

Community Forestry and Poverty Alleviation in Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam: An Agenda for Research

by William D. Sunderlin*

A position paper presented at
the Regional Consultation Workshop for ADB-RETA 6115:

“Poverty Reduction in Upland Communities in the Mekong Region through
Improved Community and Industrial Forestry”

September 1-2, 2004

Ambassador Hotel

Bangkok, Thailand

* Contact information:

Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)
P.O. Box 6596 JKPWB
Jakarta, Indonesia 10065

Email: w.sunderlin@cgiar.org

Abstract

This paper proposes a research agenda for improving the poverty alleviation potential of community forestry programs in Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam. It begins by pointing out that poverty alleviation has been an elusive goal in community forestry programs in developing countries. Nevertheless, there is hope community forestry can be an important means of livelihood improvement if it is supported by policy change.

In order to better understand the potential of community forestry to improve livelihoods, the paper defines what is meant by “poverty alleviation” and shows that in community forestry projects, its attainment must be understood in the context of competing priorities.

Recognizing that there has been very little research on the poverty alleviation potential of community forestry in Cambodia, Lao-PDR and Vietnam, the paper sets out to identify what we do know about these programs, and what we do not know that should be known. On the basis of this information, the paper proposes a research agenda that includes primary and secondary approaches and a pilot project in Vietnam. On the basis of this work, we can know what kinds of policy interventions are necessary to assure that community forestry can in fact improve rural livelihoods in Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In the Mekong region as a whole (i.e. including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and also Myanmar and Thailand) 80 million of the total 200 million population – approximately a third – are poor.

In dealing with poverty in the region, and especially in dealing with chronic poverty, extreme poverty, and a high incidence of poverty,¹ it is important to give attention to forestry. Why? Because areas in developing countries where natural forests remain tend to have high rates of poverty, and in these areas, the rural poor tend to depend on forest resources for a portion of their livelihood. In developing countries, dependence on forest resources tends to be higher for the poor than for the non-poor (Vedeld et al. 2003). Poor people tend to rely on forest resources for some of their subsistence needs, as a “safety net” in the event of emergencies, as a “gap filler” in the event of seasonal shortages and, occasionally, as a means to permanently escape poverty (FAO 2003; Angelsen & Wunder 2003).

Why is there a tendency for areas of high rural poverty and areas of remaining natural forest cover to overlap? One main reason is that the poorest of the poor tend to be located in “remote rural areas,” relatively far away from urban centers (large paved roads, rail systems, bridges) and ports, and natural forests in these areas have been able to survive because they are relatively out of the reach of nodes of economic activity (Sunderlin et al. forthcoming). Ethnic minorities in the Mekong Region tend to be among the poor – even if they are not always the “poorest of the poor” – and they often live in forested areas or recently forested areas. In Vietnam, there is a strong tendency for ethnic minorities to be dependent on non-timber forest products (NTFPs) (ADB et al. 2003:67).

Traditional models of community forestry have long existed in the Mekong Region. By “traditional models” is meant systems of local level forest management that were created spontaneously in a community and that were not introduced from the outside. *Introduced* models of community forestry are relatively recent and are growing rapidly. By “introduced” models of community forestry is meant a system of forest management presented from outside the community by the government, by an international agency, or by a local NGO, or some combination of the three. It might or might not be super-imposed on pre-existing traditional systems of community forest management. This paper proposes a primary focus on introduced rather than traditional models of community forestry because introduced models present an efficient opportunity for improvement through policy reform, extension, and investment. Hereafter, the term “community forestry” shall refer only to “introduced community forestry,”

¹ Chronic poverty is defined as that which occurs “when an individual experiences significant capability deprivations for a period of five years or more” (Hulme & Shepherd, 2003, pp. 404-405). Extreme poverty is defined as that where a person is living on less than \$1 a day. Incidence of poverty is defined as the proportion of poor in the total population in a given area.

except where otherwise noted.² Moreover, the term “community forestry” shall also be synonymous with “village forestry” or “participatory sustainable forest management” – the terms used in Lao-PDR.

What has been the record to date of community forest in alleviating poverty? At a global level, according to one leading authority on community forestry, community forestry has, by and large, performed poorly in providing livelihood benefits (Fisher 2003:18). In spite of this disappointing record, there is nevertheless hope that community forestry can make a significant contribution to improving rural livelihoods if appropriate policy changes are made (Brown et al. 2002:1). How has community forestry performed for poverty alleviation in the Mekong region in particular? No one knows, because extremely little research has been done on this topic. Among the few titles that discuss the topic are MAF (2002) and Nguyen Hai Nam (2002).

This paper will propose a general approach to research on the contribution of community forestry to poverty alleviation through the following steps. Section 2 puts forward some basic terms and concepts for addressing the paper’s subject matter. Section 3 summarizes some of the basic relevant information on what is known about community forestry in the region and its poverty alleviation potential. Section 4 will identify what is not yet known, and yet needs to be known. Section 5 presents the research agenda. Section 6 summarizes and concludes the paper.

2. Some basic concepts

What is the best approach for conducting research to better understand the potential of community forestry to contribute to poverty alleviation? In determining an appropriate approach and methodology, one important first step is to be clear on certain concepts and terms. Here, just two basic concepts will be defined and illustrated.

2.1 Definition of “forest-based poverty alleviation” and sub-definitions

First, it important to be clear what we mean by “poverty alleviation,” and “forest-based poverty alleviation” in particular. In this paper, “forest-based poverty alleviation” (FBPA) shall be defined as:

² In this paper I use the broad definition of community forestry put forward by Arnold (1992:25), which reads: “... an umbrella term denoting a wide range of activities which link rural people with forests and trees, and the products and benefits to be derived from them. If there is one dimension to be stressed above all others it is the range and diversity of these linkages, and the span of different disciplines which are engaged in aspects of community forestry. Community forestry is, therefore, not a separate discipline, or even a programme, but one dimension of forestry, agriculture, rural energy and other components of rural development.”

“use of forest resources for the purpose of lessening deprivation of wellbeing on either a temporary or lasting basis. FBPA is almost never a stand-alone process. Poverty alleviation broadly speaking tends to be based on a wide variety of economic activities including agriculture, pastoralism, and non-farm employment, among others” (Sunderlin et al. forthcoming).

“Poverty alleviation” is an overarching term that embraces two very distinct sub-definitions. At one extreme on a continuum, forest resources can be used merely for “poverty mitigation” (someone who is already poor is merely made less poor) or “poverty avoidance” (someone who is just at the poverty line is prevented from slipping below the poverty line). At the other extreme of the continuum, forest resources are used to lift someone out of poverty, on either a temporary or permanent basis (Sunderlin et al., forthcoming). These definitions and sub-definitions of “poverty alleviation” are described in Figure 1.

