

## Bridging science and policy

### Lessons learned from FTA support for the development of the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050

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#### Key messages

- Bridging science and policy requires a good understanding of interests and working style, trust and long-term partnerships between policymakers and scientists.
- Research needs to be demand driven to be more relevant for use by policymakers. Identifying the right partners, times and places, and delivering research products based on their interests and in a timely manner will also increase the possibility of narrowing gaps between policymakers and scientists.
- Providing easy-to-understand and accessible communication products that are well-tailored to policymakers' preferences and needs is the key to scientific knowledge transfer.
- Programme impacts can be sustained by providing capacity building for national stakeholders, supporting national partners in securing funding to continue implementing activities after FTA ends, and collaborating with large-scale projects to uptake and replicate findings.
- Recognizing and acknowledging the politics embedded in decision-making processes, empowering civil society to hold the state accountable in creating transformative coalitions for change, and maintaining scientists' roles as independent knowledge brokers also play important roles in bridging science and policy.

#### Introduction

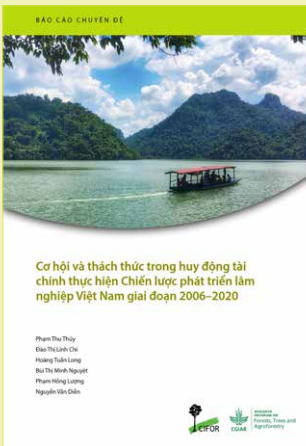
Scientific knowledge plays an important role in building and implementing policies and projects and monitoring their effectiveness. There are many initiatives, incentive mechanisms and projects to motivate scientists and policymakers to work together. However, scientists and policymakers sometimes have different purposes, concerns and points of view in formulating and evaluating policies (Bernard et al. 2005). Scientists can also experience difficulties in transferring knowledge to policymakers because of limitations in their communication skills and ability to explain and provide useful products to policymakers (Likens 2010). In addition, while scientists need time to implement professional and specific research, due to time pressures, policymakers may have to introduce policies before the relevant research has been completed (Gluckman 2018). How can we harmonize these two different purposes? How can we build and foster closer relationships between scientists and policymakers?

Based on CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) support through Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) in developing the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050, this infobrief documents lessons learned from collaboration between policymakers in Vietnam and FTA researchers and provides input for bridging science and research in future policymaking.

#### From policy request to action research

MARD asked FTA for support in providing scientific information, data and analysis on a wide range of topics the Government of Vietnam considered key elements for the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050. Based on these needs, FTA published many papers and briefs, which the Vietnam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) used in developing the strategy (Pham et al. 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020a, 2020b, 2020d, 2021a; Pham and Nguyen 2019; Vu et al. 2017; Trieu et al. 2020).

<sup>1</sup> CIFOR



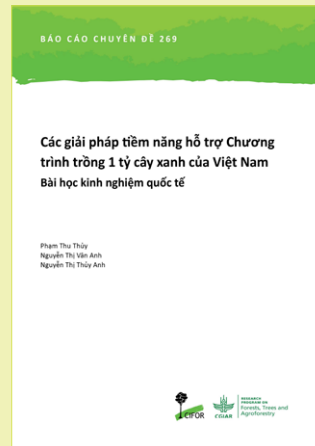
Research on opportunities and challenges in mobilizing finance to implement Vietnam's Forestry Development Strategy for 2006-2020



Research on the potential of REDD+ to finance the forestry sector in Vietnam



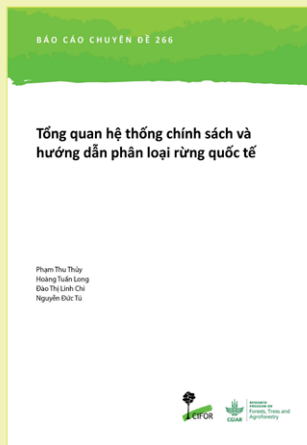
Research on financial resources for protection and development of mangrove forests at the sub-national level: Lessons from Ben Tre, Tra Vinh and Ca Mau provinces, Vietnam



Research on potential solutions to support Vietnam's One Billion Tree Planting Programme: Lessons from international experience



Research on Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy: Implementation results for 2006-2020 and recommendations for the 2021-2030 strategy



Research on policy system overview and international forest classification guide



Research on policy system overview and international forest classification guide



Research on opportunities and challenges for forest valuation in Vietnam: Stakeholder perspectives

Figure 1. FTA/CIFOR research used for the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021-2030

