

# **The Front of War for Sustainable Forest Management; Dien Bien Province**

***GOSEKI Kazuhiro***

Chief Advisor

Project for Sustainable Forest Management in the Northwest Watershed Area  
JICA – Dien Bien Province

## **Introduction**

Dien Bien Province, famous in the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, is now fighting for realizing Sustainable Forest Management (SFM).

The Government of Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (hereinafter referred to as “the Government”) has implemented to increase forest coverage and to improve living conditions of local people, cooperated with bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, by developing the 5 Million Hectare Reforestation Programme (implemented by Decision 661) in 1998. Then, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) formulated the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy for 2001-2010 in 2001, and, in 2007, the Government formulated more comprehensive and advanced version of it, the National Forest Development Strategy 2006-2020, to facilitate to recover forests both in quality and quantity, positively accepting opinions of donors. In July of the same year, the Government amended the Decision 661, for example paying special attention to the development of NTFPs (non-Timber Forest Products) in protection forests so that local people can benefit.

As a result of various political measures, including above mentioned ones, the country’s forest coverage, which had fallen as low as 28% in 1995, recovered to 37.8% in 2005. However, each of political targets hasn’t been realized yet. Forest degradation is still continuing seriously especially in the Northwest sub-region - Hoa Binh, Son La, Dien Bien, and Lai Chau provinces - due to the over harvesting of fuelwood, slash-and-burn cultivation, and conversion to farmland, caused by high poverty ratio, though the forest in this

region used to be rich in timber and NTFPs resources and in high water conservation functions.

To realize to recover forests in the Northwest sub-region and maximize the water conservation function of them, it is necessary to adopt a mechanism for maintain publicly beneficial functions of forests through reducing the pressure on the forests by improving lives of farmers through the advanced utilization of the On-the-Farm Trials (OFT) developed by RENFODA project (Project for Rehabilitation of Natural Forest in Degraded Watershed Area in the North of Viet Nam, supported by JICA, implemented from Oct. 2003 to Sep. 2008 in Hoa Binh Province) and the introduction of NTFPs, as well as the management of allocated forests based on appropriate plans. At the same time, it is essential to build the capacity of the key actors of the above-mentioned activities, such as Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and Conservation Forest Management Offices in each province in the Northwest sub-region.

Based on such backgrounds, MARD has requested Japan to provide technical cooperation that will promote forest conservation in the Northwest sub-region taking into account a number of considerations described above.

The both side agreed on implementation of the project for Sustainable Forest Management in the Northwest Watershed Area (hereinafter referred to as “the Project”) on 28 May 2010, and based on the agreement the Project was commenced this 15 Aug. 2010.

Historically, Dien Bien Phu has been a post town where is the hub of north-south and east-west trade roads connecting Vietnam with the other countries in Grate Mekong Subregion (GMS). In addition, the Project aims to sustain participatory forest management, ecological aspect, and livelihood development, economical aspect, mutually. Therefore the Project itself is closely linked with the concept of the Green Economic Corridor.

## **I. Profile of the Project Area**

Dien Bien Phu is situated in a strategically important location. It has long been a strategic bastion for the successive rulers of Viet Nam since the Nguyen dynasty built the city as a stronghold against surrounding enemies in the middle of the 19th century.

Dien Bien Province has a distinctive feature from the perspective of watershed management as well: it is home to the headwaters of three major rivers. Dien Bien Province is largely situated in the basin of the Da River. Because the Da River is a major tributary of the Red River, the province has important implications for the Red River Delta, home to the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi. However, Dien Bien Phu and the bulk of the Dien Bien district are located in the basin of the Nam Ron River, a tributary of the Mekong River. Furthermore, the southern most part of the district and the Dien Bien Dong district are within the basin of the Ma River, which goes through Son La Province, out into Laos, and then back to Viet Nam before flowing into the Bac Bo Gulf. Water conservation forests in Dien Bien Province have therefore wide implications for the lower reaches of these three rivers. And this is why the dominant part of the forests in the province have been classified as the Protection Forests in the past.

(ha)

Forest type	Status in 2006	Planned	
		2010	2020
<b>Total area</b>	769,848.77	606,809.29	760,449.82
Special use forest	46,516.88	46,516.88	46,516.88
Protection forest	721,338.13	424,199.39	424,199.39
Production forest	1,993.76	136,093.02	289,733.55

Table 1. Status and planning of three forest types of Dien Bien Province  
Source: Adapted from DARD of Dien Bien Province, 2008.

However, Northwest is the poorest sub-region in Vietnam. Dien Bien Province is the second poorest, only second to Lai Chau Province among all the provinces in Viet Nam.

