation forests (98%). Shifting cultivation forests were former fallows that would eventually be used for coffee plantations. The villagers at Kala Tonggu did not recognize any ghost forests. Only one household claimed that the village had a ghost forest in the past, suggesting that, at some point in time, these K'ho people did have ghost forests.

Several conclusions regarding forest use and classifications in Kala Tonggu can be drawn from the data in Table A2-2. First, legal land title (Red Books) had allowed the households of Kala Tonggu to collect more non-timber forest products in their community forest



Pinus kesiya Royle ex Gordon
[Pinaceae]

Those Kala Tonggu households who cut timber from their forests said they took mainly 'natural' pine – their term for *Pinus kesiya*.

TABLE A2-2: Activities in different forest classifications in Kala Tonggu over time (%).

<i>Activities and classifications</i>	<i>Now (location known)*</i>	<i>Now (total)</i>	<i>10 years ago</i>	<i>20 years ago</i>
Collecting non-timber forest products				
Protection forest	92.9	52.0	78.0	88.0
Special-use forest	50.0	2.0	6.0	6.0
Watershed protection forest	75.0	6.0	12.0	12.0
Shifting cultivation forest	71.4	70.0	78.0	76.0
Community forest	100	68.0	6.0	6.0
Hunting/catching animals				
Protection forest	14.3	8.0	18.0	26.0
Special-use forest	0	0	0	0
Watershed protection forest	0	0	0	0
Shifting cultivation forest	4.1	4.0	8.0	18.0
Community forest	15.6	10.0	0	0
Logging timber				
Protection forest	0	0	28.0	60.0
Special-use forest	0	0	6.0	8.0
Watershed protection forest	25.0	2.0	14.0	20.0
Shifting cultivation forest	0	0	0	0
Community forest	0	0	0	0

Note: * This refers to people who recognized this particular classification.

over time. Second, the primary use of protection forests in the past had been general exploitation, whereas the present use of this type of forest is limited to collection of non-timber forest products. All interviewees said they no longer logged these forests for timber. Third, due to their poor state, shifting cultivation forests were only suitable for collection of firewood or non-timber forest products.

Discussion

There is no clear rationale behind the choice of Kala Tonggu and Lam Dong province as UN-REDD pilot sites. Coffee plantations and commodity crops are perceived by the villagers to be much more important than possible benefits from REDD+. Therefore, there wouldn't be many lessons to be learned from the pilot project. One Vietnamese REDD+ expert stated during an interview: 'REDD+ has only been piloted in Lam Dong because it was an easy province to choose. It is near Dalat, the infrastructure is good, and it was most likely to succeed' (Tran, 2014).¹ The choice of Lam Dong was also politically motivated. When compared to some other parts of the Central Highlands (such as Kon Tum), the province is socially stable and politically less sensitive (see also HRW, 2002). The choice of Hieu seemed to be better justified. The commune contains a high level of biodiversity; it is populated by forest-dependent indigenous communities practising mainly customary and subsistence-based livelihood activities; and it faces a relatively high risk of deforestation and forest degradation.

However, these case studies represent two sides of the same coin: Hieu is more suitable for REDD+ in terms of its socio-ecological characteristics, but Kala Tonggu and Bao Thuan have a higher institutional and economic capacity to implement REDD+. The latter capacity is partly due to historical reasons: the K'ho have been supporting their food security with wet-rice cultivation for more than a century, so no trade-offs have to be made with regard to shifting cultivation. But in Hieu, shifting cultivation is really needed in order for REDD+ to succeed. Moreover, the institutions and households of Bao Thuan have long been exposed to Payments for Environmental Services and benefit sharing mechanisms, whereas Hieu has been relatively isolated. Lastly, because they are primarily coffee smallholders, the villagers of Kala Tonggu are not very dependent on natural forests for their livelihoods. Therefore, it would be easier for them to cease making use of the forests than it would for the households of Hieu. Conservation would also provide benefits for their coffee plantations in terms of supporting watershed functions.

Conclusions

In a previous study (Bayrak et al., 2015) we showed the importance of village patriarchs in customary forest management and benefit-sharing mechanisms. This study has been a follow-up to our overarching argument that customary arrangements still matter and need to be incorporated in REDD+ mechanisms. As shown in this study, sacred forests and other customary forest classifications are used by many indigenous and forest-dependent communities as part of a prohibiting environmental world view. It is therefore surprising that the role of sacred forests is barely examined in the REDD+ debate. The admission by our study communities that they exploit mainly those forests classified for protection and shifting cultivation – both legally and illegally – suggests that the use of formal forest classifications will sometimes be inadequate as a basis for REDD+ programmes.

Adding the socio-cultural and spiritual values of forests to the REDD+ debate would be beneficial in two ways. First, it would properly address the concerns of both indigenous people and critics of REDD+, that the forest-conservation-payments-for-carbon-credits initiative is a market-driven force 'commodifying and monetizing nature'. Using REDD+ as a mechanism to restore customary forest classifications could even be beneficial to local and indigenous communities and their traditional livelihoods. Second, as it presently involves standalone projects bound to a uniform set of rules, REDD+ is unlikely to succeed. Each project will need to be context specific. Not all indigenous communities have sacred forests to offer as inviolable ecosystems for conservation. The K'ho in this study are a case in point: REDD+ needs to address the trade-offs to be made between smallholder plantations and conservation. In Hieu, on the other hand, trade-offs need to be made between shifting cultivation, food security and conservation.

Free prior and informed consent, when it is genuine, has the potential to incorporate indigenous world views in REDD+ programmes. Indeed, free prior

and informed consent should be a process, and not an activity (Dang, 2014). This process should stimulate social learning and incorporate indigenous views through tangible actions, such as involving customary institutions and forest classifications in policy-making and execution. Although it may seem silly to some scholars and policy-makers, incorporating ghosts and spirits as legitimate stakeholders in forest conservation might sometimes be the right thing to do.

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Note

1. When Mr Tran Huu Nghi saw the final draft of this paper, he asked to add the following comments: 'But fair enough, Lam Dong has also faced deforestation and forest land encroachment due to cash crops like coffee, tea, and so on [...] They [UN-REDD] selected Lam Dong furthermore because the provincial leaders [of Lam Dong] are open and willing to cooperate with foreigners, not like other provinces in the Central Highlands. There, it is more difficult to implement a foreign project' (Tran, 2015).