Timely review of NRAP about to start

By Pham Quoc Hung

The Prime Minister of Viet Nam approved the National REDD+ Action Plan (NRAP) with Decision 799/QD-TTg on 27 June 2012. The NRAP is expected to contribute to the successful implementation of the National Strategy on Climate Change and the Green Growth Strategy. It assigns the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) as the key implementing agency to work in cooperation with several line ministries, pilot provinces, and other stakeholders. The goal of the NRAP is to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, enhance and conserve carbon stocks and protect biodiversity values. It is implemented in two phases: 1) 2012-15 with a focus on awareness raising, capacity building, and pilot activities in at least eight provinces; and 2) 2016-20 where activities will be extended to other forested provinces and technical and institutional requirements for fully implementing REDD+ at the national scale will be finalized, to contribute to achieving the target of reducing 20 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector by 2020. The Action Plan envisions an increase of the country’s forest area to up to 45 percent, and covers non-carbon benefits such as the conservation of biodiversity and livelihood improvements of forest owners, in particular forest-dependent communities and ethnic minorities.

Since 2012, Viet Nam has made considerable progress in REDD+ implementation. Preliminary institutional arrangements for REDD+ have been established at national and sub-national levels. Relevant stakeholders increasingly participate in REDD+ planning and implementation in many pilot provinces. By the end of 2014, 44 REDD+ projects were operational in 21 provinces.

The NRAP implementation is facing challenges and not all of its ambitious targets have been reached. For example, a guideline on implementing NRAP for local levels has not been issued, yet. Capacity building at all levels continues to be challenging. In addition, the monitoring of the implementation has been weak, which means that there is no clear knowledge of how far implementation has advanced and what potential bottlenecks remain. This knowledge is

Ha Tinh and Provinces of Laos joint hand to protection forest

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation mechanism among neighboring provinces to control illegal exploitation and trade of timber and non-timber forest products was signed at a meeting in May 2015 between Ha Tinh Province’s Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the counterpart agencies of Bolikhamxay and Khammouan provinces (Lao People’s Democratic Republic).

National REDD+ Steering Committee meets the second times

The members of the National REDD+ Steering Committee (NRSC) met the second times on 24 June 2015 to review the implementation progress and results of the National REDD+ Action Plan (NRAP).
critically needed before implementation can confidently move into the second phase and necessary adjustments can be made.

The UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme and the Viet Nam REDD+ Office (VRO) are currently engaging a team of consultants for an independent review of the NRAP implementation. While the focus of the review will be on progress and readiness for moving into phase 2, the review will also provide an opportunity to formulate recommendations for potential amendments to the NRAP. It is expected that the review results will be presented at the meeting of the National REDD+ Steering Committee (NRSC) in November.

Ha Tinh and Provinces of Lao PDR join hands to protect their forests

By PPMU Ha Tinh

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation among neighboring provinces to control illegal exploitation and trade of timber and non-timber forest products was signed in May 2015 between Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Ha Tinh Provinces and the counterpart agencies of Bolikhamsay and Khammouan Provinces (Lao People’s Democratic Republic).

The meeting was organized by the UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme as part of its activities to promote cooperation on forest protection and REDD+ implementation among countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

The MoU focusses on strengthening cooperation and enhancing timely information sharing among relevant agencies of the three provinces to: (i) control and prevent forest law violations; (ii) strictly control the exploitation, and export and import of timber and non-timber forest products under regulations of each country; (iii) strengthen cooperation to prevent and fight forest fires in border areas; (iv) enhance information and experience sharing on protecting forests and controlling illegal exploitation and trade of timber and non-timber forest products in bordered areas; and (v) enhance foster cooperation among relevant agencies on REDD+ implementation.

The three provinces agreed on a framework action plan for the period of 2015 to 2016 on the implementation of the signed MoU at the meeting.

Speaking at the meeting, Dr. Nguyen Huu Dzung – the National Programme Coordinator of the UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme – highlighted the importance of the MoU. He called it a crucial foundation for replicating the cooperation between other provinces of Lao PDR and Viet Nam. He also said that this is one of key activities of the Programme and expected that the three provinces would cooperate fruitfully in implementing the MoU.

