

POWERFUL ACTOR IDENTIFICATION IN COMMUNITY FORESTRY VIA ACTOR-CENTERED POWER THEORY: CASE STUDY IN SON LA PROVINCE

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SUMMARY

Community forestry is known as a new trend of forest management in which forest management role is entrusted to local communities at local levels. However, it is de facto observed that there exists a relationship between the context of political processes and the dynamics of social interactions amongst the actors. Communities are vulnerable to the influence of powerful relevant actors. Across all cases in the research site, 13 relevant actors involving in community forestry activities are identified. Applying "Actor-Centered Power" theory allows us to do quantitative calculation of power element of the relevant actors (Coercion, Incentive/disincentive, and Dominant information). Calculation results explain that how powerful relevant actors build their power based on power elements. Especially, research results pointed out that political actors still are the most powerful actors steering community forestry process in all cases. This means state agencies still dominate in forest management in general and community forestry process in particular.

Keywords: Community forestry, local community, power, powerful actors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Community forestry is an expanding model of forestry whereby a significant portion of responsibility for forest management is transferred from the state to the lower community levels. As such, community forestry aims to enhance accessibility of the direct forest users in forests and common decision-making process, as well as to improve forest management and restoration. Centralized forest management practices have been unable to successfully implement these promises on the ground; however, it remains to be seen whether community forestry can find success where the forests continue to be governed by the powerful relevant actors.

In Vietnam in general and research area in particular, realities of the patterns of community forest management indicated that local communities manage community forest in three management instruments as following: (1) by establishing management organization and operation based on the principle of the people's trust and choice with respect to the village patriarch or chief of hamlet; (2) by drawing up forest regulation that relies on local regulation; (3) by designing a mechanism of

benefit sharing based on the community's agreement and the state policy.

It is observed that there exists a relationship between the context of political processes and the dynamics of social interactions among the actors involved in community forestry; when these actors and their power sources are focused upon, key factors might become identifiable. Scholars note that poor communities are vulnerable to the influences of powerful relevant actors, suggesting that these may be driving the processes and outcomes of community forestry. Based on this argument, this research hypothesizes that "*the activities and outcomes of community forestry are driven by powerful relevant actors*".

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research objectives

With the effort to elucidate that how powerful relevant actors drive and influence community forestry process, this research aims to:

- Identify actors involving in community forestry process in the research area. Stakeholder identification is a fundamental step to execute subsequent study paces. In this case, the research focuses on the actors those

are involved in community forestry directly, instead of dealing with all of them.

- Estimate how powerful relevant actors influence on community forestry process. Actors exert their influence on community forestry by wielding the assigned power in various modalities in specific circumstances. This means different modalities will be applied by the same actors to deal with the others that own the different power potentials. Thus, interest of the research is to explain how the actors promote their power and influence the relationships among actors in community forestry practices.

2.2. Research methodology

Identify the most powerful relevant actors:

To identify actors involved in the community forest network, the first interviews with selected user groups have been conducted to get information of organizational structure, forests and respective tasks of the committee. In addition, the questions on the partners from whom the users' committee has received information and supports have been raised. This allowed the research to get general notion of actors whom the users' committee was in collaboration with. At the same time, power elements were also examined in detail through quantitative measurements, called as "quantitative analysis" in this study.

The contacts and interviews with the referred actors by the first stakeholder and the stakeholder mentioned during interviews will be implemented. By doing successive referring and contacting (snowball effect) all actors more or less involved in community forests in the research sites were identified. This process of identifying stakeholder was supposed to be complete if new partners were no longer mentioned in the interviews.

Power element calculation: By using a four-

point ordinal scale, each stakeholder was asked to label the degree of trust toward the other actors based on the received information, with a score of "3" indicating complete trust and "0" indicating no trust at all.

Likewise, Yes (1) or No (0) were used to identify the stakeholder necessary in securing community forest activities in order to approve some activities or whether giving permissions or directives to implement community forest activities. This aims to measure coercive capacity of the actors in the community forest network by using qualitative information. Therefore, coercion measured by quantitative figures was just an indication of actors' coercive capacity in community forest network and mainly depends on the forest condition and prevailing regulatory framework. The reasons of actors for their coerciveness toward the others were explored through open-ended question.

