

POLICY BRIEF

**Advancing jurisdictional sustainability in Vietnam,
focusing on the Central Highlands region**

Hanoi, March 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Project introduction

The Central Highlands is a key region of Vietnam, bearing special economic, social and natural characteristics. However, through the implementation of various political and economic policies, the area of natural forests in the Central Highlands has been gradually shrinking. Forest loss has been driven by various drivers, including: forest fires, illegal logging, and the expansion of productive activities of indigenous peoples and local communities.

The European Forest Institute contracted the Mekong Development Research Institute to conduct the Project 'Advancing jurisdictional sustainability in Vietnam, focusing on the Central Highlands region' (hereafter the project). The project aims to support: relevant agencies to develop a framework to define 'jurisdictional sustainability' and a monitoring system for that framework in Vietnam, with a focus on the Central Highlands; stakeholders to directly participate in land-use planning in at least one province (Lam Dong) through training and analysis of planning options; and stakeholders to develop a public-private investment monitoring system in land use (land-use finance). This policy brief presents the key findings in the gap analysis report, one of the outcomes for the first task of this project. It points out the inadequacies and gaps in policies and policy implementation on forest land management, as well as other issues surrounding deforestation-risk production in the Central Highlands in recent years.

1.2. Objectives

This report will explore and analyse existing gaps through empirical data in the Central Highlands. Accordingly, the main objectives of this report are:

- To identify and analyse gaps in forest-risk commodities production in the Central Highlands, Vietnam, in terms of sustainability
- To qualitatively assess the feasibility of developing a subnational jurisdictional approach to close these gaps

1.3. Methodology

To meet these objectives, this study adopts a qualitative research methodology with in-depth interview as the main data collection method.

In phase one of this project, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviewees represented many actors: international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), experts from public entities, private experts, companies (domestic/international, small-scale/large-scale), smallholders (within/outside certification schemes) and a cooperative. Due to the urgent and inconvenient timing for state actors, we could not approach central and local state actors in the first phase. However, state actors are expected to be available in a later phase.

We built an open questionnaire for target participants. This questionnaire contains four main parts: (1) forest and forest management: questions on farmers' perception of forests, the role of forests and deforestation; (2) sustainable development: questions on climate change and its impact, poverty, productivity, and production; (3) international regulations: questions on

sustainable production certificates and their costs and benefits, factors driving farmers to follow these international standards; (4) related stakeholders: questions on stakeholders' role in sustainable coffee production, farmers' participation in organisations or cooperatives.

Within the scope of this report, we focus on describing and analysing the status of production causing deforestation in the Central Highlands provinces. Despite being closely related to other aspects of the sustainable development goals of the people (mostly ethnic minorities), this report does not exhaustively address all the elements of sustainable development. In drafting this report, we made efforts to include different factors to describe as comprehensively as possible the status of deforestation and forest encroachment related to agricultural and industrial production activities. This report thus illustrates the need for central and local governments to adopt a sustainable jurisdictional framework for production activities associated with natural forests in the Central Highlands.

2. GAP ANALYSIS FOR APPLYING JURISDICTIONAL APPROACHES IN VIETNAM

2.1. Evaluation of the legal framework for land-use planning

A land-use plan goes through the following cycle: development, consultation, appraisal, approval, announcement, implementation and reporting. However, the new 2017 Law on Forestry only provides an overview of the stages from construction to the announcement, needing to reinforce the stipulations about enforcement and reporting.

Regulations on planning announcements are not yet clear. Both the 2013 Land Law and the 2017 Forestry Law require full disclosure of the master plan but do not specify the documents needed to be included. The ambiguity has created favourable conditions for low transparency to persist in land and forest planning.

Despite the mandatory regulations on gathering people's opinions when developing a master land-use plan, draft master plans and approved plans cannot be accessed by the public, hindering effective public consultations on the land-use plan.