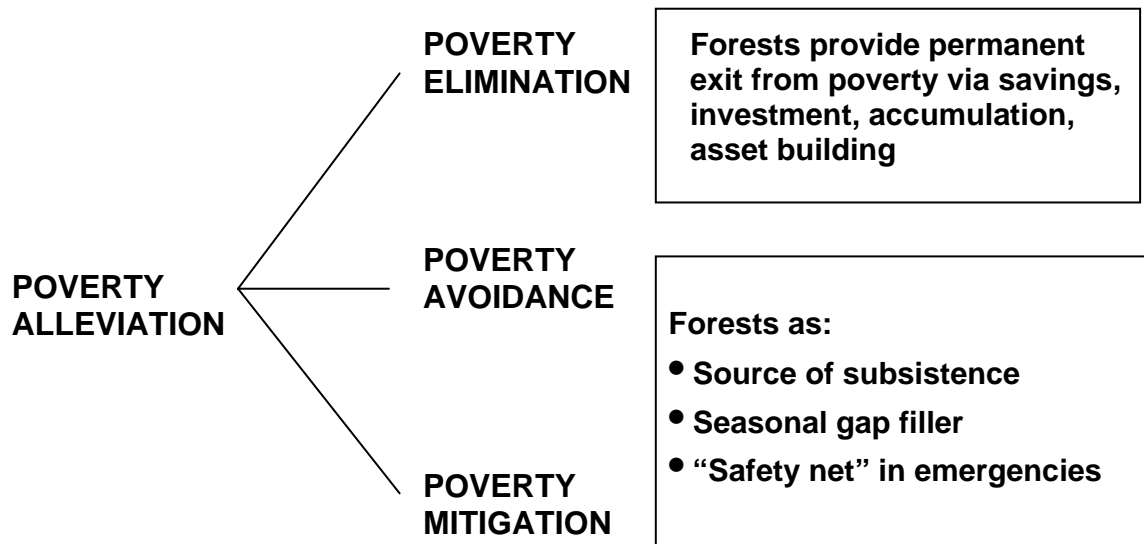


Figure 1 Definitions of “poverty alleviation” and sub-definitions in the context of forest resource use.

It is important to make these distinctions because different forest management arrangements, and different types of forest resources are likely to be suited to different poverty alleviation outcomes. It is important to match means to ends, and to be as clear as possible in advance what the ends can or cannot be.

In specifying these distinctions among the sub-types of poverty alleviation, there is no *a priori* assumption that poverty elimination is more worthy a goal than poverty mitigation and avoidance. The latter are, of course, extremely important and desirable goals, especially under circumstances where calamity has struck, or in circumstances where no “higher” goal can be achieved through existing institutional arrangements.

2.2 *Poverty alleviation and possibly competing goals*

In order for a community project to be successful in alleviating poverty – by whatever definition – it is often necessary that it have poverty alleviation as an explicitly stated goal. But the fact of there being a formally-stated commitment to poverty alleviation in a community forestry project does not mean that the commitment is *sufficient* to achieve the goal. There are any number of imaginable circumstances that might undermine achievement of that goal, among them: insufficient funding for the implementation of pilot projects; inadequate education of extension agents; competition among local inhabitants for access to forest resource benefits in which the poor lose out; an inadequate resource base for supporting livelihoods; a drought or other natural calamity; and so on.

In this section I want to discuss one factor in particular that can conceivably undermine successful poverty alleviation. This is the fact that community forestry projects often have numerous other goals, above and beyond poverty alleviation. Some of these goals might be easily harmonized with the goal of poverty alleviation; others might not be.

Many community forestry projects have poverty alleviation and improved management and conservation of forest resources as their two main goals. How compatible are these two goals? In “win-win” situations, they can be called compatible. Livelihoods improve and so does the forest resource base. But at the opposite extreme there can be “lose-lose” outcomes, where the wellbeing of the participants declines, and so does the quality of the forest resource base. And there are two other possibilities as well. In some cases, livelihoods prosper at the expense of forest cover, as in the case of conversion of forests to agriculture (“win-lose” outcome). And then again in some cases, a community forestry project might successfully exclude local people from using forests that they have come to depend on for at least a portion of their livelihood, and this might produce a “lose-win” outcome.

The main point being made here is that, under some circumstances, the achievement of one of the goals of the community forestry project might conceivably undermine success in meeting the poverty alleviation goal. It is important to bear this fact in mind in evaluating the record of existing projects, and in planning policy interventions to improve the performance of such projects.

2.3 *An example that illustrates both concepts*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the government of Indonesia applied a community forestry model throughout the island of Java. The Java Social Forestry Program (JSFP), administered and organized by the State Forestry Corporation (SFC), had an explicit commitment to improving the livelihoods of program participants and, at the same time, to reduce the destruction of forests by rural people. The basic assumption of the program was that, to the degree that poor people could be made better off, they would no longer feel compelled to “steal” timber from the SFC’s vast teak plantations. The design of the program was simple. Participating farmers were offered the opportunity to plant subsistence agricultural crops (mainly upland rice and cassava) between rows of reforestation trees on state land. In exchange for this relief of their land hunger, the participants had to agree to protect the reforestation seedlings so that they had a chance of surviving to maturity. When the tree canopy closed, which created shade and made continued farming between rows of reforestation trees impossible, participating farmers were offered new social forestry plots at another location.

How did the JSFP perform in alleviating poverty? It depends what sub-definition is used. Judged from the standpoint of poverty mitigation and poverty avoidance, the project had some successes and some failures. At a typical successful site, the incomes of poor participants was marginally improved, pre-existing friction between forest rangers and local people subsided, rates of timber theft were reduced, and forest cover was generally improving. At a typical unsuccessful site, local incomes improved marginally if they improved at all (and they often did not), historic tensions with forest rangers persisted, reforestation trees were pulled out of the ground, and the landscape looked as barren as it had been before the project was begun. A variety of factors, including soil quality, and competition for access to social forestry land, explained the variety of outcomes (Sunderlin 1993).

How did the JSFP perform from the standpoint of poverty elimination? Probably very poorly indeed. It is hard to imagine that any participants at any of the project sites managed to produce enough income through social forestry to lift themselves out of poverty in a permanent way. It is possible that some participants experienced temporary relative prosperity, but this would have been the rare exception.

Why was this the case? Because the unstated goal of the JSFP was to assist poverty mitigation and avoidance, not to lift the rural population above the poverty line in a dramatic way. If this had been the goal, then the SFC would have given participants at least some small fraction of the timber wealth generated by their labor. But by law, at that time, participants were not allowed access to any of the enormous timber rents being generated through teak timber production. The title of a book by researcher Nancy Peluso (1992) aptly

describes this situation : *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*.

In summary, we can say that the JSFP performed adequately in some cases to satisfy the goal of poverty mitigation and avoidance, and that this was in some cases compatible with the project's resource management goal. However the JSFP performed poorly for purposes of poverty elimination, and this was largely because of a competing goal. The SFC was using the JSFP as one means to preserve its own monopoly on timber rents.

3. What do we know about community forestry and poverty alleviation in Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam?

Community forestry in all three countries has legal status and support from the government, has institutional support from a variety of national or international non-governmental organizations, and has a stated commitment to improving the livelihoods of participants and to improving the management of forest resources. But beyond these broad similarities, there are great variations in the intent, institutional structure, legal status, types of forests incorporated, and outcomes in the three countries. For that reason, the community forestry models in the three countries will be described separately. This will be a basic sketch rather than an exhaustive history and description of the three models. The information provided here is limited to that which is useful for understanding the poverty alleviation potential of the programs.

3.1 Community forestry in Cambodia

The first introduced community forestry sites in Cambodia were established by international NGOs (for example Concern Worldwide and the Mennonite Central Committee) in the early 1990s at a few pilot sites in two provinces (Takeo and Kampong Chhnang) (Sokh & Iida 2001:116; Braeutigam 2003:8).

Community forestry then grew rapidly. As of 2002 there were approximately 83,000 ha in Cambodia under introduced community forestry management, representing 0.7% of Cambodia's total forest area suitable for community forestry. This area of community forestry encompassed 57 initiatives at 228 sites, and comprising 404 villages and 415,000 people (3.6% of Cambodia's population). These sites were situated in 18 of Cambodia's 24 provinces, although most of these sites are concentrated in agricultural areas, where most of Cambodia's population is found (Fichtenau 2002: 5, 23-24). One quarter of the community forestry area (20,000 ha) was situated in Siem Reap and were administered through FAO's NRM project. A survey found that two thirds of all the initiatives are located in areas with either no or little forest, or heavily degraded forests. Approximately one fourth of the initiatives are in forests said to be only slightly degraded or undisturbed forests, though in fact these forests

were degraded. No sites were located in undisturbed forests (Fichtenau 2002: 23, 24, 26).