(%)

	2002		2004		Remarks
	General Poverty	Food Poverty	General Poverty	Food Poverty	
Whole country	28.9	9.9	19.5	6.9	
Northwest	68.0	28.1	58.6	21.8	
Lai Chau	76.56	35.68	74	35.71	Figures for 2002 are those before the provincial division
Dien Bien			66	26.23	
Son La	62.61	22.85	56	17.3	Ranked 3rd in G.P. in 2004
Northeast (ref.)	38.4	14.1	29.4	9.4	
Lao Cai (ref.)	60	29.56	54	24.26	Ranked 3rd in F.P. in 2004
Bac Can (ref.)	68.69	30.74	50	24.22	Ranked 2nd in 2002

Table 2. Poverty Rate in Dien Bien Province  
Source: Adapted from Forestry and Poverty Data in Vietnam: Status, Gaps, and Potential Uses

## **II. Project design**

### ***(1) Project implementation policy***

The Project aim is for addressing deforestation and forest degradation and increasing forest cover in the Northwest sub-region of Viet Nam. It includes pilot activities designed to mutually sustain both participatory forest management and livelihood development. In the Project process, it is important to take into consideration two major factors: (i) basic conditions regarding land use, including the clear classification of land and the forest land and forest allocation; and (ii) conditions for promoting livelihood development in the context of market access. The Project builds on the process of testing hypothesis. With the accumulation of best practices, the Project aims to develop approaches applicable to other areas.

### ***(2) Project details***

#### ***(i) Project period***

The planned project period is five years, between August 2010 and August 2015.

#### ***(ii) Target groups***

The target groups in the Project include executing agencies that will play a main role in implementation of the Project; supporting agencies that will play a facilitating role among others, and members of farmers' groups and community-based organization that will participate in pilot activities in pilot sites. Among the executing agencies are DARD of Dien Bien Province, particularly a Provincial Project Management Unit to be established within DARD, District Project Management Units to be set up within District People's Committees, Commune People's Committees, and extension workers, forest rangers, and others assigned at commune levels. Among the supporting agencies will be universities and research institutes, as well as technical colleges, vocational schools, and mass or social organizations, including NGOs.

The number of beneficiaries in these target groups is unknown since the pilot sites have yet to be identified.

**(3) *Ultimate Goal***

- Increase of forest cover is promoted in the Northwest Watershed Area.

**(4) *Overall Goal***

- Participatory forest management and livelihood development are extended to the sites with similar conditions to the Project pilot sites in Dien Bien Province.

**(5) *Project Purpose (the objective to be achieved by the end of the project period)***

- Participatory forest management and livelihood development are mutually sustained in the pilot sites, using approaches also applicable to other areas.

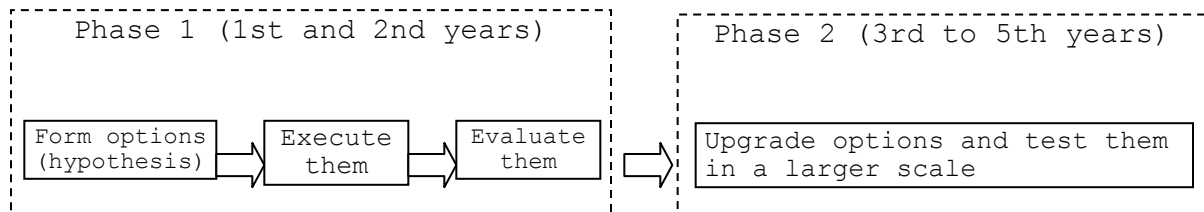
**(6) *Outputs and Activities***

**(i) *Output 1***

- Workable approaches on landscape plans and land-based livelihood development plans are verified.

The pilot activities build on the process of testing the hypothesis. The idea is to develop effective approaches that accommodate both forest management and livelihood development toward sustainable forest management in a region facing more challenges than other parts of the countries, as already discussed in Chapter I. The hypothesis to be tested is that “the approach of implementing activities in certain areas based on landscape plans, with a combination of OFTs and the allocation of forest plantations and lands being able to produce and harvest NTFPs, together with securing alternative cash income through improving market access of agricultural and forestry products, is effective in facilitating sustainable forest management.” The cycle of testing the hypothesis consists of two phases as

shown below. In Phase 1, small-scale pilot activities will be implemented. In Phase 2, more and larger scale pilot activities will be carried out.



There are three options (hypotheses or approaches), so far, as shown below. In Phase 1, two replications of each option will be tested. In all, six tests of hypotheses will be conducted. Phase 2 will involve improving the options which have been tested in Phase 1 and putting them to the test in a larger scale, as well as adding and testing new options. After completion, the approaches are expected to be extended larger in long-term, utilizing financial mechanisms (by governments, private sector, aid, etc.). There is a prospect that the approaches that have been tested and established in the Project will be applied in other areas widely, although the same kinds of projects by other aid agencies have tended to be pinpointed.

- Option 1: Income generation through marketing products to the major towns of the province will help promote sustainable management of existing natural and development of planted forest.
- Option 2: Income generation through marketing industrial raw materials through existing highway network will help promote sustainable management of existing natural and development of planted forest.
- Option 3: Income generation through contractual production of industrial commodity raw materials, associated with reallocation of production forest to households with planted resource-base, will help promote sustainable management of existing natural and development of planted forest.