Issue 262 cover: Vai trò của chi trả dịch vụ môi trường rừng trong hỗ trợ tài chính cho ngành lâm nghiệp Việt Nam

Research on the role of PFES in financial support for the forestry sector in Vietnam

Issue 262 cover: Chiến lược và chính sách phát triển lâm nghiệp thế giới

Research on world forestry development strategy and policy

Issue 256 cover: 10 Xu thế lâm nghiệp trên thế giới Việt Nam cần xem xét trong quá trình xây dựng Chiến lược phát triển lâm nghiệp giai đoạn 2020-2030

Research on ten forestry trends in the world Vietnam needs to consider in the process of developing a forestry development strategy for 2020-2030

Issue 253 cover: Chuẩn bị cho Việt Nam sẵn sàng với luật chơi mới trên thị trường quốc tế - sản xuất và kinh doanh không liên quan tới phá rừng và suy thoái rừng

Research on preparing Vietnam for new rules in international markets: Zero deforestation production and business

Issue 261 cover: Cơ hội và thách thức cho Lâm nghiệp đô thị

Research on opportunities and challenges for urban forestry

Issue 259 cover: 31 dự báo về tình hình thế giới và khu vực đến năm 2050 mà Chiến lược phát triển lâm nghiệp Việt Nam 2021-2030 cần xem xét

Research on 31 forecasts about the world and regional situation up to 2050 that the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021-2030 needs to consider

Issue 258 cover: Kinh nghiệm quốc tế và các đề xuất sửa đổi khung pháp lý về định giá rừng tại Việt Nam

Research on international experience and proposals to amend the legal framework on forest valuation in Vietnam

Issue 257 cover: Mangrove environmental services and local livelihoods in Vietnam

Research on mangrove environmental services and local livelihoods in Vietnam

These scientific findings were considered key inputs for MARD in developing the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050, and the National One Billion Tree Planting Programme. FTA and CIFOR support to MARD

is also acknowledged on the homepage of the VNFOREST/ MARD website, and in the preface of the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050.



Figure 2. FTA report posted and published on the homepage of the Vietnam Administration of Forestry website

## Lessons learned in bridging policy and science

### Lesson 1. Demand-driven research:

A Vietnamese policymaker at MARD said a common problem is that researchers often conduct research not derived from actual policy needs. He claimed that too many academic products go unused if they are irrelevant to policymakers' needs. To ensure FTA support is driven by scientific needs to address knowledge gaps and is relevant for policymakers, MARD and CIFOR held regular meetings and discussions to understand policymakers' needs, so that research processes co-produced by both parties and outcomes were considered directly and used by policymakers for specified political purposes. In this particular case, MARD developed and proposed policy options for submission to the Government of Vietnam in formulating the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy. Each of these options had to be justified and accompanied by scientific evidence and analysis. MARD officials said they used CIFOR research in different ways: printing and including FTA reports as concrete evidence in the justification letters they submitted to higher ranking government officials; and distributing FTA reports themselves to relevant government agencies to raise awareness on newly emerging issues. The MARD policymaker also said, "Development of a policy requires scientific basis, legal basis, and lessons learned from on-the-ground experience, and we appreciate CIFOR's help in obtaining these three elements."

### Lesson 2. Trust between policymakers and researchers is based on long-term partnerships:

Trust plays an important role and is considered an essential precondition for policymakers to reach out to researchers for scientific input. MARD officials said that CIFOR's position as an independent knowledge broker makes it a credible partner for MARD to work with. According to one MARD official, the ability of researchers to provide high quality research is a key factor for enhancing trust, which also requires long-term partnerships established over time. A VNFOREST official added that they often seek global experience and independent assessment perspectives, and as CIFOR is a global forestry research institution and often carries out global comparative studies, they consider it a good source of scientific information. CIFOR has worked with MARD since 2011 when it was asked to provide scientific evidence to support Vietnam's Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES) programme, and recently received an award for its outstanding contributions to PFES policy development and implementation in Vietnam. This cooperation helped both parties understand each other, and the award confirmed MARD's confidence in the scientific quality of CIFOR's research and the results it can bring. This is why MARD approached CIFOR again for technical support in developing the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050.

