

WHY FOREST AND FOREST LAND ALLOCATION (FA/FLA) IS CRITICAL TO SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY IN VIETNAM

INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam and worldwide, widespread forest degradation from climate change and other causes, like poor plantation management, is leading to increased carbon emissions, which threatens the environment, communities, and livelihoods. Despite national increases in overall tree coverage, Vietnam's natural forests are reducing in area and worsening in quality.

From 2020-2025, the USAID Sustainable Forest Management Project (the Project) is linking communities, local authorities, the national government, and the private sector to jointly address the drivers of forest conversion and degradation in targeted areas. The Project aims to avoid carbon emissions from natural forest conversion; increase carbon sequestration through better management of plantation forests; and improve the quality, diversity, and productivity of natural production forests— all to protect Vietnam's threatened forest resources.

THE CHALLENGE

Vietnam has about 3.3 million hectares of unallocated forest land under temporary management by local administrative units called Commune People's Committees (CPCs). This significant amount of (mostly unmanaged) land is often a hotspot of deforestation and forest degradation. The Government of Vietnam (GVN) has made significant efforts over the past two decades to promote forest allocation and forest land allocation (FA/FLA) from this unallocated area to non-state actors, including households, individuals, and communities who are likely to have a more vested interest in managing and protecting the land. However, households and communities currently manage only about 4 million ha (or 27%) of Vietnam's national forest, of which forest land under community management is just 7%. The slow adoption of FA/FLA is often associated with two main barriers. First, while land allocation to communities is governed by Vietnam's Land Law, forest allocation is guided by Forestry Law. Yet, these two processes are not always consistent. Secondly, policies guiding the two processes are often interpreted differently at the provincial level, causing confusion among local authorities about the FA/FLA process. Such inconsistencies at the national level and different interpretations at the provincial level often lead to hesitance among local authorities to accelerate FA/FLA to households and communities.



Vietnam contains vast areas of forested area, such as this one in Pu Long Nature Reserve of northern Vietnam. Photo: Cintapo Tran.

TAKING ACTION TO PROMOTE FA/FLA

The Project supports FA/FLA in four provinces: Lao Cai (FA/FLA of 2,200 ha to two communities), Son La (FA/FLA of 15,000 ha to 315 communities), Hoa Binh (FA of about 1,000 ha to two communities), and Thanh Hoa (FA/FLA of 350 ha to one community). In total, this support is facilitating the allocation of nearly 19,000 ha of currently unallocated land to 20 communities. The Project's technical assistance facilitates consultations with representatives from Department of Agriculture Rural Development (DARD) and Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DONRE), local authorities, and communities to clarify roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders during the FA/FLA planning and implementation processes. At a knowledge exchange workshop on FA/FLA in Nghe An in June 2022, the Project shared experiences from Nghe An, one of the pioneering provinces in FA/FLA to communities between 2018-2020 with Lao Cai, Son La, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Quang Tri and Quang Nam provinces.

As a result, Lao Cai province was inspired to increase its FA/FLA area from 90 ha up to 2,000 ha, which has since been approved by the People's Provincial Committee (PCP) for implementation, and it is catching on in other provinces too. The Project's efforts are prompting more action elsewhere too. The Project supported the development of a FA/FLA Plan that was approved by Thanh Hoa PPC for an area of 350 ha to one community, while Son La recently submitted its final implementation plan to the PPC for FA/FLA of 15,000 ha to 315 communities in 40 communes of three districts.

Project motivates Lao Cai province to increase allocated land by more than 2,000%

In June 2022, the Project held an awareness raising workshop on FA/FLA in Nghe An to provide provincial representatives with information about updated guidelines and policies on FA/FLA and to share experience from Nghe An FA/FLA with other provinces. The goal of the event was to show other provinces that FA/FLA is feasible and has real benefits!

Following the workshop, Lao Cai province was so motivated that officials immediately upgraded the size of its proposed areas of FA/FLA by more than 2,000% – from just 90 hectares allocated to one community, up to 2,200 hectares allocated to two communities. Its FA/FLA plan was subsequently approved by the Lao Cai People's Provincial Committee (PPC) and they are now taking action.



“Lao Cai has about 100,000 ha of unallocated forests being temporarily managed by CPCs. One strategy to better manage and protect this forest area is to promote FA/FLA to communities, households, or individuals. We highly appreciate the support from the USAID Sustainable Forest Management Project that will not only benefit the two communities in Lien Minh commune, but will offer valuable experience that can be scaled up to promote FA/FLA in more and more communities in our province.” –

Mr. Vu Hong Diep, Vice Director of the Lao Cai Forest Protection Department

SO WHAT?

The approved FA/FLA plans by PPCs in Lao Cai and Thanh Hoa will result in almost 20,000 hectares of land being allocated to communities and individuals for better management and protection. Next, the Project will conduct land surveying, mapping, and forest inventories to prepare a dossier for land allocation for target communities. The Project will capture the FA/FLA process and support target provinces to produce provincial-level procedures to further guide the implementation and combination of both processes at the local level. This provincial policy will contribute into accelerating FA/FLA of unallocated land to households and communities throughout Vietnam, ensuring secure tenure of forest and forest land for better forest protection, thus achieving reduced carbon emissions and increasing carbon sequestration.