(ii) *Output 2*

- Technical and institutional capacities of the implementing agencies (executing agencies, supporting agencies) are strengthened.

In the Project, an implementing agency is defined widely. Instead of the standard definition “an entity who is responsible and accountable for project implementation”, it is defined as “an entity who provides technical and institutional support necessary for implementing pilot activities”, and who may be either an executing agency or supporting agency. The implementation structure and the work plan will be developed within three months into the Project. This will be followed by the development of capacities of implementing agencies for supporting pilot activities through OJT or non-OJT means. The evaluation of the implementation structure will be conducted in the closing month of Phase 1, or the 24th month from the Project launch. Two more rounds of evaluation will be carried out later.

*(iii) Output 3*

- Provincial plan for dissemination of the achievements of pilot activities is adopted for Dien Bien Province.

Output 3 envisions the extension of participatory forest management and livelihood development to the sites with similar conditions to the Project pilot sites in the Province as called for in the Overall Goal. It represents an interim target that will lead to the attainment of the Project Purpose in that the state to be attained by the Project--the Project Purpose itself--will be achieved with “approaches” that are applicable to other areas.

Activities for Output 3 include reviewing the existing guiding documents for participatory forest management and livelihood development plans, reviewing the existing governmental fund can be utilized for similar activities, integrating existing guiding documents and those developed by the Project into one technical guideline, preparing provincial plan for dissemination of the achievements of pilot activities, and submitting recommendations to central government and related agencies.

## **Conclusion**

As already discussed, the concept of the Project is closely linked with the approach of the green economic corridors. Therefore, successful implementation of the project may contribute a lot in development of the green economic corridors in Vietnam, since the Project aims to extend the

developed approaches in other areas, not only in Dien Bien Province and the Northwest sub-region but all over the country by submitting recommendations to central government and related agencies.

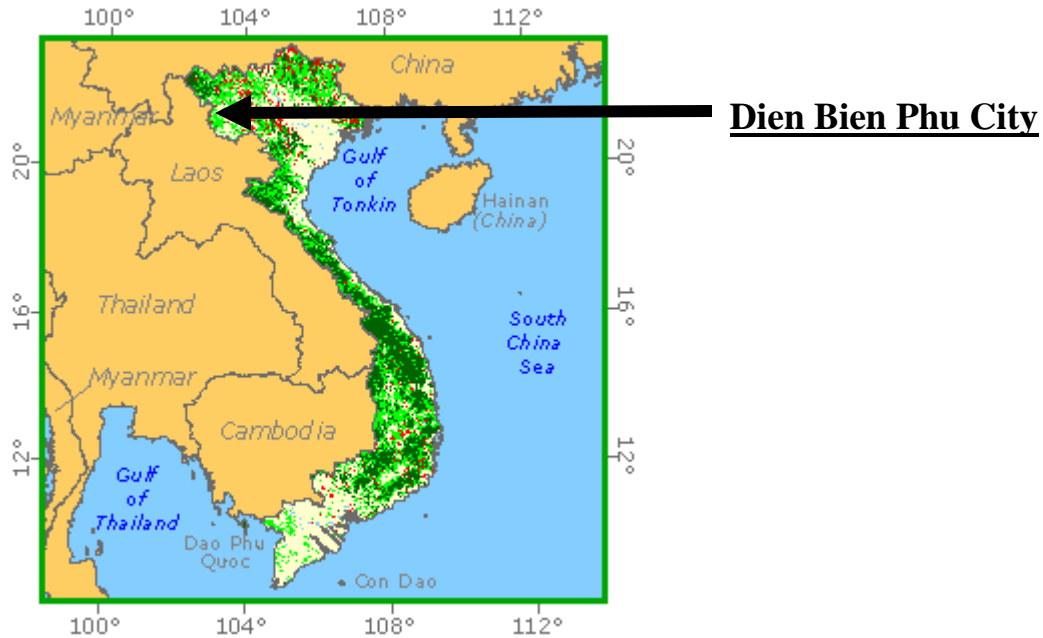
It would be appreciated if the Project team, as well as the target groups, could continuously exchange experiences of the green economic corridors with advance activities in Viet Nam and other GMS countries.

*Note: Certain parts of this report are adopted from an internal report of JICA on the detailed design survey conducted in Oct. 2009.*

## **References**

1. Nguyen Ba Ngai, Nguyen Quang Tan, William D. Sunderlin, Yurdi Yasmi (2009), Forestry and Poverty Data in Viet Nam: Status, Gaps, and Potential Uses. RECOFTC
2. Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (2007), Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2006-2020. Prime Minister Decision No.: 18 /2007/QD-TTg

## Annex: Current Forest Cover Map and Location of Dien Bien Phu



### Legend

	Water
	Closed Forest
	Open/Fragmented Forest
	Other Wooded Lands
	Other land cover

Note: based on "Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000", adopted from FAO Forestry country profiles - natural woody vegetation