2.2. Issues with land tenure and forest protection

2.2.1. Definition of 'forest' and regulations of forest protection

The 2017 Forestry Law defines natural forest and planted forest separately. However, the Law regulates changes to the legal status of forestland according to the classification of three types of *functions* (special-use forest, protection forest, and production forest) but in addition to forest *quality* from natural to planted forest.

The 2017 Law on Forestry provides that all types of natural forests are prohibited from being converted to non-forest purposes, except for '(i) important national projects, (ii) projects for national defence and security purposes or (iii) other urgent projects approved by the Government'. These exceptions are very broadly formulated, allowing for numerous natural forest conversion projects to be implemented in practice. Furthermore, there is no quantitative

criterion (e.g. the size of investment capital, social costs or benefits, etc.) to decide whether to approve or reject the project.

Our interviews reveal that the major problem with land-use legality relating to forest land in Lam Dong and Dak Nong Provinces is the risk of people being evicted from previously state-owned agricultural and forestry farms. These projects were incentivised by a 50-year land rental period. After those companies disbanded, the land became vacant wasteland. However, it cannot be recovered because it must be re-evaluated to see how much deforestation had been caused

Forest encroachment is not only due to agricultural activities. Illegal conversion of forest and farming land for real estate development is also occurring. Furthermore, coffee plants are not as valuable as other crops and commodities. Thus, coffee production activities nowadays lead to little or no deforestation in the Central Highlands. Moreover, not only forest land, but farming land is subject to encroachment. Therefore, the problem now is not only about promoting sustainable coffee production but also how to sustain coffee production because farmers are shifting from coffee production to land trading and other jobs.

2.2.2. The status of forest land ownership in the Central Highlands

Since the 2003 promulgation of the Land Law, the Land-use Right Certificate is the only legal document to prove the rights of land users to their land. However, many households in the Central Highlands only hold a document called the 'Green Book' for the land they have cultivated for decades.

The Green Book in the Central Highlands originates from the history of Vietnam's economic policy. After the reunification in 1975, the centralised economic management model was applied in the Southern of Vietnam. Agricultural farms and forestry farms were established to organise agroforestry production activities across the country. Decree No. 01-CP of 4 January 1995 stipulates that agricultural and forestry farms must sign contracts to 'allocate' (in Vietnamese: giao khoán) land to people for cultivation, but still retain their status as landowners with those plots. A Green Book is a lease contract to regulate the legal relationship between a farm or forestry enterprise as the landowner – the lessor – and a household cultivating on that land – the lessee. Because they only hold the right to rent land, households do not fully enjoy the rights that the Land Law grants to land users. Basically, the household can only use the land and enjoy the benefits of the land, and these rights are subject to many restrictions. For example, households must¹:

- Sell their products to farms and forestry farms
- Cultivate according to the method specified by the contract
- Not change the crops without the approval of the farm owners.
- Pay for the land rent

In that regard, the Land Law does not specify how households holding Green Books can transfer, inherit, donate, mortgage or contribute land as capital. The Article 167, Clause 3 of

¹ Art. 9.2 Decree No. 168/2016/NĐ-CP.

the 2013 Land Law only specifies that the notarisation and certification of contracts and documents will be done by land users or group of land users.

Regarding land-use term, Green Book holders are subject to more restrictions than holders of land-use right certificates. Green Books signed after 2017 only have a maximum term of 20 years.² Meanwhile, land-use right certificates last up to 50 years – longer than the maximum term of most Green Books.

In 2014, the Government issued Resolution No. 118/2014/ND-CP, establishing the legal basis to review the activities of agroforestry enterprises. It provides for the dissolution of agroforestry farms that: are small-scale and inefficient; have experienced continuous loss for three years; or are not carrying out production activities but only leasing land for profit, also known as ‘white-allocating’ (khoán trắng). Land managed by these farms will be re-allocated to local authorities for management or assigned to people who are already using the land or do not have land for agricultural cultivation.