It is expected that in September, the Programme will join hands with Ha Tinh Province to host another meeting to detail the cooperation mechanism with two Lao PDR provinces on controlling illegal timber exploitation and timber exports through border crossings of the three provinces.
National REDD+ Steering Committee meets the second times

By Hoang Viet Dung

The members of the National REDD+ Steering Committee (NRSC) met for the second time on 24 June 2015 to review the implementation progress and results of the National REDD+ Action Plan (NRAP). Mr. Cao Duc Phat, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and Chairman of the NRSC, chaired the meeting with participation of 14 out of 16 members.

At the meeting, the Viet Nam REDD+ Office (VRO) displayed notable results of NRAP implementation. For example, 10 Provincial REDD+ Steering Committees and REDD+ Task Forces were established to guide the implementation of REDD+ at local levels. Two provinces – Dien Bien and Lam Dong – already have approved Provincial REDD+ Action Plans (PRAP).

The VRO also highlighted current activities, including the development of Reference Emission Levels (RELs) and PRAP development guidelines as well as the finalization of the national safeguard roadmap and a proposal for establishing the Viet Nam REDD+ Fund.

NRSC members also identified key future activities, such as strengthening the operations of the Committee, including appointing representatives of REDD+ pilot provinces as members. Further activities include defining national approaches to REDD+ implementation, developing technical requirements for REDD+, and restructuring and strengthening the six Sub-Technical Working Groups.

The next meeting of NRSC is planned for November this year.

RELs to be submitted in the end of 2015

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) requested its relevant agencies supported by the UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme to develop and finalize Reference Emission Level (REL) no later than October this year. According to an approved plan, MARD is planning to submit the REL to the UNFCCC this year.
VRO revives Sub-Technical Working Groups

By Hoang Viet Dung

The Viet Nam REDD+ Office (VRO) revived the six Sub-Technical Working Groups (STWGs) under the Viet Nam REDD+ Network and enhanced their operations.

The STWGs on REDD+ Governance, Benefit Sharing, Private Sector Engagement, Local Implementation of REDD+ and Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) held several meetings in recent months.

The Office also cooperated with other organizations and REDD+ projects in conducting several activities, including sharing experience in piloting REDD+ at local levels through REDD+ projects.

The last STWG meeting took place in December 2013, and no meetings were held in 2014. The end of the hibernation in 2015 of the STWGs was partially the result of a fundamental change in the function of the Office.

On 5 March 2015, the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) issued the Decision No.106/QD-TCLN-VP on the establishment of the VRO to replace the Decision No.18/ QD-TCLN-VP dated 19 January 2011 on the same issue.

According to the Decision, the Office is the standing agency of the Viet Nam REDD+ Steering Committee and operates under the direction of the Chairman of the Committee and direct management of the VNFOREST Director General.

Previously, the Office used to be under the Department of Science, Technology and International Cooperation of VNFOREST. The main purpose of the change is to enhance the Office's role as the coordinating, monitoring and guiding agency for REDD+ implementation.

The UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme continues to actively support VRO in effectively playing its roles. The Programme has also supported the recruitment of REDD+ technical human resources for the Office and the implementation of several activities in VRO's approved annual work plan. This is one of the Programme's key objectives related to capacity building.
REDD+ and combatting desertification

By Tran Minh Phuong

The establishment of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was on the agenda of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) organized in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992. The UNCCD was subsequently established on 17 June 1994 in Paris, France.

The current 10-Year Strategy of the UNCCD (2008-2018) specifies the following goals as "to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability".

The World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) is observed worldwide on 17 June every year. Its focus this year was "attainment of food security for all through sustainable food systems." The event's slogan was ‘No such thing as a free lunch. Invest in healthy soil’. The 2015 observance called for, inter alia, change in land-use practices through smart agriculture and adaptation to changing climate, access to technology and land rights for small holder farmers, a balance in the land use for ecology and consumption, more investments in sustainable land practices, and more effective action on desertification whose effects on security, peace and stability are invisible yet real for the affected countries.

On 17 June 2015, VNFOREST with support from the UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme and in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Binh Thuan Province hosted an event related the World Day to Combat Desertification, the International Day of Biodiversity (22 May) and the World Environment Day (5 June). Participants of the events joined hands and planted 2,000 casuarinas to reduce wind erosion and prevent the invasion of sand.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Nguyen Ba Ngai, VNFOREST Deputy Director General, called for joint actions by all people in protecting, restoring, and managing Viet Nam's forests. He highlighted the close link between mitigation and adaptation, and the contributions that REDD+ implementation can make to reduce the impacts of droughts, water shortages and desertification.