To measure the contribution of incentives (finance, materials, and technical support) of the particular actors to their own programs was a difficult task. Hence, we chose a two-point scale as the measurement of incentives, where a value of "0" pointing out the particular actors who did not receive any incentives at all, and a value of "1" indicating incentives that were received from a specific stakeholder(s). Follow-up questions were asked about the types and extent of supports provided by specific stakeholder(s) to the partners in the network.

The accumulative results of power elements through a complete network survey were used to identify the group of powerful actors in each network of community forests.

1. Percentage of relative power - Xi

- Percentage of relative power - Xi (Dominant information).

$$X_i = \frac{\text{Total accumulated value of stakeholder} \times 100}{(\text{Total number of stakeholders} - 1) \times 3(\text{maximum scale of the measurement})}$$

- Percentage of relative power – Xi (Incentive)

$$X_i = \frac{\text{Total accumulated value of stakeholder} \times 100}{(\text{Total number of stakeholders} - 1) \times 1(\text{maximum scale of the measurement})}$$

- Percentage of relative power – Xi (Coercion)

$$X_i = \frac{\text{Total accumulated value of stakeholder} \times 100}{(\text{Total number of stakeholders} - 1) \times 1(\text{maximum scale of the measurement})}$$

X_i is defined as the percentage of maximum amount that an actor gets from the evaluation of the other actors in the network.

2. Individual Concentration Value – h_i

$$h_i = \frac{X_i}{\sum_n^1 X_i}$$

Where, X_i is the sum of answers per actor for one power element, $0 < X_i \leq (n - 1) \times$ highest possible answer based on Likert scale (1 or 3), for $i = 1, \dots, n$. $\sum_n^1 X_i$ are total given answers per power element.

3. Concentration Ratio – C_{ri}

- r is the position of the sorted ratio of power per actor (h_i); the sorting starts with highest h_i value until the lowest, equal values can be sorted continually anyway, for $r = 1, \dots, n$

- C_{ri} of stakeholder 1 = h_i of stakeholder 1

- C_{ri} of stakeholder 2 = C_{ri} of stakeholder 1 + h_i of stakeholder 2

- C_{ri} of stakeholder 3 = C_{ri} of stakeholder 1 + h_i of stakeholder 2 + h_i of stakeholder 3

- C_{ri} of stakeholder n = C_{ri} of stakeholder 1 + h_i of stakeholder 2 + ... + h_i of stakeholder n

4. Dominant Degree Value – D_i

$$D_i = \frac{(C_{ri})^2}{i} + \frac{(1 - C_{ri})^2}{n - i}$$

Where, C_{ri} is concentration ratio of each power element of respective stakeholder; 'i' refers to the position of stakeholder after sorting; n refers to the total number of actors in the network.

Data triangulation: Triangulation, known as cross-check applied to social science to point out that at least two methods are used in the study to check the results, aims to increase the credibility and validity of the results. It is important to do cross-check due to involvement of using methods to collect data such as direct field observations, interviews, documents, person, time and questionnaires in studying the same phenomenon (Denzin, 2006; Hussein, 2009).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Identifying actors engaging in community forestry activities

On the basis of the diversity of functions and values that forests provide, community forestry is characterized by many actors. Beyond the communities themselves, other groups, organizations at different levels (regional, provincial, national and international) also have impacts on local people's access to the forests and forest products (Peluso, 1994). Conceptually, the four main types of actors involved in community forestry are the state, the civil society, the private sector and the donors (Dahal, 1996; Hopley, 2004).

Collected data shows that there are 9 main actors involving in community forest activities in the research area, including: 1/ Political actor; 2/ Economic actor; and 3/ Societal actor as shown in the table 1.