2.3. Market gaps

Most farmers interviewed worried about the lack of output markets for certified/sustainably produced coffee, coupled with low selling prices compared to the work they have put in sustainable production practices. Farmers appear unconcerned about the distinction between domestic and foreign markets. They have difficulties in accessing the domestic market for sustainable coffee. The lack of output markets and decreasing motivation of farmers to adopt sustainable coffee farming practices in the Central Highlands can be explained by the following reasons:

- Sustainable coffee has lower yields than conventional coffee. Therefore, farmers who want to sell more coffee tend to compensate the shortfall with conventional coffee. The mixing of sustainable and conventional coffee means that it cannot be sold to traders who need certified sustainable coffee.
- Also due to low yields, sometimes farmers cannot have enough sustainable coffee to sell to traders who want a certain quantity in one transaction. Therefore, those traders opt for buying conventional coffee to reach their required quantities.
- Since small-scale farmers cannot afford the construction of their own storage, they frequently choose to consign their products to small dealers, which often results in price rigging, underpricing and low coffee quality. As quality is not the priority of those dealers, farmers gradually abandon sustainable practices.
- There is a considerable gap between prices paid by traders and market prices. For instance, since Vietnamese law does not allow Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) companies to purchase products directly from farmers, they must go through domestic local agencies. As a result, the value chain is expanded when an increasing number of local agencies engage as middlemen. Subsequently, the initial prices that farmers sell their coffee at are often not competitive because it must ensure good prices for FDI at their end purchase.

² Art. 6.1.b Decree No 168/2016/NĐ-CP.

2.4. Gaps in environmental governance

2.4.1. Environmental impact assessment requirements

Compulsory contents of an environmental impact report are detailed in Article 32 of the Law on Environmental Protection 2020 and Form 04 issued together with Circular 02/2022/TT-BTNMT. However, these legal instruments simply list content items required in such reports without detailing reliable methods and metrics for carrying out the environmental assessment.

Project owners are obliged to consult the affected population virtually through the website of the appraisal agency (the relevant ministry or department). However, there is no mechanism to ensure the enforcement of this obligation.

Project owners are also obliged to consult in person by organising a meeting with the affected population. They must include the meeting minutes in the EIA report. However, there is no rule defining which individuals are affected by the project. Therefore, in practice, the investor and the Commune People's Committee, as co-organiser of the meeting, will select the participants. The law also stipulates that investors and appraising agencies must publicise their environmental impact reports after they are approved, but there is no regulation on timelines and methods.

Investors can select and censor the information included in the report in a way that benefits them. They also have the right to choose the expert consulted in case expert opinion is mandatory. On the contrary, there is no order or official procedure for the appraisal panel to conduct a fair hearing and collect other information to fully evaluate the report prepared by the investors. Therefore, it is difficult for the appraisal panel to make an objective assessment of the report.

Penalties for violations of environmental impact reporting are very low, thereby undermining compliance in practice. For example, failure to submit a report to the public before the consultation meeting will only result in a fine of up to VND 10 million. Failure to implement measures to reduce environmental impacts in the report will only result in a fine of up to VND 40 million (Decree 55/2021/ND-CP).

2.4.2. Issues with environmental enforcement

There are gaps in the enforcement of environmental regulations, specifically relating to forest-risk agricultural production in the Central Highlands. For instance, although the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has prohibited glyphosate³, the ministry has extended the use of this chemical until the 30th of June 2021. Today, this substance is still sold to farmers through illegal markets and imports.

Environmental non-compliance is related to poor monitoring and formal inspections. Other concerns include ineffective policy communications to citizens with diverse backgrounds and understanding capacity. For example, among farmers with low education or illiteracy, fake

³ Glyphosate is a widely used herbicide that controls broadleaf weeds and grasses.

fertilisers and leftover stock of prohibited chemicals are often being used for farming, causing damages to the environment.

Furthermore, Vietnam's standards are also lower than most major international requirements. For example, Vietnam does not prohibit some chemicals that are banned by some international certification schemes.