The objective of existing community forestry sites is to protect what few forests exist and to rehabilitate degraded ones. The use of these forests is limited to the collection of NTFPs and firewood, so income generation in the medium term is likely to be very limited, according to Braeutigam (2003:41). McKenney & Tola (2002:97) have noted that this presents an important challenge because if stakeholders foresee minimal potential benefits from a community forest, then they will have less incentive to invest the time and effort necessary to maintain effective management of those forests.

As of two years ago, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries had the authority to allocate an area of Permanent Forest Reserve to a community or a group of people, and the cantonment chief of the Forest Administration had authority to approve community forestry agreements for a period up to 15 years. A Community Forest Management Plan governing the site had to be revised every five years (Braeutigam 2003:11). The national community forestry program is under the direction of the Forestry Administration (FA). The FA has direct responsibility for sites on production forest lands, whereas the Ministry for the Environment has responsibility for sites in protection forests.

Cambodia's community forestry system faces several problems that pose a challenge to the aim of improving the livelihoods of participants. Among these problems are: a tendency toward conflict at the sites, related in part to unclear and insecure tenure and lack of land use planning; a lack of benefit sharing arrangements; and weak government finances and capacity in support of the system.

Research conducted in 2002 at 27 of the 57 then existing initiatives found that various kinds of conflicts had occurred at 20 of the sites (Fichtenau et al. 2002:35). The four categories of conflict encountered were: (1) conflicts among villagers either within a specific community village or with a neighboring village; (2) conflicts with outsiders (e.g. the military, commercial enterprises, agricultural or forestry concessions, local authorities); (3) conflicts over fishing and mangrove issues (e.g. use of illegal fishing equipment or use of mangrove for charcoal; and (4) other conflicts, including distrust of forest authorities and preference for work on the basis of families rather than a communal approach (Fichtenau et al. 2002:35-36, 60).

According to Braeutigam (2003:2 & 26), as of a year ago there is a lack of benefit sharing arrangements between communities and local governments. Related to these unclear conditions and to the delay in endorsing a community sub-decree, some local authorities have been reluctant to sign management agreements with communities.

The development of community forestry in Cambodia is undermined by severe lack of financial resources and institutional and personal capacity, as well as financial resources and continues to depend heavily on the support of foreign donors and NGOs (Braeutigam 2003:2; Sokh and Iida 2001:115). Many projects are in operation without an ongoing evaluation or monitoring (Sokh and Iida 2001:113). Extension for community forestry is fragmented and limited in scale (Braeutigam 2003:1).

According to Braeutigam (2003:32), priority issues for the development of community forestry at the field level are to “clarify land tenure, to strengthen the capacity of community forestry groups and associations, to document and build upon field based initiatives to show effectiveness of CBFM and to formulate clear planning processes and procedures.”

Recently, community forestry in Cambodia has received a good deal of attention as a potential alternative or complement to forest concession management (McKenney & Tola 2002:86). For this reason, giving attention to the challenges described above is all the more urgent.

3.2 Community forestry in Lao-PDR

Community forestry was initiated in Lao-PDR in the early 1990s. The first initiative, called “Joint Forest Management,” was begun in 1993 in the Dong Khapo State Production Forest with funding from the Lao Swedish Forestry Program (LSFP). In 1995, the Forest Management and Conservation Project (FOMACOP) was begun in Savannakhet and Khammouane provinces with support from the World Bank, the Finnish International Development Agency, and the Global Environmental Facility (Braeutigam 2003:46). Other projects begun since then include the Forest Conservation and Afforestation Project of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency in Vang Vieng, the Industrial Tree Plantation Project of the ADB, the Training and Model Forest established in Vientiane by GTZ (Braeutigam 2003:56-58). As of last year, community forestry in Lao-PDR occupied 150,000 ha of forest or approximately 1.3% of total forest cover (Braeutigam 2003:63).

In Lao-PDR community forestry is strongly focused on production forests and benefit sharing arrangements for village access to a portion of timber wealth, though there are also some reforestation efforts included (Braeutigam 2003:2).

In contrast to Cambodia, the central authorities have a strong role in promoting and administering community forestry, with support from a limited number of international organizations and NGOs (Braeutigam 2003:2). The main responsibilities for community forestry lie with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), and with the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES). The Department of Forestry (DoF), the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and the Department for Land Planning and Management play a supporting role (Braeutigam 2003:50).

The FOMACOP project has received much attention in documentation and discussion of community forestry in Lao-PDR both because of the large area it occupied (two thirds of the total area dedicated to community forestry) and because of controversy surrounding its termination. During its implementation phase (1995-2000) forest management plans were prepared and executed in production forests covering approximately 100,000 ha and including 41 villages in Savannakhet and Khammouane provinces (Braeutigam 2003:54). According to the chief technical advisor (CTA) of the project, at the end of the implementation phase, the harvesting and sale of timber on a low-intensity and sustainable basis had generated a net revenue of US\$ 3,400 for each of the participating villages. Approximately one quarter of this revenue was channeled back to sustainable forest management and to the 33 Village Forestry Associations, and the rest was allocated for village development activities. According to the CTA, even though the proportion received by villagers seemed modest, it provides an income that was relatively high compared to the general income level in the region (Katila 2000:3). But the FOMACOP experiment was not viewed favorably by the Lao-PDR government, among other reasons because it was believed that timber wealth should be distributed more evenly among people in the national population, not just those who happened to live in the midst of abundant forests.

A scaling-up of FOMACOP from 2000 to 2010 was originally planned, but was not done because of a decision by the government of Lao-PDR to evaluate existing models before entering the scaling-up process (Braeutigam 2003:54). A new initiative based on the FOMACOP approach called the Sustainable Forestry and Rural Development (SUFORD) project, supported by the World Bank, was begun in late 2003 and will serve as the basis for introducing community forestry to production forests nationwide (Braeutigam 2003:46 & 55). The goal of the project is to institutionalize the systematic management of production forests, alleviate rural poverty, contribute to socio-economic development, and protect biodiversity and (Braeutigam 2003:55).

One of the main challenges facing the goal of poverty alleviation through community forestry in Lao-PDR is to develop a benefit sharing system that, on one hand, produces sufficient economic incentives at the village level, and on the other, distributes timber wealth in an equitable way to non-local stakeholders.

Another tall challenge concerns the country's system of land use planning and land allocation (LUP/LA), which is closely tied to its system of community forestry. Community forestry sites are often the beneficiaries of land allocation prior to the inception of projects. In the last decade approximately 5,400 villages, or about half of all villages in Lao-PDR, have completed the LUP/LA process. The goal of the nationwide LUP/LA process is to provide tenure security for rural households, to encourage private investment, to reduce shifting cultivation by

promoting sedentarized land uses, and to conserve forest resources (Braeutigam 2003:48).

But according to Braeutigam (2003:49), because of some errors in implementation, “LUP/LA often does not lead to the redistribution of land to disadvantaged groups and has caused partially negative impacts on the livelihood of rural communities, especially ethnic minorities, by reducing their agricultural production area” (Braeutigam 2003:49). According to Chamberlain (2002:1), one of the major causes of poverty in Lao-PDR was shown to be relocation and the implementation of the Land-Forest Allocation program, which deprived some people of their land and customary land use practices. It appears that reforms in the LUP/LA process might help improve the implementation of SUFORD and other community forestry initiatives.

In Lao-PDR, as in Cambodia, lack of capacity in government services is one of the main obstacles to successful implementation of the national community forestry program (Braeutigam 2003:2).