Table 1. Identifying actors involving in community forestry in the research area

Actor	Definition	Role	Example
POLITICAL			
Politician	Actors who is selected by the people to fulfill a public mandate and who can legitimize binding decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of policies - Provision of information and capital - Technical and advisory services 	Representatives of political party (District People's Committee and Communal People's Committee);
Public Administrations	Public actors that make decisions concerning specific problems on the basis of general legal standard, resolving these problems by implementing special measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination and networking 	Natural conservation authority, Police, Military
Forest Administration	Public administrations focusing on forest tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guide and implement FLA. - Support community in building local regulations on forest management. - Organize the forest protection network in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD); - District Forest Protection Department; - Management board of Natural Reserved Areas
Traditional Leader	Actor who is legitimized to fulfill a public mandate and who can legitimize binding decisions for a community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representing the culture - Leading the people - Advising people - Dispute solving - Traditional courts 	Traditional authority such as patriarchs, village leaders
International donor organizations	Actor that offers funds for solving problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of information - Source of funding - Support for legal and technical reforms - Capacity building - Research and education 	KfW (German Development Bank); SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation agency)
ECONOMIC			
Forest user group representative	Actor that articulates the interests of local forest users and attempts to implement them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation and labour providers - Holders of 'local knowledge' - Land and forest management - Community development 	Community forest committee; Board of village forest management
Forest entrepreneur	Actor using forests for production or consumption of products and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Markets for timber products - Provision of information - Employment 	Forest companies
Consultant	Actor providing information, capacity building, funds and management for another actor based on a contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publication and documentations - Capacity building 	Consultants
SOCIETAL			
Research institutions	Actors providing science-based knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of programs - Provision of information of programs through research - Capacity building; production of trained manpower - Transfer knowledge, technique; 	Forest Inventory and Planning Institute; Forestry Science Institute of Vietnam; Forestry University of Vietnam
Media	Actor distributing and generating information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public attention and awareness 	Radio, TV, Newspaper

a. Political actors: State institutions are involved in forestry development and policy formation, with government actors comprising institutions at different levels within the state. The state is the highest authority and as such presides over society and the business sector; it is responsible for making binding decisions in order to define and implement common welfare (Grimble & Wellard, 1997). Migdal (1988:19) defines the state as “an organization with the ability or authority to make binding rules for society and ability to enforce its rules”. This definition is clearly linked to the concept of capabilities which define state strength; capabilities are here defined as “the ability of state leaders to use the agencies of the State to get people in the society to do what they want them to do” (Migdal 1988, 1994). The state is comprised of many institutions, such as the government, civil service, judiciary, parliament, and local government (Smith, 1993). ‘State’ in this research refers to formal government agencies which deal with forest policy tasks and manage state forests and forested lands in the form of community forestry.

b. Economic actors: Refer to actors interested in economic benefits such as money, forest products, and non-timber forest products as well. Rest on field survey data, there are 3 actors identified to be engaged in community forestry activities namely Forest User Group Representative (FUGR), Forest Enterprise (Fb), and Consultant (Con).

- *Forest user group representatives (FUGR)*

As the name implies, forest users are the immediate users of a forest; in community forestry, the term may refer to individual direct forest users with partial legal rights to forest access and the decision-making process. They are a heterogeneous group with varied interests in forests, including fuel wood, non-wood products, hunters, encroachers, and livestock herders. When a group of direct forest users has mutually recognized rights to use a particular forest, they become known as a forest user group (FUG). Such groups can be either formal or informal organizations that have been authorized to manage local forests

in a sustainable manner (e.g., traditional authorities). Conservation, management, and forest utilization are the major concerns of forest user groups. A users’ committee is the executive body of the user group; this committee coordinates and negotiates with the government/other relevant actors and over sees forestry and organizational duties.

- *Forest entrepreneurs (Fb)*

Motivated by profit, the private sector plays a crucial role in forestry businesses. Private operators in forestry have the capacity to greatly assist forest communities by providing technical expertise, capital, and market access. Big concessionaires, timber industries, furniture industries, saw mills, contractors/loggers, and small-scale fellers are examples of private sector actors in forestry. It is the role of the state’s Forest Administration to facilitate linkages between groups of forest users and timber operators. However, these powerful actors in most cases tend to ignore local regulations and controls, undermining the authority of community institutions and appropriating resources at the expense of local community members (Shackleton, Campbell, Wollenberg & Edmunds, 2002).

- *Consultants (Con)*

Consultants are individuals or private organizations in forestry that provide forest advisory services; as such, they can influence forest policy with their high competency in and knowledge of the subject. By providing information on improved methods with which to utilize and protect the forest, their clients are able to make improvements without additional political pressure. Krott (2005:153) defines it as follows: “*consulting provides information to support the client in resolving his own problems*”. Most consulting refers to research, technical procedures (e.g., equipment use), capacity development (training), marketing, and financial promotion (entrepreneurship development). A consultant’s interests in forestry are thus service delivery, employment, and profit making.

c. Societal actors: Refer to ones who provide scientific-based knowledge, distribute and generate information to the public.