There is still a lack of a unified coordinating institution on biodiversity conservation. State management responsibility for biodiversity conservation is shared among the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) and the People's Committees of the provinces, whose mandates often overlap and conflict. At Sub-Departments of Environmental Protection, there is a lack of specialised units and staff on biodiversity.

2.5. Financing gaps

The three main gaps in financing deforestation-free commodity production and forest protection in the Central Highlands of Vietnam identified in the interviews are:

- Lack of public financing for forest protection:
 - Lengthy and uncertain payment mechanisms for forest owners to afforest
 - Decreasing public budgets for ranchers and forest protection units following a trend of cutting public personnel budget
- Problems with sustainable access to financial support for investments in sustainable agriculture
 - Project-based financial support is unstable or unsustainable.
 - Smallholders can get tricked by middlemen and sign onto high-interest loans
- Gaps in public-private partnerships
 - Challenging to develop mutual understandings and consensus
 - A vicious cycle of input-output financial flows relating to market gaps
 - Fragmented but lengthy value chain, hindering smallholders' access to reliable financing sources or forecast their investments

2.6. Technical gaps

2.6.1. Challenges in meeting international regulations

The main challenge for Vietnam's coffee industry will be meeting future compulsory sustainable standard requirements of some international markets, such as the EU. The European Commission has recently proposed a draft regulation which would ban the placement on the EU market of agricultural products that are illegal or linked to deforestation after a cut-off date. Meanwhile, many Vietnamese enterprises that export their coffee to the EU are small and medium-sized enterprises with limited resources, unsophisticated production processes and insufficient investment in research and development.

Many interviewed stakeholders consider international requirements ill-suited to local conditions and a reflection of global development gaps. Ensuring traceability is particularly daunting for the Vietnamese coffee sector.

Ironically, our interviews indicated that non-compliant products can still find their way to the European market through different informal channels. This supports popular opinion that unsustainable coffee can survive, even in the most regulated markets. Therefore, it is critical to investigate these informal or irregular channels because they may hinder efforts to persuade farmers to adopt sustainable agricultural techniques if unsustainably produced products can still be sold on international markets. Furthermore, such situations also emphasise that responsibilities to promote sustainable agricultural production should be laid on both producing countries and consuming markets.

2.6.2. Participation in certification schemes

International schemes

We conducted two focused group discussions with two groups of farmers: those who participate in certification schemes and those who do not. Farmers who participate in certification schemes prioritise benefits from long-term capacity building over bonuses. Farmers not participating in certification schemes find bonuses and selling prices of certified coffee not attractive enough. Besides, Vietnamese farmers are generally unfamiliar with management tasks and obtaining certification is expensive for them.

The government does not recognise farmer groups who promote sustainable agriculture or/and certification as a legal entity to receive government assistance, obtain loans, or conduct transactions on behalf of its members. There is also no guaranteed premium, and the roasters do not promise that they will purchase all certified goods.

Up until now, Vietnam still does not have a compulsory system of monitoring and evaluation for sustainable production. Therefore, all the supervision and quality control process is handled by private entities. The lack of an effective monitoring system leads to producers failing to adhere to all compulsory standards, including child labour exploitation during peak hours, the use of prohibited chemicals and pesticides, and unfair treatment of seasonal workers.

National standards

The TCVN 4193:2014 is the latest set of Vietnamese technical standards for green coffee, but it is not compulsory. However, despite the government's recommendation for the widespread use of such standards, few coffee growers and processors have applied them.

Vietnam also has its own sustainability certification called VietGAP (Vietnamese Good Agriculture Practices), issued by MARD in 2010. Producers applying this standard must use certain production techniques and comply with food safety, product traceability, and environmental and health requirements. However, this standard has not yet been recognised by law, so participation is still voluntary.