Dr. Ngai’s speech provided an important reminder that REDD+ goes beyond carbon sequestration. It is also to address non-carbon social and environmental benefits, such as livelihood improvements, and the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and other ecosystem services.

Lessons from the ground – Planning and implementation of site-based REDD+ actions

By Shyam Paudel and Hoang Viet Dung

In Viet Nam, the National REDD+ Action Plan (NRAP) will be implemented through Provincial REDD+ Action Plans (PRAPs). Policies and Measures (PAMs) identified in the PRAPs are then implemented through Site-based REDD+ Action Plans (SiRAPs), the result of negotiations with forest owners such as households, villages, communes, forest management boards (FMB) and state forest companies (SFC). The ultimate goal of SiRAPs is to reduce the human pressure on forests.
that results in greenhouse gas emissions. Through a participatory process, local people and forest owners identify and propose potential solutions and activities to address drivers.

By the end of July 2015, ten pilot communes approved their site-based REDD+ action plans (SiRAP) and three others are in the final stage of approval in five pilot provinces.

The UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme has signed agreements with eight of the pilot communes to support implementing their plans. Further agreements are expected to be signed in the coming months. In the mean time, discussions and negotiations are in progress for REDD+ Implementation Agreements (RIA) with six FMBs in Lao Cai, Ca Mau and Lam Dong Provinces.

Through RIA, the Programme committed to provide financial support for those communes to implement certain selected activities identified in their plans which include not only site-level activities but also capacity building for REDD+ implementation for local people.

Previously, the Programme supported the implementation of activities in Kala Tongu and Preteing 2 villages of Lam Dong Province. Based on the experience in developing the plans for these villages, SiRAP guidelines have been prepared by the Programme and implemented widely in its five pilot provinces, except Ca Mau where site-based plans will be prepared for FMBs only instead of communes.

Recently, the Programme hosted a workshop to review and share experience in implementing SiRAPs among pilot provinces. As SiRAPs are still in the early stages of implementation, it will take time to understand their strengths and weaknesses. According to workshop participants, obtaining approval for SiRAPs by Commune People’s Committees can be considered as an early success, especially as REDD+ is new to local communities in the pilot provinces, except in Lam Dong where REDD+ has been piloted for several years. This positive outcome was primarily due to effective community consultations and the proposed activities being relevant to the needs of communes.

A typical commune REDD+ planning process includes awareness raising of local people, consultations and negotiations with key social groups, pre-planning at village level, final planning at commune level and preparation of a REDD+ Activity Plan. The SiRAP process is proving to be a crucial step in building local capacity on REDD+. Supported by trained local facilitators, the process has promoted decentralized and democratic processes, and sensitized local people on the importance of forest protection and management. Finally and perhaps most important, it is building local ownership, a critical prerequisite for the long-term engagement of local people in REDD+.

Despite progress, challenges remain

Despite the encouraging progress that the Programme is making at the local level, it has been facing some technical and management challenges. As REDD+ is an evolving concept, some misunderstandings and misconceptions about REDD+ among stakeholders remain, especially in provinces, communes and villages.

Several REDD+ projects are exacerbating this problem by providing different and inconsistent messages to stakeholders, leading to confusion and raising unnecessary expectations of the people. Provincial REDD+ facilitators specifically highlighted challenges related to communicating proper messages during awareness raising. They recommended strengthening the capacity of provincial communication teams to overcome this issue.

Integrating or harmonizing sub-national REDD+ plans with existing development plans such as Forest Protection and Development Plans (FPDP) and Socio-Economic Develop Plans (SEDP) is another challenge. In addition, many officials still consider REDD+ as a forestry sector issue. They are reluctant to expand its scope to other sectors, which may undermine the overall goal of comprehensively addressing key drivers of deforestation.

Planning and implementing Programme activities in the pilot provinces effectively continues to be hampered by limited technical and management capacities. Activities are frequently considered an expansion of existing mandates and an “unwelcome” addition to existing workloads. Finally, the Programme has been facing operational hurdles, such as smooth resource mobilization from the center, which has caused delays in implementation. These challenges are currently being addressed and we are optimistic to overcome them one by one.
Viet Nam REDD+ Geo-portal is coming online

By Akiko Inoguchi

A Viet Nam REDD+ Geo-portal is in the making. The portal will be one of the main entry points for relevant stakeholders to access information on developments and progress of REDD+ implementation in Viet Nam.

