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Project title: GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS AND IRREGULAR FOREST ACTIVITIES (IFA): IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EU FLEGT AND REDD+ IN LAOS

Funding period

01.09.2015 - 31.05.2019 (including an extension for maternity leave).

Abstract

The key objective of this research is to investigate the most prominent existing and emerging governance institutions (e.g. statutory laws and co-existing traditional rules and norms) affecting land and forest use and how irregular forest activities (IFA) relate to them. This is observed in the context of the “EU Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade” (FLEGT) and “Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation” (REDD+) processes. The main research question is: How institutions and institutional actors emerge and render legitimacy and how IFA influence these institutional processes at different levels of governance?

Theoretically the research builds on institutional theory and the theory of decentralisation in forest management. The study will advance those theoretical frameworks, by clarifying the role of informal institutions on institutional change, on the one hand and on the process of decentralisation, on the other. Research will take place in Savannakhet and Khammoune provinces of Laos. The study relies on qualitative research methods, including: (i) literature/document review; (ii) mapping of institutions and relevant actors; (iii) in-depth, semi structured interviews with key informants at different levels (central to local), and with relevant forest user groups. Qualitative analysis of interview data and social network analysis (SNA), as a complementary tool will be applied.

The project results will contribute to a greater understanding of: i) sources of institutional change and legitimacy of the emerging institutions; ii) internal and external factors determining forest law compliance behaviour; and iii) how irregularities in forestry sector relate to institutional change and shift of powers and authority (decentralisation) in forest management. Scientific results and potentials for scientific breakthroughs include development of an analytical framework for forest law compliance behaviour; and advancing the institutional theory and theory of decentralisation concerning the role of informal rules and irregularities on those processes. These results will facilitate development of alternative law enforcement measures, which are needed to complement the “traditional” command and control approach. It will also provide insights about the potential conflicts and synergies between the EU FLEGT and REDD+ processes, which is crucial for mutually supportive design and implementation of those two instruments.

Keywords: forest governance, environmental governance, illegal forest activities, deforestation, forest degradation, forest law compliance, legal pluralism, institutions, international forest policy, Laos.