Vietnam still does not have a legal framework for sustainable agricultural production. The only compulsory requirements for all agricultural products including coffee are stipulated in the Law

on Food Safety 2011. The Law specifies maximum residue limits for many foods. However, Vietnam's national regulations do not always match international ones. For example, cross-checking the highly hazardous pesticide inventory in Vietnam with the Pesticide Action Network 2019 list showed that 104 active ingredients that are internationally banned are still allowed for use in Vietnam.⁴

2.6.3. Gaps in data management

Recent efforts by international NGOs and companies to enhance monitoring, tracing and reporting practices are still fragmented and based on the willingness of farmers. Each certification scheme or sustainability programme has their own monitoring and reporting requirements. However, many sustainability indicators overlap. Therefore, there might be duplications in data collection and verification among different management processes. These duplications can be identified by mapping the required indicators of major international certification schemes and other projects relating to agricultural production.

There is a common complaint about the lack of stringent monitoring efforts by state actors, which calls for enhancing their role. While the efforts of non-state actors can be effective in small-scale projects, their upscaling requires more stringent and synchronised regulations and management by the state. However, personnel resources of local authorities and social organisations to strictly operate monitoring systems are very limited. Enhancing the role and performance of local state actors implies addressing public financing shortage for local state management operation.

There are also gaps in the roles of different actors and personnel resource allocation in data management. The difficulty does not lie in monitoring, but mostly in collecting and reporting data and to whom, as well as who stores and shares what data. The collection and reporting process itself currently involves many actors, leading to the fragmentation and loss of the original data. Meanwhile, forest and agricultural management authorities from the district to the provincial levels seem to manage all relevant data in forest-risk agricultural production with very limited personnel resources. They seem to only act as data hubs without on-site checking for data collection credibility. Therefore, the gap between data sources and management units needs to be bridged, either by modifying the data management process with effective role assigned to all relevant stakeholders or with technological applications, or both.

⁴ Phong, L. T., & Thong, T. A. (2020). *Highly Hazardous Pesticides in Vietnam: A Situational Analysis*. International Pollutants Elimination Network.

2.6.4. Gaps in technical support for farmers

The farmers' greatest need is to enhance the quality and price of coffee products through advanced technology and improved tracking system. Most farmer interviewees recognise the need for changes in their growing practices, and harvesting and post-harvest procedures, but they do not have supporting equipment. Furthermore, the use of digital traceability would allow farmers to reach more customers in domestic and international markets.

Many coffee farmers express the need of technical support for effective intercropping. Growing macadamia alongside coffee is a popular choice among Central Highlands producers. Other options for intercropping with coffee include pepper or fruit trees, such as mango, durian and avocado.

2.7. Gaps in multistakeholder participation in governance processes

Agriculture in the Central Highlands has great potential but has not been effectively exploited. Its full potential is hindered by low labour productivity, value added, competitiveness and market values. This is mainly due to the inefficient association of 'four parties' farmers, the State, scientists, and businesses, leading to a lack of investment capital, high-quality labour, infrastructure and services.

Our interviewees provided information about coffee value chains, which include the following actors: farmers, multiple levels of local coffee agencies, traders/roasteries, sellers, consumers, the central government (planning and policy directions), local governments, researchers, and NGOs. The coffee value chain is long. Multiple middlemen increase costs. Additionally, some domestic companies can influence the whole value chains by buying coffee directly from farmers at unmatched prices, probably to control prices. This is considered as a coffee speculation that might make it unfair for companies that invest in capacity building of local producers and hence cannot afford high prices. There are suggestions to reduce intermediate phases without creating benefit conflicts. It can be done by encouraging farmers to preliminarily process coffee (e.g. drying) to increase its value and hence prices so that only big companies can afford direct purchases without the competition from smaller local agencies (middlemen).

Overall, the main barriers for multistakeholder engagement in sustainability governance processes in the Central Highlands are found to be:

- Institutional barriers:
 - Local authorities at sub-provincial levels have limited decision-making powers to establish steering committees (such as advisory committees for jurisdictional sustainability governance) by themselves. Generally, administrative procedures for establishing such institutional arrangements are complex and time-consuming. Even building collaboration connections between provincial and sub-provincial governmental leaders is challenging.
 - Some local non-state actors, especially small-scale businesses and smallholders, are excluded from project management arrangements in the existing governance tradition.