Some have argued that community forestry in Lao-PDR should give more attention to NTFPs. Foppes & Kethpanh (no date) point out that poverty alleviation policy focuses on wood production forest areas, in spite of the fact that such forests are available to far fewer villages than are NTFPs collection forests. They demonstrate the utility of extending community forestry to areas where NTFPs are an important source of income. This is a position put forward by MAF (2002:45) as well.

3.3 *Community forestry in Vietnam*

Vietnam has given legal status to community forestry in 2004. The system of community forestry in Vietnam is similar to that of Lao-PDR inasmuch as certain projects will entitle participants to a portion of timber wealth through benefit sharing arrangements. However, similar to the situation in Cambodia, forests in Vietnam on which community forestry is practiced will in many cases be degraded. The following discussion of community forestry in Vietnam, and its relation to poverty alleviation, is an abbreviation of a longer discussion in Sunderlin & Huynh Thu Ba (forthcoming:42-44).

Community forestry in Vietnam is closely tied to the government’s longstanding Forest Land Allocation (FLA) program, which until recently only allocated such lands to households or individuals. Recent changes to the Land Law, passed by the National Assembly in October 2003 and to be enacted by decree in mid-2004, will allow the allocation of land (including forest land) to communities, not just to households. This means that larger tracts of land can be allocated to villages and hamlets in remote rural areas. This legal change, along with a new regulation on benefit sharing, will establish the legal basis for community forestry in Vietnam. Community forestry potentially increases the forest resource “pie” at

the village level, and benefit sharing potentially increases the share of that larger pie available to the community.

The revised Land Law that creates the legal basis for community forestry designates in its list of land users: “Residential communities including communities of Vietnamese residing in the same village, hamlet or similar residence with the same tradition, customs or in the same extended family, to which land is allocated or who are using land and have been acknowledged by the State with regard to their land use rights” (SRV 2003:7). This legislation is exceedingly important because forestry experts recognize that the biggest single obstacle to the development of community based forest management in Vietnam has been the lack of recognition of communities and their use-rights of forests and forest lands (Nguyen Hai Nam 2002:3).

The legislation on benefit sharing related to forests (known as Decision No. 178 of November 12, 2001) specifies the benefits from the sale of forest products to households and individuals to whom forest land has been allocated, leased, or contracted. Important in this legislation is that individuals and households will be able to get two-thirds or more of the total value of harvested products, including timber, with the remainder of the share going to the commune budget or other government entities (MARD 2003). This is a dramatic improvement over past arrangements, where the economic benefits to individuals and households were either non-existent, low, or poorly specified.

Some observers have mentioned reasons for concern about the potential for successful community forestry in Vietnam. According to Gilmour (1998:12-13), powerful influences from outside the village have undermined local authority and have constrained the ability of villagers to manage forests effectively. Sikor and Apel (1998:18) point out that in areas where there are tense relations between state agencies and village residents because of past policies, it may be difficult to lay the groundwork for effective community forestry. It is possible that some commercial forestry enterprises, which have a stake in maintaining their stream of benefits, may pose obstacles to the effective implementation of community forestry. The closure of the extraction quotas for almost all State Forestry Enterprises has fueled illegal logging, which potentially undermines the revenue base for community forestry regimes.³ According to Vu Hoai Minh and Warfvinge (2002:12) it remains to be seen if the legislation on benefit sharing can be a useful instrument for developing community forestry; it must be effectively adapted to varying circumstances in different parts of the country.

Yet some observers have pointed out the reasons for being optimistic that community forestry will succeed in Vietnam. First, at least on paper, the community forestry legislation offers real devolution to villages and hamlets, and the benefit-sharing law offers substantial economic incentives for participating in community forestry. Real devolution of decision-making power to communities is

³ Personal communication from Ross Hughes. February 2, 2004.

the essential foundation for improving livelihoods through community forestry (Fisher 2003:18-19). Second, it appears that at least in some communities, the foundation for community forestry is strong in spite of past policy barriers. Case studies conducted in three provinces (Hoa Binh, Nghe An, and Thua Thien-Hue) show that communities have been able to circumvent formal restrictions and have implemented their own system of community forestry with or without external support (Vu Hoai Minh and Warfvinge 2002:3). The communities at these case study sites have been able to convince local authorities of the soundness of their approach (Vu Hoai Minh and Warfvinge 2002:47). The authors of the study claim there are hundreds of cases of this kind of management all over Vietnam (Vu Hoai Minh and Warfvinge 2002:45). Another set of case studies offers preliminary evidence that allocation of forests to communities can lead to improved local management of natural resources (Nguyen Hai Nam 2002:8).

4. What are the gaps in our knowledge that we need to fill?

In view of the lack of research to date on the poverty alleviation potential of community forestry in the Mekong region, there are very large information gaps that need to be filled. This section identifies research needs in terms of four broad categories of information: (1) institutional commitment to poverty alleviation; (2) location of community forestry projects; (3) the mechanics and performance of poverty alleviation through the implementation of community forestry; and (4) specific equity concerns. The knowledge gaps will be identified as questions that must be answered.

4.1 Institutional commitment to poverty alleviation

What is the *de jure* (i.e. legal) commitment of the governments of Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam to poverty alleviation through community forestry?

If such a commitment is stated explicitly, does it say anything about the kind of poverty alleviation that is being sought through community forestry? This is unlikely, given that the sub-types of poverty alleviation are rarely conceptualized by governments. Nevertheless, there may be language in laws, regulations, or procedural guidelines that specify in what ways and to what extent livelihoods are to be improved.

What is the *de facto* performance of the community forestry program in fulfilling its commitment to poverty alleviation through community forestry? Is there a difference between the *de jure* commitment and the *de facto* performance? If so, what explains this gap? Are there other major goals in the community forestry program, e.g. improved management and conservation of forests, resolution of land claims, etc.? Do these other goals support the goal of poverty alleviation? Are these goals neutral with respect to fulfillment of the poverty alleviation goal?

Do these goals compete with the fulfillment of the poverty alleviation goal, and possibly undermine it?

It is important to examine the formal commitment of community forestry projects with respect to the rights of women and ethnic minorities. Sometimes, there are explicit commitments made with respect to lifting the status of women or of ethnic minorities through their involvement in government-sponsored forestry projects. As above, it is useful to examine the difference, if any, between the promise made and the performance delivered.

If an agency other than the national government (e.g. provincial or local government, international organization or local NGO) has a leading or important role in administering the community forestry program – either in part or in whole – the questions above should also be posed with respect to those agencies.

4.2 Location of community forestry projects

Are community forestry projects located in areas where people are poor?⁴ If yes, was this the result of deliberate planning, or is it the result of happenstance? What is revealed through an overlay of two datasets: (1) a national map of poverty (head count, incidence, and if possible, severity and chronicity); and (2) the location of community forestry sites? What is revealed through the insertion of a third layer: ethnic minority communities? Be aware that, even if community forestry sites are located where people are poor, this does not guarantee that the poor in fact have successfully been included as participants in the community forestry project. This issue is addressed below in section 4.4.

What is the location of community forestry sites with respect to types of forest cover? Are they located in areas where natural forest resources exist in sufficient amount to serve as a meaningful basis for livelihood support and/or improvement? If not, are community forestry sites located in areas where the land resources and local markets can support the establishment of small farm plantation species? Be aware that, even if community forestry sites are in the midst of a well forested area, this does not guarantee access to, and remunerative use of, the forest resource. This issue is addressed below in section 4.3.