As the name suggests, one of its main features is a map interface that will provide spatially-explicit information on REDD+ planning (i.e., the NRAP, provincial PRAPs and SiRAPs) and forest cover changes based on national Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) data.

The portal will be linked to the other information systems for REDD+ including the Viet Nam REDD+ website and the planned safeguards information system to enable access to all REDD+ information. It will also be part of the FORMIS Platform, the Government’s information system for the forestry sector. Once finalized, the future management of the portal will be aligned with the management of the FORMIS Platform.

The Viet Nam REDD+ Geo-portal is currently being demonstrated online at http://redd.vnforest.gov.vn/portal/index.html. Any comments or questions are welcomed and should be sent to akiko.inoguchi@fao.org. Consultations for the content of the portal are planned through the STWG-Local Implementation of REDD+, and an official launch will be announced by the UN-REDD Programme in the coming months.

Progress on Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Social Concepts into REDD+ Action Plans

By Pham Minh Thoa and Elizabeth Eggerts

In early 2015, a guideline was developed for facilitating the mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion concepts into Provincial REDD+ Action Plans (PRAP) as a part of the PRAP development guideline. The guideline is part of a larger effort to integrate gender considerations into REDD+ activities within the UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme.

In late last year, in a joint effort with USAID LEAF, the Programme identified entry points for incorporating gender-responsive measures into the PRAP of Lam Dong Province – one of its six pilot provinces. The province successfully brought gender-responsive elements into the now approved PRAP and its monitoring framework development process.

Based on this experience, the Programme recognized the need to develop a guideline on gender mainstreaming and social inclusion for its other five pilot provinces, which are currently in various stages of completing their PRAPs.

The guideline provides practical guidance on supportive steps and targeted entry points to ensure that gender-responsive
and socially inclusive measures are integrated within the PRAPs. A corresponding suggestive monitoring framework, including sample indicators, for incorporating the proposed gender and social inclusion elements, forms part of the guideline.

The preliminary draft version of the guideline was shared for commenting at a PMU technical meeting and a consultation workshop in Binh Thuan Province in May 2015 with participation of representatives from pilot provinces and local communities.

Complementing these efforts, in August and September, the Programme plans to present the guideline during training workshops for the five PRAP teams to help build their capacity on mainstreaming gender-responsive and social inclusion elements into the PRAP, including within monitoring and reporting frameworks.

This effort is one of the on-going initiatives that highlight the strong commitment of Viet Nam to gender equality as well as the Cancun Safeguards.

Roles of spatial analysis in Provincial REDD+ Action Planning

By Charlotte Hicks and Nguyen Thanh Phuong

Spatial analysis plays various roles in different steps of the development of Provincial REDD+ Action Plans (PRAP) in Viet Nam. It offers visual information on environmental, social and economic attributes in an accessible way to facilitate decision-making processes relating to identifying relevant REDD+ interventions for the PRAPs.

Spatial analysis refers broadly to the examination of the location, attributes and relationships of features within and between spatial data. It aims at providing visualized displays of those data (such as maps) and information to answer particular questions.

Specifically, the analysis can: (i) enable decision makers and stakeholders to understand the context for REDD+ planning related to various attributes that can be presented as maps (e.g. forest cover, land use, infrastructure development, population distribution); (ii) facilitate analysis of drivers of deforestation and forest degradation; (iii) assist in analyzing the suitability of locations for different land uses and in identifying priority areas for REDD+ interventions; (iv) identify where REDD+ interventions can enhance social and environmental benefits or may have implications for safeguards; and (vi) provide inputs for further planning (e.g. site-based or land-use planning).

Spatial analysis is suitable for the identification of priority areas for REDD+ implementation. The results, which can besides maps also include statistical information (e.g. graphs or tables), can support participatory discussions on land-use and REDD+ planning.

Mapping can enable relevant decision makers and stakeholders understand the spatial distributions of potential benefits, risk and costs for implementing REDD+ interventions or identify where REDD+ implementation can achieve multiple benefits.

With support from UNEP’s World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), the spatial analysis process for PRAP development is being implemented by the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI) and the Vietnam Forestry University (VFU).