- Decision making is still mostly top-down. A project steering board at a provincial level usually directs sub-provincial project activities.
- Technical barriers:
 - Discrepancies in knowledge and understandings among stakeholders are difficult to be bridged and hinder consensus.
 - Different ethnic communities require different engagement approaches.
- Financial barriers:
 - Insufficient and decreasing local authorities' budgets hinder their proper performance of their governing responsibilities. Decreasing public budgets mean that there is less personnel to cover a growing number of governance responsibilities. This situation deters the local authorities from pro-actively engaging in initiatives other than state top-down assigned duties.
 - Low financial returns for smallholders do not provide an incentive for them to engage in sustainable projects.

3. CONSIDERATIONS FOR APPLYING JURISDICTIONAL APPROACHES IN VIETNAM

3.1. Suggested translation

What makes the jurisdictional sustainability concept and the jurisdictional approach different from other landscape approaches is the emphasis on jurisdictional powers, including enhancing the roles of governmental actors in local governance processes and addressing legality issues. In other words, jurisdictional approaches do not only govern within administrative boundaries but also emphasise the need to effectively devolve and exercise governance powers according to specific jurisdictional levels.

Therefore, the translation of these two notions should explicitly mention the 'jurisdictional' aspect. In that light, the Vietnamese translations of 'jurisdictional sustainability' and 'jurisdictional approach' should be '*sự bền vững theo vùng thẩm quyền*' and '*phương pháp tiếp cận theo vùng thẩm quyền*' respectively.

3.2. Considerations for applying the Transparency Pathway model to Vietnam

Given the existing local sustainability governance challenges in the Central Highlands, such as fragmented stakeholder involvement, centralised powers, insecure policy prospects and deficient compliance monitoring, common requirements for developing an effective application of the jurisdictional approach in Vietnam are:

- Regulated and enabled multistakeholder participation in the whole governance process, focusing on:
 - Enabling multistakeholder interactions and participation in local governance processes and supporting them by regulations.

- Ensuring equity and inclusivity among participating stakeholders.
- Empowering stakeholders' engagement through capacity building and effective policy communication. Empowering stakeholders can enhance informed autonomous participation rather than coerced compliance. This point raises the need for transparency and stakeholder communication.
- Enhancing the roles of governmental actors to proactively support the whole process.
- Enhancing the roles of international state cooperation agreements and NGOs.
- Sharing knowledge, respecting and understanding indigenous values and conditions.
- Effective distribution and harmonisation of powers and mandates, including:
 - Supportive involvement of central governmental actors in local governance
 - Effective decentralisation of decision-making powers to local governments to enhance their roles in local governance processes, especially relating to usually high-level policy-making fields, such as land-use planning and sectoral planning
- Secured and consistent legal basis and management instruments, including:
 - Domestic regulation: consistent and synchronised legality across governing levels (central policy directions versus local interpretation and implementation) and sectors/fields (avoid conflicts and gaps among policies in different management fields) to reduce policy fragmentation and uncertain policy directions.
 - International regulation: align domestic regulations and standards to the most common international requirements.
- A reliable and transparent data management system to increase the traceability and credibility for the governance process through:
 - Participatory monitoring and reporting to enhance transparent and peer pressure via cross-checking (building on lessons learnt from Minas Gerais in Brazil and Terpercaya in Indonesia), also to empower all local actors, especially the most vulnerable
 - Public-private collaboration in data management systems for seamless information sharing
- Sustainable financial mechanisms to enable long-term operation, including:
 - diversifying market access – reaching out to diverse international and domestic markets for sustainably produced commodities
 - supporting small producers, who cannot afford joining international certification schemes to prove the sustainability of their products (through a traceable system), then help them find domestic market outputs
 - enhancing the roles of domestic businesses and mobility of resources besides international financial aids

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusion

There have been an increasing number of programmes and projects to promote sustainable and deforestation-free agricultural production in the Central Highlands with the involvement of prestigious international actors, enterprises, and provincial to local authorities. Some projects have been successful at small-scale landscape levels. Nonetheless, it remains to be determined why these successful sustainable agricultural production pilots cannot be scaled up to the district and provincial levels?