⁴ I emphasize that it is not appropriate to say “Everyone is poor in the countryside, so it does not matter where community forestry is located.” This observation might be especially important in Vietnam, where rapid economic growth in the course of the last decade has lifted pockets of people out of poverty in various parts of the country. But the observation is also true in Cambodia and Lao-PDR, because there can be significant variations in incidence, degree, and chronicity of poverty locally.

4.3 *Mechanics and performance of the poverty alleviation process*

In the course of implementing a given community forestry project, were the arrangements adequate for the purpose of alleviating poverty? The following questions are designed to answer this overarching question:

- Did the project explicitly or implicitly aim to mitigate poverty, avoid poverty, or eliminate poverty, or all three?
- Was the forest resource base to which the project participants had access potentially sufficient in quantity and quality to help meet the project's poverty alleviation goals, and to do so in a lasting way?
- Was the non-forest income of the participants sufficiently large and stable to support the poverty alleviation goals of the project?
- Were the local forest resource access rules adequate and sufficient for the purpose of meeting poverty alleviation goals? (This can be very important from the standpoint that forestry rules and regulations often prohibit specific uses of forest resources.)
- In cases where project participants are being given access to timber rents, were the benefit sharing arrangements adequate and sufficient for the purpose of meeting the project's poverty alleviation goals?
- In cases where the project aimed to have participants market forest products, were the marketing arrangements adequate for the purpose of meeting the project's poverty alleviation goals? Specifically, were the participants in a position to get the best possible price for their products through having sufficient price information, access to a variety of buyers, and means of transportation to markets? Were the project participants sufficiently well organized among themselves so as not to be needlessly victimized in unfair marketing arrangements?
- Were the livelihoods of the participants sufficiently well endowed in terms of the "five capital assets"⁵ so that they had the best chance possible to take advantage of the opportunities offered through the community forestry project? Specifically, were the natural resources at their disposal sufficient (natural capital)? Were the local infrastructure and the participants' own tools and technology sufficient (physical capital)? Did they have a sufficient level of general education and were they well

⁵ "Livelihood" can be defined as that which comprises: "... the assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutional and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or household" (Ellis 2000:10).

enough trained to take advantage of the project (human capital)? Were their monetary endowments (e.g. savings and access to credit) adequate? Were the participants' networks of relationships (e.g. ties with extended family member, local organizational capacity) sufficiently robust to support effective participation in the community forestry project (social capital)?

- Was the level of education and training of the project extension agents sufficient for the purpose of enabling the project perform successfully?
- In cases where the community forestry project depended on outside funds or subsidies for its implementation, were those endowments sufficient to enable the project to perform successfully?
- Was the project carried out in a period of time that was free of calamities, for examples, droughts, floods, conflict and war, forest fires, etc.? If a given project failed to meet poverty alleviation objectives, it is possible this happened in large measure due to factors that had little to do with the design and mechanics of the project.

4.4 *Specific equity concerns*

There are various equity concerns that must be examined carefully in order to assure that community forestry projects not only alleviate poverty, but also do so in a way that meets standards of fairness with respect to various key issues. These issues are: participant selection; "internal" equity problems, including misappropriation of benefits and gender discrimination; "external" equity threats; and standards of fairness among neighboring communities and among ethnic groups.

At the time that a community forestry site was being established, did it make sense to prioritize participation of the "poorest of the poor"?⁶ If yes, were the poorest of the poor indeed prioritized successfully in the participant selection process? Researchers must be aware that the relevance of this question is in proportion to the size of the forestry benefits to be expected from the project. The greater the benefits, the higher the degree of competition for entry, and the more likely it is that those who are weak and powerless will not get access to those benefits. Conversely, if the level of benefits in a given community forestry project is low, equity concerns of this type rarely materialize.

Once a community forestry project is underway, there are various ways in which project benefits can be inappropriately monopolized by members of the group, sometime to the disadvantage of the poor. As above, the danger of this happening is in direct proportion to the size of the available project benefits.

⁶ Some types of community forestry involve the establishment of woodlots on owned land. In these cases, the "poorest of the poor" might not be included because, by definition, they do not have access to owned land that is necessary in order to participate.

Women are sometimes victimized by discrimination in the implementation of community forestry projects. One possible form of discrimination is that women might not be given any role in the conceptualization and implementation of a given project, even if they might have a key role in managing forest resources, and even if they might be a major source of labor for carrying out the project. Another form of discrimination is economic. Women sometime fail to reap the full economic benefit of their participation in a project, even if they have a substantial role in doing the work. Yet another form of discrimination is that which can befall female-headed households. The woman heading a household might not be included in the project because she is a woman (i.e. because there is no adult man in the household to serve in the project's committee of participants), in spite of the fact that female-headed households are often poor. These forms of discrimination can be difficult to deal with under circumstances where the bias is legitimized by local culture and mores.⁷

Some of the greatest threats to the poverty alleviation potential of community forestry can come from outside of the community. This is particularly the case when the resources available to the community are abundant. There are many reported cases in Mekong countries (some related to community forestry and some not) where local forest resources are forcibly appropriated by powerful outsiders. These outsiders can be private timber concessionaires, members of the military, or other powerful individuals and organizations.

In some cases, the "external threat" is not a powerful individual or organization, but instead a neighboring village. There are many cases where a village involved in community forestry cannot take full advantage of the forest resources at its disposal because of competing claims to the same forest by neighboring people who are not participants in the community forestry project. Resolution of such problems can be exceedingly difficult for at least three reasons. First, the "intruders" may believe they have a rightful claim to the forest resources because of pre-existing, traditional land use rights that predate the introduction of the community forestry project. Second, there is inherent ambiguity concerning the issue of distance: Does a village necessarily have a better right of access because it is closer to a given forest? Third, and related to the second point, as forests become more and more degraded, people travel further and further away to get access to forest resources they depend on.

Ethnic status, like gender, is an issue where power relations and longstanding prejudices and mores can undermine a fair outcome in the implementation of community forestry. Ethnic minorities in the Mekong region are often victimized by their inability to assert their resource management preferences. This is made all the more difficult by a tendency to look down upon land use practices that are judged to be insufficiently modern and efficient. These issues can be particularly

⁷ For a useful case study examining gender in the context of community forestry in Cambodia, see Vann & Theun (2002).

sensitive in cases where minority and majority ethnic groups lay claim to the same forest resources, or in cases where powerful outside actors lay claim to forest resources that are nominally under the control of a minority ethnic group. Another possible flash point is when both majority and minority ethnic groups live in the same community and are involved in the same community forestry scheme.

5. How can the information gaps be filled?

The large information gap with respect to community forestry and poverty alleviation can be filled through a combination of secondary and primary research. Most but not all of the secondary research effort will be devoted to obtaining information on institutional commitment to poverty alleviation through community forestry (4.1 above) and the location of community forestry projects (4.2). Most but not all of the primary research will be applied to get information on the mechanics and performance of the poverty alleviation process (4.3) and on specific equity issues (4.4).

This section discusses, in sequence: a plan for secondary research; a plan for primary research; integration of the work done by the ethnicity and gender specialists into the community forestry research; and some preliminary thoughts on a pilot study to be conducted in Vietnam.

5.1 Secondary research

There will be three primary aims in conducting secondary research. The first aim will be to accumulate, read, and annotate all relevant formal and informal (grey) literature on community forestry and its relation to poverty alleviation in a given country so as to be thoroughly familiar with the topic. It will be important to review the national poverty alleviation strategy to understand what it does and does not say about forestry generally, and community forestry in particular. The sources of this information will be: the consultants' own collections (in cases where they are already community forestry experts); organizations, both governmental and non-governmental that do work on community forestry and/or poverty alleviation; and the collection of resources that has been assembled by the project staff.⁸

The second aim of the secondary research will be to answer the questions posed with respect to "institutional commitment" in section 4.1 above. Specifically, it will be important to obtain and examine the enabling legislation for community forestry and policies and guidelines on poverty alleviation at the national,

⁸ Zishan Karim (z.karim-alumni@lse.ac.uk) is responsible for assembling this information.

provincial, and local levels.⁹ Moreover, as noted above, it will be important to examine the implementation guidelines for community forestry made by international and national organizations that might have a lead role in administering community forestry in a given country.

