

# **Forest-Based Poverty Alleviation in North-Eastern Vietnam**

**This thesis is presented for the degree of  
Doctor or Philosophy**

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Year: 2019**

# Forest-Based Poverty Alleviation in North-Eastern Vietnam



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Submitted in fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy,  
Edith Cowan University (October, 2019)

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## **ii) Abstract**

The relationship between poverty and forest in developing countries like Vietnam is important because the poor rely on forest resources and poverty is often seen as a major cause of environmental degradation. The overall aim of the thesis is to examine the way national policy has influenced household livelihood strategies for poor people in situations where access to forests is important to supplement income, and to examine the role of forest management in this process.

To deal with the aim, we compared six villages in two provinces (Bac Kan and Thai Nguyen; three villages in each province) where conditions such as national policy, forest areas, forest type categories, socio-economic conditions, lifestyle, ethnicity, culture and livelihood strategies were similar. Only location and form of forest management, were different. Three instruments (village survey, annual household survey, and quarterly household survey), modelled and adapted on the Poverty Environment Network (PEN) prototype household questionnaires, were used in 184 households. In addition, 57 people working directly in forest-related fields from different level of government (province, district, commune, village, National Park, Natural Reserve) were invited to participate in in-depth interviews, and 60 villagers living in the six villages were involved in group discussions.

The mechanism used for the decentralization of forest management known as forest land allocation (FLA) was examined by considering the experiences of administrators and users from the village to the province level and benchmarking them against Ostrom's eight design principles. Areas were identified where policy and practice can be improved, including clarifying the rights between forest owners (communities, households, and individuals) and three forest-use categories (special-use forests, production forests and protection forests).

Forest management practices differed between the two provinces: sponsored Forest Protection Groups (FPGs) existed in Bac Kan, while forest protection by households' responsibility was used in Thai Nguyen. FPGs can be shown to play a role in reducing the amount of forest products being collected and curtailing illegal activities. Collective action in the form of FPG activities in Bac Kan include internal elements (forest patrols, village/FPG meetings, leader capacity building, cooperation, trust and honesty between villagers, and household characteristics) and external elements (the technical and funding support from international projects, and village recognition from a government agency administering a National Park). Together these elements can be held responsible for improved forest condition.

For both provinces, about 15.2% of total household income was derived from forests, a consistent and significant contribution to livelihoods. Principal Component Analysis of quarterly household income revealed seasonal increases mainly based on crop (maize, rice, root) and forest protection for Bac Kan, and seasonal increases for particular forest products (firewood, timber/poles) and crop (maize, rice) for Thai Nguyen. Poor people in both provinces have less diverse income sources.

By using poverty indices with and without forest income, and comparing with and without PES income between the two provinces, we can demonstrate that the poverty rate would double if different forms of forest income were to be excluded. Incentives in the PES scheme, encouraging forest dwellers to become involved in forest management, and voluntary payment schemes for tourism services can be shown to add a stable and sustainable financial source that contributes to better forest protection and improved income for people who directly rely on forests.

Overall, we built a novel forest-based poverty alleviation framework to apply wherever forest types, socio-economic conditions, livelihoods, culture, and livelihood strategies, are similar. By using this framework, policymakers can develop appropriate plans/policies to target forest management and poverty alleviation.

### **iii) Acknowledgements**

First and foremost my lovely family, my wife and three beautiful princesses, have encouraged me to undertake this Ph.D. My wife, also my colleague, has accompanied me on this project journey, as well as other rural development projects in Vietnam. I hope I can give you as much support as you have given me, when time comes for you to do your PhD. Our children Mai, Moon, and Mary Lou have always been my inspiration for my research. In the most stressful times, they have always been the motivation for me to go on. So, this thesis is for all of you.

I also would like to express my special thanks to my principal supervisor, Professor Pierre Horwitz from the School of Science, for his kindness, constant support and advice throughout the course of the research program. During times of difficulty in both life and research, he was always there, giving me valuable advice. The research presented significant challenges in data collection, data processing, data analysis, and writing, and the debates we had to find a common direction for the research project; to have come this far must be some measure of success. Professor Pierre Horwitz, you are not only a great supervisor, but a second father. Again, I would like to thank you especially.

I would like to thank two other supervisory committee members for my thesis, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tran Quoc Hung (Faculty of Forestry, Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry, Vietnam) who helped me to organize field work in Vietnam, while Dr. Aiden Fisher (School of Science, ECU) advised me in data analysis and gave me feedback for Chapters 4 and 5.

I would like to thank: the enumerators (Miss. Ma Thi Ngan, Mr. Nong Van Tu, Mr. Nong Van Su, and Mr. Nguyen Van Duong) for helping me collect field data; the leaders of Province People's Committee of Thai Nguyen and Bac Kan province who agreed to allow me to carry out this research; and all interviewees, village heads, 104 households in Thai Nguyen, and 80 households in Bac Kan who agreed to participate directly in the study. Without these contributions the thesis would not have been possible.

In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to show my greatest appreciation to an academic writing consultant, Dr. Helen Renwick, a helpful proof-reader for her help in editing Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of my thesis. I also would like to show my greatest appreciation to Dr Saiyidi Mat Roni, lecturer in accounting at School of Business and Law, ECU, for his comments and advice on my income chapter (Chapter 5).

Finally, I wish to express a deep sense of gratitude and love to my friends and parents for their mental support and help, and their encouragement for me to complete this study and thesis.

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