- Research institutions (RI)

Research institutions help generate knowledge in community forestry; as such, their role has primarily been to train professionals in community forestry practices, provide technical support to actors, carry out field-based research on different modalities of participatory forestry, and act as advocates for the development of community forestry. Forestry research institutions are established by governments at different levels with the goal of sustainably conserving forest ecosystems and contributing to local community development via things like national parks or protected areas. Their interests mostly focus on natural conservation and assisting local communities in socio-economic development (Nelson, 1987).

Along with research institutions, forestry related subjects can be studied and researched to degree level at universities, where education and research is the primary focus. Through formal forestry education, forestry professionals could acquire the basic competencies (knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills) required for forest management (Rebugio & Camacho, 2005). Universities have the potential to play three roles in promoting community forest management: advocacy, information, knowledge generation; capacity building; and human source development.

- Media (Med)

‘Media’ refers to the various means of communication required to disseminate community forestry information, including television, radio, and newspapers. With public attention and awareness of forests, the media is simultaneously regarded as representing the common thinking and existing as a product of either state-owned or private enterprises. The media as a product must be oriented towards markets by fulfilling the demands of recipients and advertising to customers (Kleinschmit & Krott, 2008).

3.2. Powerful relevant actors identification and their power elements

Across case studies, 13 actors were identified, of which political actors (e.g., forest administrations, donor organizations, traditional authorities) and economic actors (e.g., community forest committees, consultants) were the most frequent relevant actors as shown in figure 1. Community forest committees are relevant actors since they represent local forest users and, through their normative claim, are involved in forest management decisions. Public administrations, donor organizations, and traditional authorities are also relevant actors. The figure below also shows the political actors appearing in all cases, which can help to explain how they influence community forestry programs. These results are in line with Schusser et al.’s (2015).

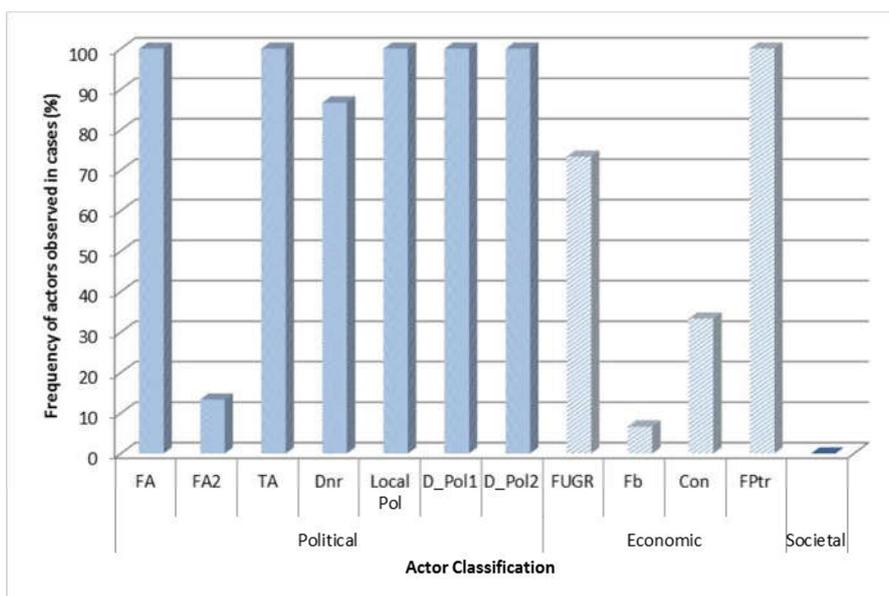


Figure 1. Frequency of the relevant actors in community forestry in research site

As discussed in the methodology section, the group of powerful actors involved in community forestry networks is identified via the quantitative calculation of ‘individual relative power – Xi’ and ‘dominant degree – Di’. By doing a power diagnosis in the case studies, we can observe and identify the most powerful actors. This is the crucial foundation for the analysis needed to qualitatively

determine how powerful actors build and accumulate their power.

The results of the quantitative calculation of the power elements of relevant actors are summarized in figure 2. Here, we see the elements on which the relevant actors build their power in order to influence the community forestry process according to their own interests.