The third aim of the secondary research will be to answer the questions posed with respect to the location of community forestry projects in section 4.2 above. This will involve obtaining digitized GIS map information with layers on: the location of existing and planned community forestry projects; forest cover, if possible, differentiated according to forest quality (degraded/undegraded), type (species), and land use status (e.g. production vs. conservation); and poverty, if possible at the highest level of specificity (e.g. at the level of village or commune as compared to province). Note that maps of poverty in the Mekong region, to date, have focused on “head count” measures (total number of poor people in a given area) and “incidence” measures (percentage of poor as part of the total population in a given area). It will be very useful to obtain mapping data on poverty severity (distinguishing between those who live on less than \$2 per day and \$1 per day) and on chronicity (being poor continuously for a period of more than or less than five years). To my knowledge this kind of mapping has not yet been done in the Mekong region, but might be done soon given the high degree of attention to innovation of poverty measurement and mapping in recent years.

5.2 *Primary research*

A relatively small portion of the primary research will involve completing the search for information on commitment (4.1) and location (4.2) that cannot be accomplished through secondary sources. For example, in cases where enabling legislation and community forestry project documents are vague or inconsistent in regards to explaining whether and how it will improve livelihoods, it might be necessary to interview key officials or experts to get a full and clear understanding of the information. Likewise, if mapping data are unclear or incomplete, it might be necessary to have formal interviews with experts.

Most of the primary research will be devoted to investigating the mechanics and performance of the poverty alleviation process in community forestry (4.3 above) and specific equity issues (4.4 above). This will be accomplished almost wholly through case study field research, in two phases. The first phase of research will involve “intensive” case study research at four community forestry sites (one month at each site) in each country. The second phase of research will involve “extensive” case study research at 40 sites (one day or less at each site) in each country.

⁹ A good starting point for Lao-PDR is to examine Samontry (2002) and MAF (2002). Note that Lao-PDR’s PRSP says “Forest resources are potentially one of the country’s major sources of lasting poverty reduction” (Braeutigam 2003:47).

The logic of this research strategy is to optimize the advantages and disadvantages of an intensive (“deep but narrow”) approach and an extensive (“wide but shallow”) approach. Doing intensive case study research at a few locations has the distinct advantage of being able to get to know the performance of a particular community forestry site thoroughly. This is particularly important with respect to measuring appropriately all variables related to livelihood, adequacy of the resource base, to what extent the project did or did not attain its goals, and any equity problems that might have surfaced. It is particularly important to conduct research on equity issues through an intensive approach, given that respondents are unlikely to reveal information on sensitive issues unless they have gotten to know and to trust the field researcher, and unless they have an opportunity to speak privately. Getting to know the field researcher, of course, takes time. The disadvantage of the intensive approach is that the resulting information, in and of itself, cannot be generalized to all sites in the study country.

After the intensive case study work at four sites is completed, the research is then “scaled up” to a larger number of sites. The logic of the sequence is that the intensive research will have produced a rich set of insights and questions to pose at a more representative and generalizable level. The intensive research will be conducted largely through a census of households and household survey questionnaire, and a follow-up village-level meeting. In contrast, the extensive research will involve just one meeting at each community forestry site. The advantage of the extensive approach will be representativeness and the ability to capture the diversity of sites throughout the study country. (The sites will be chosen through a stratified random sample based on data gathered in relation to 4.2 above.) The disadvantage of this approach is that the amount of data gathered on each site will be comparatively limited, and information on any sensitive equity issues, will be difficult if not impossible to obtain.

Intensive research at four case study sites

In each country, the four intensive case study research sites should be selected from all national sites on the basis of stratification criteria that are most relevant to the main community forestry issues being faced in that country. In Cambodia, it might be useful to choose sites on the basis of forest quality (abundant/degraded) and forest land use (protection/production). In Lao-PDR, forest quality (abundant/degraded) might usefully cross-classified with land allocation status (allocated/non-allocated). In Vietnam, it might be useful to select on the basis of land allocation status (allocated/non-allocated) and forest land use (protection/production). These possibilities are displayed in Figure 2.

| CAMBODIA | | FOREST LAND USE | |
|-----------------|----------|-----------------|------------|
| | | PROTECTED | PRODUCTION |
| FOREST QUALITY | ABUNDANT | | |
| | DEGRADED | | |

| LAO-PDR | | ALLOCATION STATUS | |
|----------------|----------|-------------------|---------------|
| | | ALLOCATED | NON-ALLOCATED |
| FOREST QUALITY | ABUNDANT | | |
| | DEGRADED | | |

| VIETNAM | | ALLOCATION STATUS | |
|-----------------|------------|-------------------|---------------|
| | | ALLOCATED | NON-ALLOCATED |
| FOREST LAND USE | PROTECTED | | |
| | PRODUCTION | | |

Figure 2 Possible stratification criteria for selection of “intensive” case study sites in Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam.

The proposed stratification variables above are merely a preliminary suggestion. The best possible variables will be determined on the basis of aggregated information about all community forestry sites in a given country. Other possible stratification variables include: ethnicity of participants (minority/majority); distance from urban centers (near/far); type of community forestry (introduced/traditional); and performance (success/failure).

At each of the four research sites, a census should be conducted of all households in the village or hamlet to be studied. This census performs three

valuable functions. First, the data will serve as a sample frame for the subsequent random selection of respondent households for the questionnaire survey. Second, the census can include several questions on key variables that are useful to be measured for the village as a whole, e.g.: participant/non-participant status; interest/non-interest in participating in social forestry; or indicators of wellbeing on the basis of asset ownership. Third, this step allows the field researcher and the research project to become better known to the community.

The household questionnaire survey – at the very least – will be used to conduct research on a representative sample of households that are participating in a community forestry project. The household survey will be one of the main means through which the mechanics of poverty alleviation through community forestry (4.3) and specific equity issues (4.4) will be understood. The following will be among the key objectives of this household survey:

- Collect basic information on the respondent household that will enable a comparative assessment of the wellbeing status of the household among all households in the project, and possibly in the village as a whole. Such information will include: income; household assets of various kinds; savings; access to credit; levels of education; etc.
- Understand how, from the point of view of the respondent, the wellbeing of the household has fared since the inception of the community forestry project (T1). Has the wellbeing of the household: improved; stayed the same; or gotten worse?
- Understand, from the point of view of the respondent, the full range of reasons for changes of household status, if there has been any change since T1. The aim is to understand the possible contribution of community forestry (good or bad) in a comparative context that includes all possible reasons for change in household status.
- Understand, from the point of view of the participant, if the community forestry program is useful to them or not, and whether it can and should be improved, and if so, what are the specific ways in which it can be improved.

There are two important methodological issues that cannot be resolved until more is known about the specific case study sites that are chosen: (1) whether or not to do a survey of non-participants; and (2) whether to undertake an absolute measure of income against a national poverty scale.

(1) Under certain circumstances, it might be vitally important to conduct a household survey not just of participants, but of non-participant households as well. This can conceivably be a very useful means to assess the participant

selection process as an equity issue. Moreover, the contrast of wellbeing status of participating and non-participating households can possibly yield important information on what the project is or is not accomplishing. But there are imaginable conditions where this approach would not be useful. If all inhabitants of a given village or hamlet are participants, such a contrast has no basis. And if there are very few non-participants in a given village or hamlet, it might not be worth the effort to do the comparison. And in some cases, if the contribution of community forestry as a portion of total household income is very low (something that can be known in advance of conducting a household survey), the comparison and contrast with non-participant households might be meaningless.