This report draws a non-exhaustive list of gaps and challenges hindering such a scale-up. It shows that most of the gaps and challenges are interconnected. For instance, some programmes (such as those coordinated by IDH and the SNV) have successfully engaged all stakeholders in their pilots and involved the provincial level in steering committees. However, there is still a gap between the high-level steering committees and grassroot multistakeholder engagement. This is due to the lack of representatives of domestic non-state actors, sub-provincial authorities and farmers on those steering committees. It may be cumbersome to include many actors on a provincial steering committee. However, even if this is the case, activities should be planned and prioritised through a bottom-up approach. Currently, most governance processes in the Central Highlands (as well as elsewhere in Vietnam), even innovative landscape approaches promoted by international NGOs, are mostly top-down. From policy making and target setting to managing local compliance and actual practices, our empirical data shows that locally contextualised governance has not been performed meaningfully.

These gaps and challenges in multi-level governance arrangements lead to fragmented perceptions of sustainability objectives and values among stakeholders. Knowledge and information can be conveyed through training and communication. However, stakeholders do not achieve in-depth understanding that leads to autonomous actions in the same way when some actors are marginalised and there are imbalance of powers. Our interviews with smallholders and those working closely with them revealed that farmers' requests for support were constantly postponed. Other actors complain about farmers' resistance to changing their farming practices, even in a minor way. This vicious cycle is due to the lack of relevant and meaningful support. It causes farmers' low capacity to make their desired contributions. As a result, farmers are both the most affected and the most blamed.

Furthermore, an important concern in multistakeholder engagement is the role of local authorities and their performance. Many actors still view approvals and support from authorities as key to ensure successful sustainability governance. However, in some cases ineffective engagement and performance of local authorities stem from other gaps in the institutionalisation and public financing mechanisms for forest protection and sustainable agriculture promotion.

4.2. Recommendations

Given the interconnections of the gaps analysed in this report, they need to be addressed simultaneously. Moreover, building on the experience of previous landscape projects in Vietnam and elsewhere, the pursuit of jurisdictional sustainability in the Central Highlands

region should take advantage of jurisdictional aspects to tackle existing gaps in local sustainability governance. A way forward could be, not only to engage, but to empower local authorities and communities to shape their own priorities and tackle their own problems. Indeed, a subtle difference between landscape and jurisdictional approaches lies in the capacity and power of local authorities at each jurisdictional level to make the choices that suit their local contexts and needs. Therefore, local empowerment should be done with the involvement of actors from different levels and sectors, including central state actors to decentralise appropriate decision-making powers and supporting instruments for local authorities to perform their roles. International actors, from NGOs to enterprises and certification schemes, have laid a helpful foundation for the introduction of sustainable agriculture in Vietnam and create markets for sustainable products. However, domestic resources and capacity will define sustainable operation of local sustainability governance systems.

Another recommendation relates to promoting jurisdictional sustainability governance processes in the Central Highlands. Based on the barriers to multistakeholder engagement mentioned above, it is not realistic for any research group without advanced long-term collaboration connections and documented approvals from provincial authorities to establish state-involved institutional arrangements at sub-provincial levels such as an advisory committee for jurisdictional sustainability. It is even more difficult to conduct time-consuming activities as local authorities already have limited personnel to struggle with their regular responsibilities, not to mention external non-compulsory tasks. Meanwhile, some projects have already established different management committees in the Central Highlands. Therefore, it would be more effective to make use of these arrangements but enhance their operational approaches by:

- including more types of actors
- empowering bottom-up decision making
- shifting higher managing settings to supporting and facilitating actors while choices are made at lower levels to suit specific local contexts

Overall, it is crucial to consider practical barriers given the time and resource limitations.

Disclaimer

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