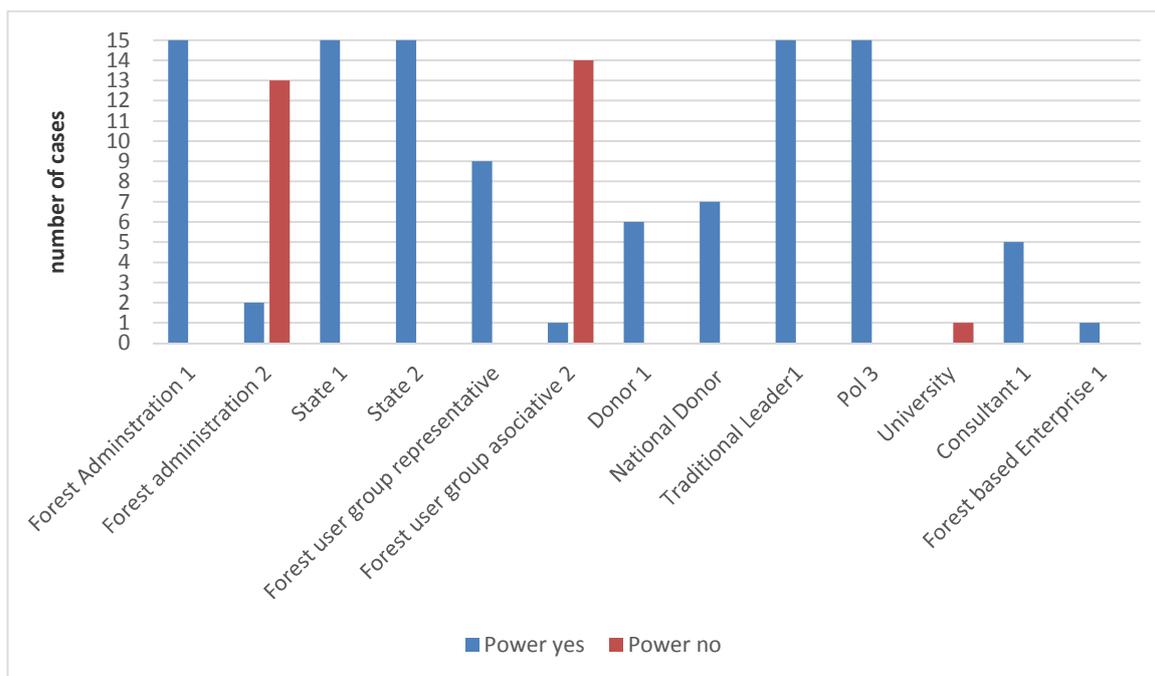


Figure 2. Powerful relevant actors' power status in the research site

Across all cases, it is clear that forest administrations build their power on a mixture of all three power elements (dominant information, incentives, and coercion), as these are state agencies reporting to the state government over forestry activities at the local level. Interestingly, traditional authorities, in company with community forest committees, gain their power through dominant information in most cases. Since traditional authorities are the elites and are as such respected by local forest users, the communities’ forest users accept their information and advice without verifying it. Nonetheless, in half the cases, community forest committees based their power on coercion and incentives. The community forest committees in these cases wield these effectively in community forestry activities.

Furthermore, political actors achieve their power status through coercive power elements. Although these actors are not involved in community forestry activities, they hold veto rights over and make final decisions regarding the issues concerning community forestry at respective levels as stipulated in legal documents.

The results in figure 2 and 3 show that the powerful relevant actors in community forestry could be identified through applying the theoretical concept introduced by the Community Forestry Working Group (Devkota, 2010; Krott et al., 2013; Maryudi et al., 2012; Schusser, 2013; Schusser et al., 2015; Yufanyi Movuh, 2013). It is confirmed that a public administration (e.g., the local government), traditional authority, community user group representative, and forest enterprise

were also identified. The presence of such political actors (e.g., forest administrations, district government, local government unit,

and donor) is evidence of the role state orientation plays over the forestry sector and community forestry programs.