## LỜI GIỚI THIỆU

Lâm nghiệp là một ngành kinh tế kỹ thuật đặc thù, có vị trí đặc biệt quan trọng trong nền kinh tế quốc dân. Trong 15 năm thực hiện Chiến lược phát triển Lâm nghiệp Việt Nam giai đoạn 2006-2020, ngành Lâm nghiệp đã đạt nhiều thành tựu quan trọng, tài nguyên rừng được bảo vệ và phát triển ngày càng tốt hơn; năm 2020 tổng diện tích rừng đạt trên 14,6 triệu ha, tỷ lệ che phủ rừng 42%, cơ cấu 3 loại rừng đáp ứng cơ bản yêu cầu phát triển lâm nghiệp, bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học và an ninh môi trường. Kim ngạch xuất khẩu sản phẩm gỗ và LSNG năm 2020 đạt trên 13 tỷ USD, Việt Nam trở thành nước xuất khẩu đồ gỗ và lâm sản ở vị trí thứ 5 trên thế giới, thứ 2 châu Á. Dịch vụ môi trường rừng thực sự trở thành nguồn tài chính quan trọng, bền vững của ngành, là một trong 10 thành tựu nổi bật của ngành Nông nghiệp và PTNT và được quốc tế ghi nhận.

Bên cạnh các thành tựu, ngành Lâm nghiệp cũng đang đối mặt với một số khó khăn, thách thức như công tác quy hoạch và quản lý quy hoạch còn hạn chế; tình trạng tranh chấp đất đai, vi phạm các qui định về bảo vệ và phát triển rừng vẫn còn diễn ra phức tạp tại một số địa phương; diện tích rừng tăng nhưng chất lượng rừng còn hạn chế, năng suất rừng trồng tuy được cải thiện nhưng vẫn còn thấp, chủ yếu gỗ nhỏ, chưa hoàn toàn đáp ứng nhu cầu nguyên liệu cho công nghiệp chế biến, xuất khẩu.

Thực hiện sự chỉ đạo của Chính Phủ, Bộ Nông Nghiệp và Phát triển nông thôn đã tổ chức tổng kết, đánh giá kết quả thực hiện Chiến lược phát triển Lâm nghiệp giai đoạn 2006-2020 và xây dựng Chiến lược phát triển Lâm nghiệp Việt Nam giai đoạn 2021 -2030, tầm nhìn đến năm 2050.

Chiến lược phát triển Lâm nghiệp Việt Nam giai đoạn 2021 -2030, tầm nhìn đến năm 2050, đã quán triệt và cụ thể hóa các quan điểm và định hướng phát triển kinh tế - xã hội của Nghị quyết Đại hội Đảng lần thứ XIII đối với ngành Lâm nghiệp và đã được Thủ tướng Chính phủ phê duyệt tại Quyết định số 523/QĐ-TTg ngày 01 tháng 4 năm 2021.

Bộ Nông nghiệp và PTNT trân trọng cảm ơn sự đóng góp của các Tổ chức, chuyên gia trong nước và quốc tế trong quá trình xây dựng Chiến lược, đặc biệt là Tổ chức Nghiên cứu Lâm nghiệp Quốc tế (CIFOR), Cơ quan Hợp tác Phát triển Đức (GIZ), Quỹ Quốc tế Bảo vệ thiên nhiên (WWF) và mong muốn tiếp tục nhận được sự quan tâm của các bên liên quan để Chiến lược được thực hiện hiệu quả, góp phần thực hiện thành công các mục tiêu quốc gia về phát triển bền vững./.

Hà Nội, tháng 4 năm 2021



TS. HÀ CÔNG TUẤN  
Thứ trưởng thường trực Bộ NN và PTNT

Figure 3. CIFOR's contribution acknowledged in the preface of the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050 signed by MARD Vice-Minister, Ha Cong Tuan



Figure 4. MARD Ministerial Award to CIFOR in recognition of its contributions to the PFES policy

