



How Have the Women’s Role in Community Forest Management Changed? Case of Two Cotu Ethnic Villages, Central Vietnam

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I. ABSTRACT

Women’s roles are essential in Community Forest Management (CFM), drawing on their knowledge of natural forests. However, little research has focused on the process of women’s role changes in CFM within Vietnam’s mountainous villages, where a patriarchal society has persisted for generations. This study examines the progress of changing women’s participation and roles in CFM across two remote villages in central Vietnam. The results first found that both villages have undergone similar historical changes influenced by tighter forest regulations, NTFPs markets, and male migration, creating more opportunities for women in CFM. Second, women’s roles are changed by factors at the community level. In one village, a woman’s leadership in communal administration fostered trust among villagers, leading her to be nominated to the executive committee on CFM, enhancing their voices and decision-making power. In contrast, women are recognized for linking forest protection to Cotu culture preservation and medicinal plant growth. These findings highlight the significance of macro and micro factors influencing inclusive forest protection and gender equality in the Cotu community.

II. INTRODUCTION

- Community Forest Management (CFM) has been implemented since 2004 in Vietnam (Bao, 2006).
- Women have duties in gathering NTFPs (UNREDD, 2013), financial accounting, administrative tasks, marketing (Shank, 2020).
- In some villages, women increased their power in the CFM implementation. Understanding this problem, the research examines the progress of women’s roles in the CFM throughout the community’s history phase. Focusing on two Cotu ethnic communities that have implemented CFM since 2018, the primary question is: How have women’s roles in CFM changed?

III. OBJECTIVES

- Understanding the community’s history has developed over time.
- Analyzing the women’s roles changed in CFM implementation.

IV. METHODOLOGY

- Data collected from 38 sampled households examined women’s roles, labor division, socioeconomic structure, and governance from May to September 2024.
- In-depth interviews with village elders were conducted to understand the original gender roles of the Cotu community’s history, found factors influenced women’s role change:
 - Macro scale: Tighter forestry regulation, NTFPs market development, men migration.
 - Micro scale: Villager’s trust, Cotu culture preservation, and medicinal planting.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. HISTORICAL OF TA’RI AND POR’NING VILLAGE

Period	Ta’ri village	Por’ning village
After 1975	Under Vietnam’s socialist regime , communal administration shifted to government control, reducing the role of village elders to ceremonial duties.	
1975 - 1990	The development of the timber commercialization market focuses on timber logging.	
After 1990	Forest protection policies (banning timber logging, slash-and-burn cultivation, and wildlife animal hunting).	
1986	“Economic Renovation” (Doi Moi) policy linked NTFPs market development and market economy .	
2003	Split old Hien District into Dong Giang and Tay Giang, with both villages in Tay Giang and infrastructure investment .	
2008	Community was resettled 5km from the central commune, becoming a remote area .	Community resettled near the center of Lang commune, becoming a roadside area .
2012		Cotu Cultural Tourism Village is recognized .
2014	A lady became a village head	
2018	- CFM implementation. - Women participated in the executive committee on CFM implementation .	- Medicinal trees were planted . - CFM implementation.
2018	The local government’s policy of collaborating with vocational training institutions led to men migration .	
2020	Growing of local NTFPs markets (e.g. small-scale trader and family business models).	

5.2. WOMEN’S ROLES CHANGED IN COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT

1. Forest policy and politics in Vietnam

- Reducing men’s role** involvement in forest resource

2. Socioeconomic development phase

- Increasing women’s opportunity** to engage in **livelihood activities**.
- Increasing women’s power** in households and communities through **men’s migration**.

3. Each community’s characteristics and women’s role

- A man became the village head, various problems appeared:** **Unfair treatment among villagers, rising illegal logging, and drinking habits** hindered **their effectiveness**. Increasing **male migration** further enabled **women to engage in community activities**, resulting in **a lady** becoming **a village head** in 2014 and participating in the **executive committee on CFM** in 2018.
- Cotu culture** is deeply tied to nature, reflected in its **cuisine** and **traditional handicrafts** (weaving and knitting), which rely on forest materials. In this context, the **Cotu culture reenactment for tourism** is a collective responsibility of all communities and requires **collaboration between men and women**.

VI. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the community’s history exploited that women’s roles changed in CFM under the influence of macro and micro factors: At a macro level, forest regulation transition (ban on logging, hunting, slash-and-burn cultivation) and socio-economy development (NTFPs market, men migration) reduced men’s roles while increasing women’s role in forest protection. At a micro level, villagers’ trust influenced women’s role in CFM, enhancing their voice and decision-making power in Ta’ri village. Other villagers recognized women’s role in linking forest protection with Cotu culture preservation in culture tourism of Por’ning village.

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