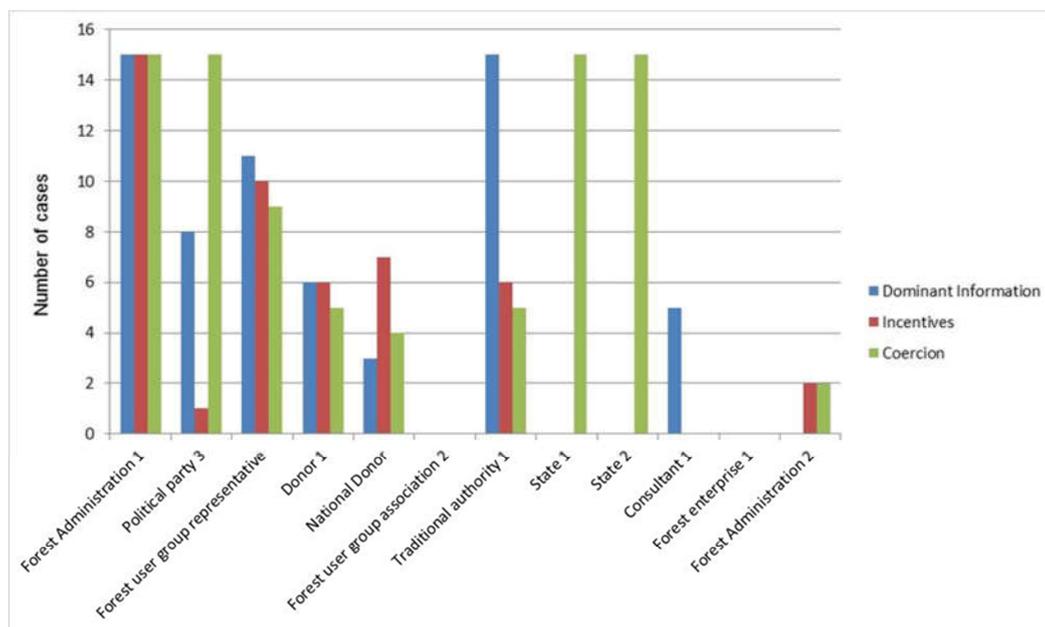


Figure 3. Power element of the powerful relevant actors

4. CONCLUSION

The obtained results on the influence of the powerful relevant actors in connection with the process of community forestry provide a scientific and practical basis from which we can discuss for the following things:

- Political actors are the powerful relevant actors to an extent of 100% cases as seen in figure 2, 3. It is once again pointed out that appearance of political actors in community forestry prove dominance of state over the community forestry and forestry sector

- Forest administration wield mixture of power elements to drive community forestry. Forest administration institutions as key entities responsible for forestry activities. Empirical findings clearly show that the responsibility for forest management overlaps between relevant actors such as the forest administration and district department” of agriculture.

- In contrast to TA and FUGR, political actors steer community forestry by using their approved authorities (coercive power element).

- Applying theory of “Actor-centered power” can identify the potential of relevant actors to drive community forestry activities.

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NHẬN DẠNG CÁC BÊN LIÊN QUAN CÓ QUYỀN LỰC TRONG LÂM NGHIỆP CỘNG ĐỒNG DỰA TRÊN LÝ THUYẾT TẬP TRUNG QUYỀN LỰC: TRƯỜNG HỢP NGHIÊN CỨU TẠI TỈNH SƠN LA

Ngô Duy Bách

Trường Đại học Lâm nghiệp

TÓM TẮT

Lâm nghiệp cộng đồng được biết đến như là một hướng đi mới trong quản lý rừng mà ở đó vai trò quản lý rừng được chuyển giao cho cộng đồng địa phương ở các cấp. Tuy nhiên, thực tế cho thấy có mối quan hệ qua lại giữa các quá trình chính sách và động lực của các mối tương tác xã hội giữa các bên liên quan. Cộng đồng địa phương rất dễ bị tổn thương bởi thể lực của các bên liên quan có quyền lực trong lâm nghiệp cộng đồng. Trong toàn bộ các điểm nghiên cứu, có 13 bên liên quan được nhận diện tham gia trong hoạt động lâm nghiệp cộng đồng trong khu vực nghiên cứu. Áp dụng lý thuyết "Tập trung quyền lực" cho phép xác định, tính toán định lượng các yếu tố quyền lực của các bên liên quan (Cường chế, Khuyến khích, Thông tin). Kết quả tính toán, phân tích chỉ ra cách các bên liên quan xây dựng quyền lực của họ dựa trên các yếu tố quyền lực đó như thế nào. Đặc biệt là kết quả nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra rằng các cơ quan nhà nước, chính quyền địa phương là những bên liên quan có quyền lực nhất điều khiển và định hướng hoạt động lâm nghiệp cộng đồng trong khu vực nghiên cứu. Điều này có nghĩa là các cơ quan nhà nước vẫn giữ vai trò chủ đạo trong quản lý rừng nói chung và tiến trình lâm nghiệp cộng đồng nói riêng.

Từ khóa: Các bên liên quan, cộng đồng địa phương, lâm nghiệp cộng đồng, quyền lực.

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