### Lessons 3. Right partner, right time, right place:

Identifying who researchers should engage, when and where researchers should engage with policymakers also play an important role in enhancing effective sharing of scientific knowledge to policymakers. Working directly with VNFOREST as the agencies responsible for the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050, CIFOR was invited to contribute scientific knowledge and input for important technical discussions, policy dialogues and draft versions of the strategy as the bases for final approval, and had the opportunity to share its research findings with the right actors at the right time. Being allowed to participate in internal and close door meeting for policy makers helped scientists better understand the policy implementation context, stakeholders' points of view on the advantages and disadvantages of implementing policy, and allowed daily exchange for sharpening policy solutions with policymakers (Gluckman 2018). This meant discussions and policy proposals became the joint intellectual property of VNFOREST and FTA, which also meant a higher likelihood of them being adopted by policymakers (EFECA 2021). It was also necessary to find a balance between policymakers and researchers' time expectations. While policymakers need information and analyses for timely submission and approval of policy options, researchers often need more time to carry out proper, high quality and participatory research. It was not always possible to reconcile these different priorities, but under FTA support, VNFOREST and CIFOR consolidated and analysed lessons learned from existing policies on key issues that VNFOREST and MARD then considered for inclusion in the forthcoming strategy to provide timely input for MARD. While research often took time, and results could not always be ready for dissemination to policymakers when they needed it, FTA held regular technical discussions with VNFOREST to inform MARD of further analyses required to firm up MARD decisions. FTA also supported MARD in organising numerous national consultation workshops to facilitate policy dialogues where stakeholders could participate fully in decision making processes.



National Consultation Workshop on Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050, chaired by MARD Vice-Minister, Ha Cong Tuan

Photo: CIFOR



National Workshop on 10 years of Payment for Forest Environmental Services in Vietnam

Photo: CIFOR

### Lesson 4. Provide easy-to-understand and accessible communication products:

Rather than lengthy scientific reports with complex writing, policymakers like VNFOREST want brief and readable summary reports that provide key messages and get knowledge across quickly. To accomplish this wish, FTA committed significant human and financial resources to creating easy-to-understand communications products, such as policy briefs, short presentations, and toolboxes. This approach also helped the process of transferring scientific knowledge more effectively. In addition, as most policymakers in Vietnam have difficulties understanding material written in English (EFECA 2021), most communications and research products were made available in Vietnamese. This also bridged between international researchers and government and helped in overcoming cultural and language barriers.

**Lesson 5. Programme impacts can be sustained by providing capacity building for national stakeholders, supporting national partners in securing funding to continue implementing project activities after FTA ends, and collaborating with large-scale projects to uptake and replicate findings:**

To sustain programme support, FTA and CIFOR dedicated all staff present in the country to engaging in the national policy and providing technical inputs when policymakers needed them. FTA also put significant effort and resources into providing capacity building for government officials, civil society organizations, the media and national research organizations on research methodologies, skills, tools and knowledge to develop evidence-based decision making and participate in monitoring policy implementation (Pham et al. 2021b). Moreover, with funding support from FTA, CIFOR also helped provincial governments request funding for applying their newly acquired knowledge and tools in monitoring forestry policy implementation (Pham et al. 2021b). By working with key donors and development projects, partners also adopted and replicated recommendations proposed by FTA across Vietnam, ensuring the sustainability of FTA support after the programme ended (Pham et al. 2021b).

**Lesson 6. Enlarge political spaces by recognizing and acknowledging politics embedded in decision-making processes:**

Due to political goals and practicalities, policymakers do not always apply and use the research outcomes they obtain. Although scientists may produce a lot of strong scientific evidence, it may not always be used when doing so can affect the interests of powerful actors. Numbers and facts are not apolitical as they can also be collected, interpreted and presented to serve a political interest (Pham et al. 2020c). Moreover, although research should be policy demand driven, political interests might change due to institutional changes (e.g., new leadership), and weak coordination and poorly defined policy objectives can also lead to unclear priorities. Whose voices count is also unclear as powerful elites often dominate decision-making processes (Pham et al. 2020c). Recognizing and acknowledging these politics, empowering civil society to hold the state accountable in creating transformative coalitions for change and maintaining knowledge brokers' independence were adopted as strategic pathways for CIFOR and FTA to enlarge the political space and support MARD in developing the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021–2030, with vision to 2050.

**Conclusion**

Lessons learned from FTA's support for VNFOREST in developing the forestry strategy for 2021–2030 and vision to 2050, show that scientists and policymakers can collaborate

effectively. To improve the applicability and transfer of scientific knowledge, it is essential to understand policymakers' needs and have timely access to the right audiences that influence policy design and implementation. Communication products should be tailored to user needs and integrated into policy-making processes. However, scientific knowledge transfer also faces many difficulties, especially from political and institutional factors. The sustainability of any externally funded project depends on long-term investment in human resources, long-term collaboration to build policymakers' trust to request and take up research findings, a strategic communications campaign and inclusive decision making.

**Acknowledgement**

We would like to express our special thanks to the CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA), and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for their financial support to our research.

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FTA's work is supported by the CGIAR Trust Fund: [cgiar.org/funders/](http://cgiar.org/funders/)



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