(2) At the very least, the household survey must produce information that yields a picture of the relative wellbeing among all households in the project and community. But should the same survey attempt to produce a measure of wellbeing or poverty according to an absolute scale of national or international poverty measurement? This can be accomplished by posing detailed questions on either household expenditure of all kinds, or on income of all kinds (monetary and non-monetary). The benefit of such an approach might be dependable knowledge on the appropriateness of the site as a poverty alleviation project (if such was the program goal) and/or on the success or failure of the project in producing the desired livelihood outcome. For three reasons, I am hesitant to recommend such an approach. First, such measures tend to be very time consuming. Second, the approach can put some respondents on the defensive if the questions are perceived as too intrusive. Third, even if we produced very reliable absolute measures of income, they might not tell us much since findings at a mere four sites cannot be generalized to all community forestry sites in each country.

One particular methodological challenge for Vietnam must be flagged early. The household survey described above focuses on measuring changes in wellbeing over time that might or might not be attributable to a community forestry project. This might be difficult, if not impossible, in Vietnam, given that community forestry through the FLA has only been begun this year. It is conceivable that it is too early in Vietnam for the “new” community forestry to have had any measurable impact on livelihoods. If this is the case, then the case study research should focus on predecessor models of community forestry. And if this is the case, brief visits to the newer sites might be useful for producing preliminary insights on their performance.

After all household interviews have been concluded at each site, the field researcher must conduct a meeting with all participants to discuss preliminary findings of the research. In preparation for such a meeting, the field researcher must go through the survey forms and identify important issues and trends that are worth discussing. An example: “For some reason, only households that own cattle are deriving any benefit from community forestry. Why is this so?” Or: “All households that produce coffee and/or that have at least one hectare of owned

land do not participate in the community forestry project. Why is this so?" There are two main reasons for such a meeting. First, conceivably, it can be a valuable form of compensation to the villagers for having contributed their time to the project. It offers the research opportunity to share preliminary findings with the community. Second, the meeting can produce valuable summary analysis benefiting from the collective knowledge of the village. Such analysis helps lay the groundwork for the subsequent stage of field research.

Extensive research at 40 case study sites

The 40 community forestry sites chosen for the subsequent extensive phase of research can be selected either as a simple random sample of all sites, or as a stratified sample that extends the fourfold classification criteria applied in the selection of the four intensive case study sites. The aim is to have a sample that is fairly representative of all sites throughout the country.

The visits to these sites has the following primary aims. The first aim is to find out to what extent the key findings at the intensive case study sites can be generalized to a larger number of sites. One way to accomplish this will be to conduct a group exercise focused on two questions: What proportion of the participants are better off, worse off, or the same since T1? What factors explain these divergent outcomes?¹⁰ The second aim is to know if there are any new and different issues, unanticipated in the prior research, that must be taken into account in order to understand community forestry's performance in improving the livelihoods of participants. This can be accomplished by posing a series of semi-structured, and open-ended questions.

The time allowed for this series of meetings (one day at each site) will probably restrict the field researcher to just one large meeting at each site. However, as time allows, it might be wise to have some smaller meetings in addition to the big meeting. Some useful constituents for smaller meetings might be: participant women; members of the project steering committee (if such exists); non-participants; or extension workers serving the site.

5.3 Integration with ethnicity and gender research

This research project (ADB-RETA 6115) will have a specialist looking at ethnicity in relation to forests and poverty alleviation, and another specialist looking at gender issues in relation to forests and poverty alleviation. They will be conducting much of their work outside of the bounds of this component on community forestry. However inasmuch as the community forestry component will be looking at equity issues, and inasmuch as ethnicity and gender are two specific equity issues, then their expertise and involvement can be useful and welcome. And conversely, the community forestry "lens" can be useful to their

¹⁰ I conducted a trial of this kind of exercise at two community forestry sites in Cambodia, in April 2004. The discussion was lively and useful.

efforts given that it can offer a structured way to obtain data on the issues they are investigating.

The usefulness of a collaborative relationship with the gender research is certain. Almost all community forestry sites to be visited will have women performing some of the labor, and even if they are not, they have a stake in the performance of community forestry because it affects household wellbeing. The relevance of a collaborative relationship with the ethnicity research is probable, but less certain. The reason is that it is not possible to know *a priori* how many of the case study sites will have ethnic minority participants.

5.4 *Pilot project in Vietnam*

One of the objectives of the community forestry component of ADB-RETA 6115 is to apply the research findings in a practical way. In Vietnam, the findings on the poverty alleviation performance of community forestry will be used to improve all aspects of the implementation of community forestry related to increasing the wellbeing of participants. There will be a pilot project at one location that will serve to test and to demonstrate an “improved” method of implementing community forestry. As yet, the location of that pilot site is not known, and the groundwork for conducting such a pilot project has not yet been established.

However, at this early stage, it is important to be mindful of the pilot project for two reasons. First, the work done to identify prospective case study sites can also be used to identify a planned site that would serve well as a pilot. Second, it will be useful for researchers to be thinking creatively at an early stage about what kinds of program changes will produce a better result for alleviating poverty.

6. **Summary and conclusion**

In attempting to reduce rural poverty in Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam, it is important to examine the potential contribution of forest resources to that effort. The reason is that many of those who are most poor rely on forest resources for a portion of their household income. This income can be important for meeting subsistence needs, for performing a “safety net” function, for filling seasonal income gaps, and sometimes, for rising out of poverty. Community forestry is potentially a crucial institutional vehicle for assuring and improving the delivery of livelihood benefits from forests.

This paper has proposed a research agenda to know how well existing community forestry programs are performing for the purpose of poverty alleviation, and to assess how to improve that poverty alleviation function. Two concepts are put forward as a basis for conducting this investigation. First, it is important to disaggregate what “poverty alleviation” means, recognizing that it covers a spectrum ranging from poverty mitigation or avoidance at one end, to

poverty elimination at the other. Second, it is important to understand the kind of institutional commitment made by the implementing agency or agencies. Specifically, it is important to know: What is the nature of the commitment to poverty alleviation? What are the goals of the community forestry programs above and beyond poverty alleviation, and do these other goals support or undermine the attainment of poverty alleviation?

Recognizing that very little is known about the poverty alleviation performance and potential of community forestry in Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam, this paper recommends attention to four domains of knowledge:

1. The nature of the commitment to poverty alleviation and other goals, as just explained.
2. Mapping of community forestry sites, forest cover, and poverty.
3. The mechanics and performance of poverty alleviation at four case study sites studied intensively, and 40 randomly chosen sites studied extensively.
4. Specific potential equity problems that include: participant selection; appropriation of benefits from within the site; appropriation of benefits from outside the site; ethnicity issues; and gender issues.

The first two domains of knowledge are to be studied largely through secondary research. The second two domains of knowledge are to be studied largely through primary research.

The logic of the primary research is to begin with a “deep but narrow” approach at four case study sites that produces highly reliable information, some of it on otherwise unknowable sensitive equity issues. The information from this phase of research is used as the basis for a subsequent extensive phase of research at 40 randomly selected sites. This “wide but shallow” approach will enable getting information on key issues that is representative for the national community forestry program as a whole.

REFERENCES

- ADB et al. 2003. *Vietnam Development Report 2004: Poverty*. Joint Donor Report to the Vietnam Consultative Group Meeting. December 2-3. ADB, AusAID, DFID, GTZ, JICA, Save the Children UK, UNDP, and the World Bank. Hanoi, Vietnam.
- Angelsen, Arild and Sven Wunder. 2003. Exploring the Forest-Poverty Link: Key Concepts, Issues and Research Implications. CIFOR Occasional Paper No. 40. Bogor, Indonesia: Center for International Forestry Research.
- Arnold, J.E. Michael. 1992. *Community Forestry: Ten Years in Review. Revised Edition*. Community Forestry Note 7. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- Braeutigam, Dietmar. 2003. Community Based Forest Management in Cambodia and Laos: Frame Conditions, Selected Examples and Implications. Phnom Penh: MRC-GTZ Cooperation Programme; Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme; Watershed Management Component.
- Brown, David, Yam Malla, Kate Schreckenber and Oliver Springate-Baginski. 2002. From Supervising 'Subjects' to Supporting 'Citizens:' Recent Developments in Community Forestry in Asia and Africa. *Natural Resource Perspectives* No. 75. United Kingdom: Overseas Development Institute, Department for International Development.
- Chamberlain, James R. 2002. The Relationship of Poverty to the Forests in the Lao PDR. Paper presented at the international workshop on "Forestry and Poverty Alleviation in Lao PDR." December 17-18, 2002. Vientiane: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, FAO, SIDA.
- Daoroung, Premrudee. 1997. Community Forests in Lao PDR: The New Era of Participation? *Watershed* 3(1):1-9.
- FAO. (2003). Forests and Poverty Alleviation, by William D. Sunderlin, Arild Angelsen and Sven Wunder. Chapter in *State of the World's Forests 2003*, pp. 61-73. Rome, Italy.
- Ellis, Frank. 2000. *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Fichtenau, Jürgen, Ly Chou Beang, Nup Sothea, and Dy Sophy. 2002. An Assessment of ongoing Community Forestry Initiatives in Cambodia: Implications for the Development of a Forestry Extension Strategy. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Cambodian-German Forestry Project; Department of Forestry and Wildlife; GTZ.
- Fisher, Robert J. 2003. Innovations, Persistence and Change: Reflection on the State of Community Forestry. Chapter in RECOFTC and FAO (eds.) *Community Forestry: Current innovations and experiences*. CD- ROM. Bangkok, Thailand: RECOFTC and FAO. pp. 16-29.
- Gilmour, Don. 1998. Options and Approaches for Community Participation in the Management of Watershed/Forest Resources in Dak Lak Province. Consultancy report on behalf of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and Mekong River Commission Secretariat.
- Hulme, David and Andrew Shepherd. 2003. Conceptualizing Chronic Poverty. In David Hulme and Andrew Shepherd (eds.) Special Issue on "Chronic Poverty and Development Policy." *World Development* 31(3):403-424.
- Katila, Marko. 2000. Village Forestry Experiences in FOMACOP: From Piloting to Expansion. Paper presented at the Workshop on "Community-Based Forest Management in the Mekong River Basin: Strategies and Tools for Community Forest Management Support," organized by SMRP (GTZ-MRC) and the Asia Forest Network. March 27-29, 2000. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- MAF. 2002. Consultant's Contribution to Discussion Paper on "Village Land Use and Forest Management for Poverty Alleviation." Presented at the Donor Consultation on Forestry Strategy to the Year 2020. Vientiane: Lao People's Democratic Republic, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.
- McKenney, Bruce and Prom Tola. 2002. Natural Resources and Rural Livelihoods in Cambodia: A Baseline Assessment. Working Paper 23. Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute.
- Nguyen Hai Nam. 2002. Community Forestry and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam. Paper presented at the International Workshop on Forestry and Poverty Alleviation in Laos PDR for Forestry Strategy 2020. December 17-18, 2002. Vientiane.
- MARD. 2003. Joint circular No. 80/2003/TTLT/BNN-BTC of September 3, 2003 guiding the implementation of Decision No. 178/2001/QĐ-TTg OF November 12, 2001 by the Prime Minister on the benefits and obligations of households and individuals to which forest and forest land were allocated, leased or contracted. Hanoi: Vietnam.

- Nguyen Hai Nam. 2002. Community Forestry and Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam. Paper presented at the International Workshop on Forestry and Poverty Alleviation in Laos PDR for Forestry Strategy 2020. December 17-18, 2002. Vientiane.
- Peluso, Nancy L. 1992. *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Samontry, Xeme. 2002. Forest Policy on Poverty Alleviation in Lao P.D.R. Permanent Secretary Office, MAF. Vientiane: Lao People's Democratic Republic.
- Sikor, Thomas and Ulrich Apel. 1998. The Possibilities for Community Forestry in Vietnam. Asia Forest Network Working Paper Series. Santa Barbara, California, USA: Asia Forest Network.
- Sokh, Heng and Shigeru Iida. 2001. Community Forestry Models in Southeast Asia and Cambodia: A Comparative Study. *Journal of the Faculty of Agriculture, Kyushu University* 46(1):113-121.
- SRV. 2003. Draft Law for National Assembly's Ratification: Law on Land. Hanoi: Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
- Sunderlin, William D. 1993. Environment, Equity, and the State: A Perspective through the Java Social Forestry Program. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Rural Sociology. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University.
- Sunderlin, William D. and Huynh Thu Ba. Forthcoming. *Poverty Alleviation and Forests in Vietnam*. Bogor, Indonesia: Center for International Forestry Research.
- Sunderlin, William D., Arild Angelsen, Brian Belcher, Paul Burgers, Levania Santoso, and Sven Wunder. Forthcoming. Livelihoods, Forests, and Conservation in Developing Countries: An Overview. *World Development*.
- Vann, Sun and Kouk Theun. 2002. Gender in Community Forestry Management: A case study from Snam Phrah Commune, Bakan District, Pursat Province, Kingdom of Cambodia. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Concern Worldwide; CBNRM Initiative; WWF; IDRC; Oxfam America; RECOFTC.
- Vedeld, P., A. Angelsen, E. Sjaastad, G.K. Berg. 2003. *Counting on the Environment!: Forest Environmental Incomes and the Rural Poor*. As, Norway: NORAGRIC.

Vu Hoai Minh and Hans Warfvinge. 2002. Issue in Management of Natural Forests by Households and Local Communities of Three Provinces in Vietnam: Hoa Binh, Nghe An, and Thua Thien-Hue. Asia Forest Network Working Paper Series, Volume 5. Santa Barbara, California, USA: Asia Forest Network.

Time table for implementation of community forestry component in ADBTA 6115 on Poverty Reduction in Upland Communities in the Mekong Region through improved Community and Industrial Forestry July 2004 - December 2005

| Tasks | End of 2004 | | | | | | 2005 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | J | A | S | O | N | D | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D | |
| Paper in preparation for Sept 1-2 inception workshop | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Consultants provide feedback on paper | | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Intensive field research planning via email. Consultants interview & hire enumerators | | | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Field research training: - Cambodia: Oct 11 – 14 - Laos: Oct 18 – 21 - Vietnam: Oct 25 - 28 | | | | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Inception workshops: - Cambodia: Oct 15 - Laos: Oct 22 - Vietnam: Oct 29 | | | | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Implementation of "narrow but deep" field research at four case study sites. | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Data entry & cleaning | | | | | | | | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Discussion of interim findings. Interim consultative workshop. Planning of "wide but shallow" visits | | | | | | | | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Visits to 40 randomly chosen sites. | | | | | | | | | ■ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Data entry on "wide but shallow" information. | | | | | | | | | | ■ | | | | | | | | | |
| Writing of national case studies on community forestry | | | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | | | | |
| Writing of synthesis report on community forestry | | | | | | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| National & regional consultations | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |