

## BRIEF REPORT

Applying the Principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent  
in the UN-REDD Programme in Viet Nam





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## Acknowledgement

Viet Nam is the first country programme to proceed with formal preparations for field-based REDD+ activities. The Viet Nam UN-REDD Programme is pioneering a process to seek Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in its two pilot districts.

During the 21 days, the programme has reached more than 5,500 local people of 78 vilages, 20 communes of Di Linh and Lam Ha district, Lam Dong Province.

UN-REDD Viet Nam Programme would like to thank those who contributed, supported and dedicated to making the UN-REDD Viet Nam Programme: Free Prior and Informed Consent process possible and successful.

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**FPIC**  
**A guiding principle**

Participation and inclusion are among the human rights principles that guide the United Nations' work at all levels. They include full and effective participation in, contribution to, and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural and political development.

The landmark United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2007, provides a universal framework for action for the international community and States concerning Indigenous Peoples.

Respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent communities is vital for the UN-REDD Programme to successfully carry out its activities. Indigenous Peoples' participation as partners can contribute to and benefit from UN-REDD Programme activities at both the national and international levels.



**Piloting FPIC for REDD+ in Viet Nam**

Country actions under the UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) are funded by the Norwegian Government. The initial "Quick Start" phase of UN-REDD involves programmes in nine pilot countries, one of which is Viet Nam. The UN-REDD programme in Viet Nam is executed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and is implemented by Viet Nam Administration of Forest, VNFOREST. A pilot province has been selected as the focus for sub-national capacity building. This is Lam Dong in the Central Highlands, where UN-REDD activities are implemented in collaboration with Lam Dong Provincial People's Committee (PPC) through its provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). As the first UN-REDD Country Programme to begin implementation, the UN-REDD Viet Nam Programme has pioneered the application of FPIC in two districts, Lam Ha and Di Linh of Lam Dong province.

Viet Nam has fifty-three ethnic minority groups, comprising approximately sixteen million people, who speak languages belonging to eight distinctive language groups. Most of them live in and around forests in highlands. Due to high levels of internal migration in recent decades, there is now a far greater diversity of ethnic groups in many localities than was the case previously. This is certainly true in Lam Dong province, where thirty of the nation's

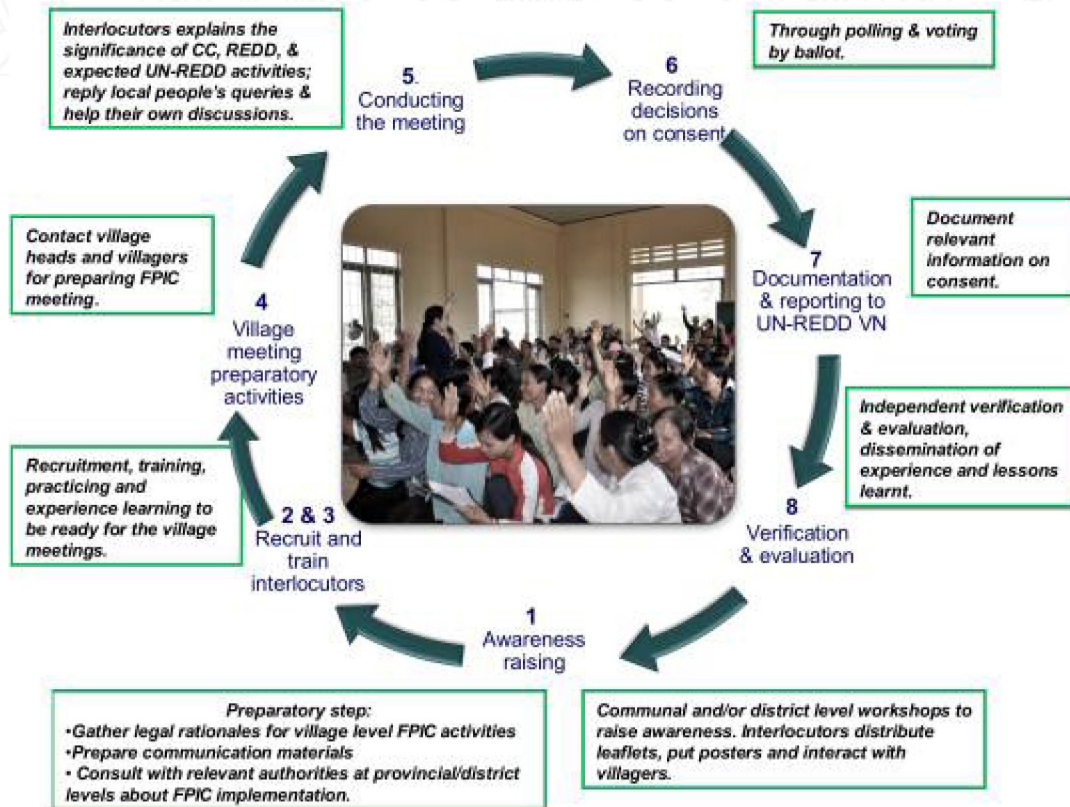


Lam Dong - Lam Ha, Di Linh

ethnic minority groups are now represented in the two pilot districts, among which only six are native to the districts, the others having moved from other parts of the country in the last generation.

The pilot FPIC process involved an eight-step programme; see Figure 1. These eight steps were implemented over a period of five months at the beginning of 2010; see Figure 2. Step 5, the village FPIC meetings, were divided into three phases. In the first phase, a total of twenty villages were covered; in the second phase a further thirty-one villages were visited, and in the third phase an additional twenty-five villages. The purpose of breaking the village meetings into three phases was to allow lessons from earlier phases to be incorporated into revised procedures for later phases.

<sup>1</sup> Participation and Inclusion: Every person and all peoples are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in, contribution to, and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural and political development in which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be realized. United Nations Development Group (UNDG) (2003).



The following sections describe each of the eight steps of the pilot FPIC process.

Figure 1: The 8-step process based FPIC principles

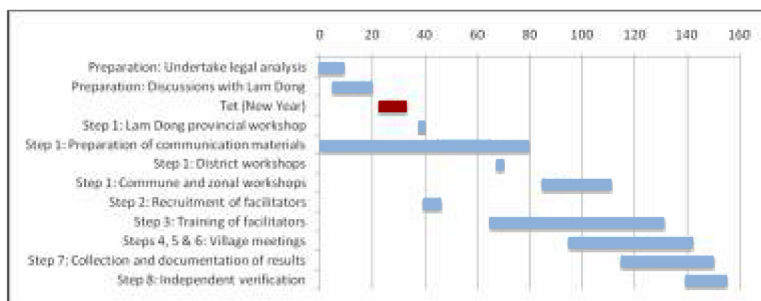


Figure 2: FPIC Implementation timeline

## Preparations for FPIC

In preparation for the FPIC process, two legal reviews were undertaken. These were i) *An analysis of Vietnam's legal framework of land use planning relevant to ethnic minorities; and ii) An analysis of Vietnam's legal framework relevant to the participation of local communities and people and FPIC related international conventions that may be applied in Vietnam.*

The first review<sup>2</sup> analysed general provisions in the following legal documents:

- The Land Law (revised in 2003);
- The Law on Forest Protection and Development, 2004;
- National Assembly Resolution 57 2006/QH 11 on the Five Year Land Use Plan, 2006- 2011;
- Decision 134/2004/QĐ-TTg relating to land use for production, residence, housing and drinking water supply for poor ethnic minorities facing with difficulties;
- Decision 304/2005/QĐ-TTg on pilot forest allocation, forest protection contract with ethnic minority households and communities in Central Highlands;
- Decision 07/2006/QĐ-TTg on socio-economic development program for ethnic minority and mountainous communes facing with extreme difficulties, 2006 – 2010 relating to supports given to their poverty reduction and socio-economic development promotion.

This report concluded: “Land use planning is a very important aspect of Vietnam's land use policy and is clearly reflected in the Land Law, the National Assembly Resolution; Resolution, Decisions and Decrees issued by the Government of Vietnam, ministries and/or inter-ministries. These legal instruments directly or indirectly relate to land use plans of ethnic minorities”.

<sup>2</sup> Report prepared by Associate Prof. PhD. Vuong Xuan Tinh, Vice Director, Institute of Ethnology



The report also defined various constraints to effective and transparent land use planning. For example, “Viet Nam’s land use legal system addresses numerous issues that are related to ethnic minorities, but only indirectly” and “there remain issues that are inappropriate to specific conditions of the ethnic minorities in the existing land use planning process”.

The report summaries several basic constraints found in the legal documents relating to the implementation of land use plans that is related to local ethnic minorities. For example, land use plans “do not satisfy poor households or households having insufficient land to meet their needs; and such plans do not highlight the responsibility of state owned forestry and/or farming units towards the local ethnic minorities; plans often include provisions that are inappropriate to some ethnic people’s land use historical contexts and practices”.



In the FPIC relevant legal documents, the UN-REDD programme gathered and reviewed legal documents issued by the State of Vietnam and United Nations documents to which Viet Nam has ascribed. These include:

- Ordinance on Democracy at Grassroots issued by the National Assembly’s Standing Committee, came into effect from the first of July 2007 that stated principles, process for ensuring people participation in development process but it is not clear enough on how the ethnic people participate in details;
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the UN Assembly in September 2007;
- Operational guidance from the UN-REDD program related to Indigenous Peoples, which includes free prior informed consent of indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities as a guiding principle, essential to ensure their adequate and effective participation in policy/decision making process in the implementation of the UN-REDD program.



### Production of communication materials

Communication materials were carefully prepared in order to carry simple but important messages for dissemination among the local people, many of whom are under-educated, accurately and effectively. The UN-REDD programme prepared draft materials and then collected comments made at meetings held with the Department of Forestry, and at awareness workshops and interlocutor training courses (see below), as well as during implementation of phases 1 and 2 of the village-level FPIC events.

Substantial use was made of international REDD+ communication products that were translated into Vietnamese and refined to be appropriate to specific conditions in Viet Nam. Additional materials prepared by the UN-REDD programme included leaflets, posters and banners and videos.

These activities resulted in a set of communication materials to serve awareness raising and FPIC implementation. As requested, the materials were transferred to the commune and village officials to raise awareness among the villagers by themselves.

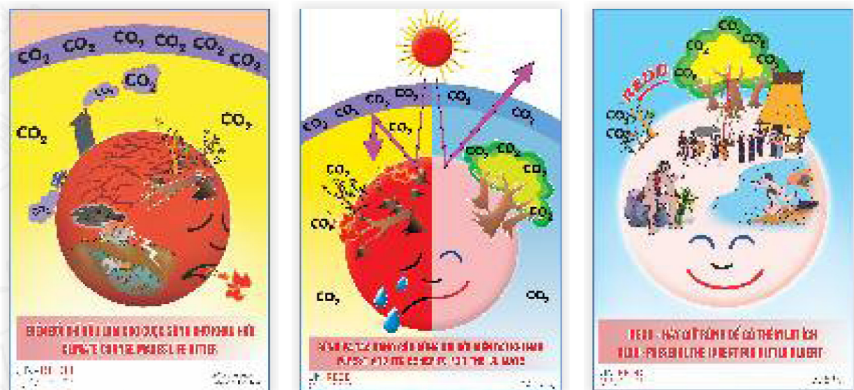
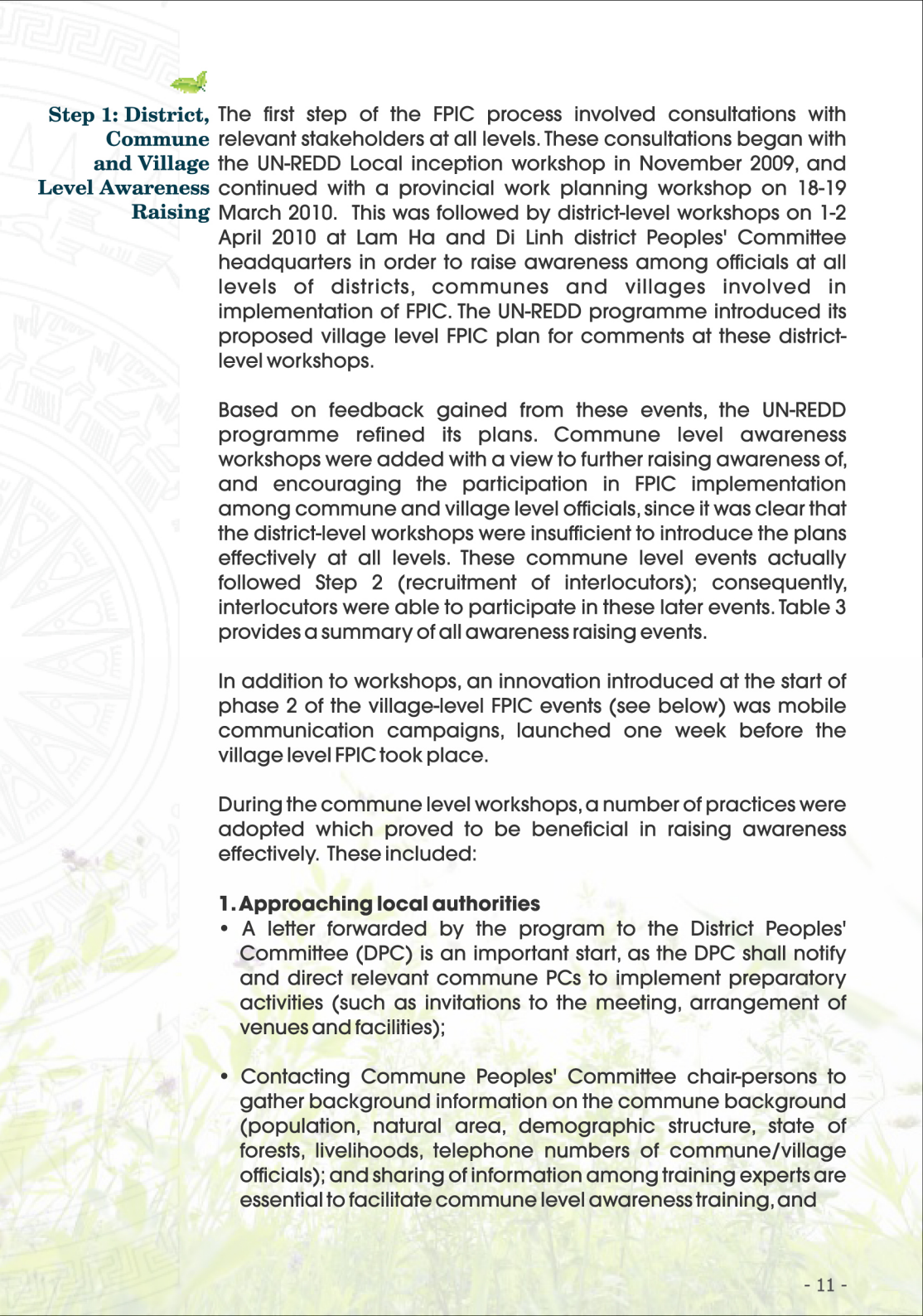


Figure 3: communication product produced



Figure 3: communication product produced

One issue that required careful analysis concerned the languages to be used in the communication materials. In addition to Vietnamese, there are numerous other languages spoken by stakeholders in the pilot districts. Due to the mixed ethnic nature of virtually all communities, due to internal migration dynamics in recent decades, virtually all villagers have a high level of aural and spoken fluency either in Vietnamese or the largest of the ethnic minority languages, K'ho. Literacy rates are relatively high, compared to remote regions in other countries, but even many K'ho people are more competent in reading Vietnamese than their own language; and this tendency is even more marked among the smaller ethnic groups. Consequently a decision was made to produce communication materials, specifically the FPIC leaflet and brochure describing the UN-REDD Programme, in two languages, Vietnamese and K'ho.



**Step 1: District,  
Commune  
and Village  
Level Awareness  
Raising**

The first step of the FPIC process involved consultations with relevant stakeholders at all levels. These consultations began with the UN-REDD Local inception workshop in November 2009, and continued with a provincial work planning workshop on 18-19 March 2010. This was followed by district-level workshops on 1-2 April 2010 at Lam Ha and Di Linh district Peoples' Committee headquarters in order to raise awareness among officials at all levels of districts, communes and villages involved in implementation of FPIC. The UN-REDD programme introduced its proposed village level FPIC plan for comments at these district-level workshops.

Based on feedback gained from these events, the UN-REDD programme refined its plans. Commune level awareness workshops were added with a view to further raising awareness of, and encouraging the participation in FPIC implementation among commune and village level officials, since it was clear that the district-level workshops were insufficient to introduce the plans effectively at all levels. These commune level events actually followed Step 2 (recruitment of interlocutors); consequently, interlocutors were able to participate in these later events. Table 3 provides a summary of all awareness raising events.

In addition to workshops, an innovation introduced at the start of phase 2 of the village-level FPIC events (see below) was mobile communication campaigns, launched one week before the village level FPIC took place.

During the commune level workshops, a number of practices were adopted which proved to be beneficial in raising awareness effectively. These included:

**1. Approaching local authorities**

- A letter forwarded by the program to the District Peoples' Committee (DPC) is an important start, as the DPC shall notify and direct relevant commune PCs to implement preparatory activities (such as invitations to the meeting, arrangement of venues and facilities);
- Contacting Commune Peoples' Committee chair-persons to gather background information on the commune background (population, natural area, demographic structure, state of forests, livelihoods, telephone numbers of commune/village officials); and sharing of information among training experts are essential to facilitate commune level awareness training, and

are necessary for organizing village meetings and follow-up activities of the program;

- Clear explanation of the purpose of training, and expected results of the training enhances the attention of participants and encourages their active participation;

## **2. Use of materials**

- Posters were placed in the meeting rooms;
- Slides from Powerpoint presentations were also printed and distributed to participants;
- Leaflets in suitable languages were distributed among participants;
- Each issue (on forests and climate change, REDD+ and activities, FPIC) had been prepared in the form of a specific presentation and presented by an assigned expert;
- A REDD+ video was valuable in providing key information for target audiences.

## **3. Conducting discussions**

- In addition to normal discussion (raising questions for comments/opinions from individual participants) there was an initiative to organize discussion groups and provide paper and pens for groups to prepare presentations on their views. Gifts were offered for those participants who expressed good comments/opinions; this encouraged their active participation;
- Information received from their presentations helped the group of experts to assess the level of understanding, refine and correct wrong information, improve their own presentations and collect further local information.



#### 4. Interactions with local people during and after training

- Interactions took place during breaks to share information among participants, and help the interlocutors establish closer relations with local officials and establish liaison for village level FPIC activities;
- During interaction with village heads, the interlocutors discussed preparatory activities for organizing the village meetings, and helped village heads to have an image of activities to be performed, understand how to undertake outreach work when inviting the villagers to the meeting, and how to propose their requirements relating to the village level FPIC meetings to commune leaders;
- Offering gifts for participants and taking photographs with them before parting have generated good feelings among the participants.

As a result of these awareness raising activities, subsequent local activities, particularly village level FPIC meetings were greatly facilitated. A network has now been established of commune officials and village heads who are active in supporting FPIC and the programme.



**Step 2: Recruitment of Interlocutors** The use of “interlocutors” was planned as a way of conducting the FPIC process so as to emphasize independence from government control. In some countries, local CSOs may be used for this purpose, but independent CSOs are only weakly developed in Viet Nam.

Key activities in this step were to identify recruitment criteria, advertise for applicants, conduct of interviews, and selection.

The recruitment criteria decided on were:

1. Demonstrated forestry and environmental knowledge
2. Experience in teaching and directly working with communities
3. Fluency in an ethnic minority language and understanding of their customs
4. Good listening and open-minded attitudes
5. Having good communication capability
6. Friendly and sincere manner.

The shortlisted interlocutors were interviewed by a board of examiners who had participated in the design and implementation of these activities.

The results of the interviews were that 24 interlocutors were selected from a total of 35 candidates. Of the successful candidates, 30%

are members of ethnic minority peoples, and 46% (11 out of 24) are women. One third of the recruited interlocutors had experience working in the actual pilot districts. Half of the interlocutors are lecturers from the local university, while 17% work for a local protected area.

**Step 3: The key activities in this step involved:**

**Interlocutor Training**

- Introduction to FPIC and preliminary training in consultation methods through participation in the two district-level awareness raising events;
- Basic training and consultation practice through participation in the two-village FPIC trial events: Lam Bo of Phuc Tho commune, Da Sa of Lien Ha commune, Lam Ha Dist.
- Improvement training delivered before the start of village-level FPIC events.
- Continuous experience learning and sharing of lessons after each working day and each FPIC event.

**Results:** a strong and sustainable brigade of interlocutors has been created; groups are able to work independently and help each other. Of particular importance were the great efforts made by ethnic minority interlocutors. The brigade was able to prepare issues and present them at commune/village level awareness workshops.





**Step 4: Village Meeting Preparation**

As mentioned previously, the village-level FPIC events (Steps 4, 5 and 6) were split into three phases so that lessons learnt in earlier phases could be incorporated into subsequent phases. Figure 4 shows the location of villages in each of the three phases.

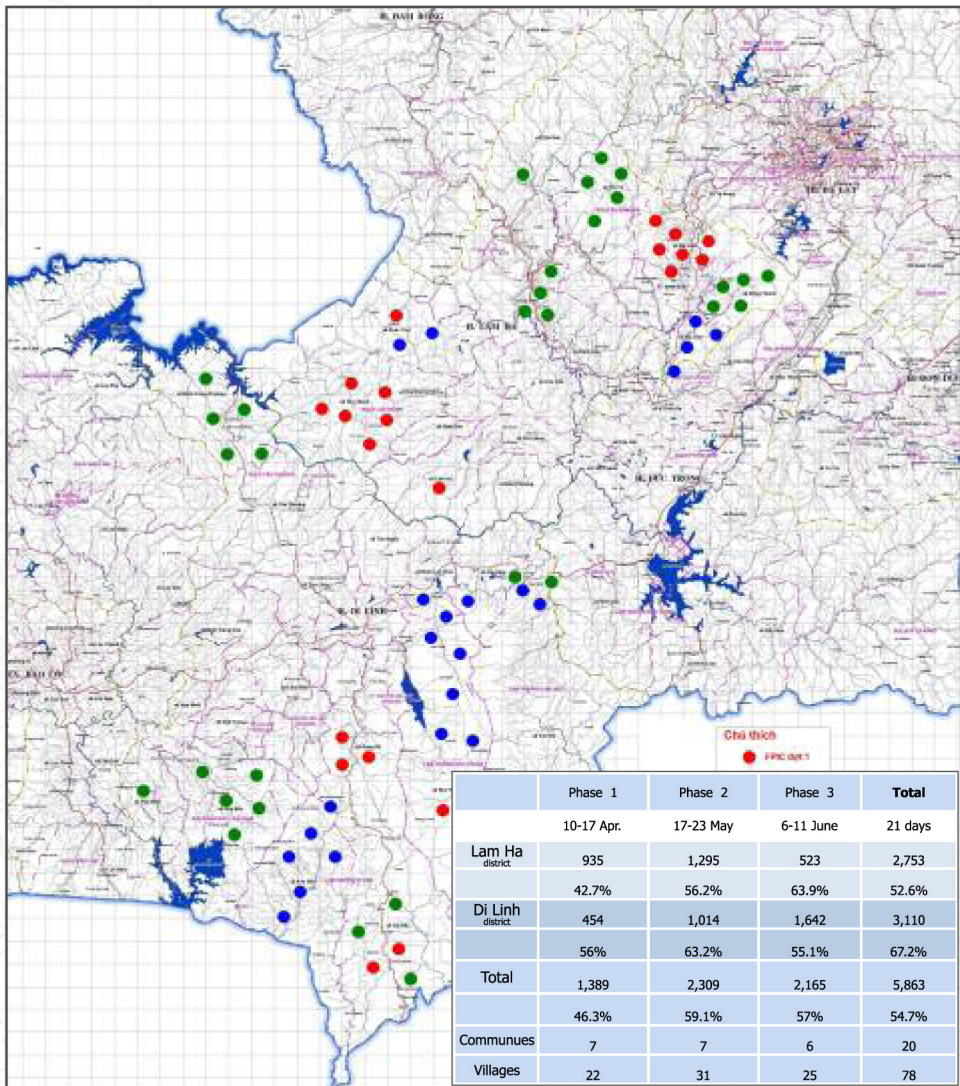


Figure 4: Map of the three phases of village-level FPICs events; red = phase 1; green = phase 2; blue = phase 3



**P**rior to phase 1, relatively little attention was paid to preparation for village FPIC events - a meeting was held with village heads during the district workshop, but there was no pre-check of the site for meeting, the arrangements being left largely up to the village heads. However, upon completion of phase 1, greater attention was paid to village meeting preparatory activities. More time and effort was spent by the programme on the village meeting preparation, including checks of the suitability of the proposed location.

The awareness raising workshops at the commune level facilitated effective implementation of FPIC at the village level, as commune officials and village heads had improved awareness of the principles, understood the requirements for implementing FPIC at the village level, and really wished to be involved in this activity. Furthermore, good relationships between interlocutors and commune officials and village heads were established, which further facilitated the performance of preparatory activities.

The basic process used in phase 1, and improved upon thereafter, involved the following key activities, undertaken by, or guided by interlocutor groups:

1. Identification of local people having 'position' in the community and roles in the village meeting;
2. Discussion with village heads about the meeting venue, timing, necessary arrangements and announcement;
3. Following phase 1, mobile communication was carried out one week before the village meeting

Lessons learnt from the preparatory activities:

- The meeting timing should be defined on the basis of local seasonal crops in order to increase the percentage of the villagers' participation;
- An advance survey is essential to ensure high quality of the FPIC meeting;
- During the advance survey, approaching those who have an important voice in the locality is very important;
- A study of local communities (including, for example, the proportion of Kinh and ethnic minorities) in advance is necessary so that appropriate meeting plans can be prepared;
- Interlocutors should be clearly assigned to roles identified in the meeting plan, and trained to handle unexpected situations during FPIC implementation;
- Information about the programme should be designed and

- presented according to villagers' level of understanding;
- Mobile communication is part of the advance survey that is carried out shortly before the village meeting as part of the preparations. The current state of the village can be ascertained through this process;
  - The best practice is to interview households selected by the village head. In advance of meetings for each village, ten households were selected based on following criteria:
    - Households with members who understand the village organization, customs, and so on; for example, those of the village head, party secretary, headed by women, those with a recognized patriarch, etc.
    - Have potential to benefit directly from the program; i.e., those households with forest management contracts (2-4 households).
    - Those with the closest interactions with forests; for example, those with cultivated land nearby forests (3-4 households).
  - Most important is to understand the village's customs and culture (what they are interested in, or which taboos need to be avoided) and production patterns (local weather patterns, the state of cultivation, etc.) in order to improve the efficiency of communication during the meeting;
  - The timing of a contact with local people is very short and therefore the fastest way to come into contact with them is through the mediation of local authorities or prestigious figures;
  - It is essential to show respect for the villagers and to treat them as equals;
  - Collected information should be noted down in a scientific way for reporting and storing purposes;
  - Liaison with the village head and villagers should be maintained so as to regularly inform them of the programme, and create confidence in future interactions.





**Step 5:**  
**Conducting**  
**village meetings**

This is the critical step and the one that has been most subject to testing, adjusted and improvement so as to ensure all requirements with respect to the number of participants, gender and ethnic balance, and principles of FPIC are met.

The key activities in conducting village meetings, as they evolved through practical experience, involved:

- Opening session, typically, the head of village opened the meeting, he introduced the objectives, participants and steps of meeting;
- Presentation of such issues as climate change, REDD, and UN-REDD activities by the interlocutors;
- Discussion session, including questions and answers;
- A session to allow decisions to be made on consent or non-consent;
- Recording of the results by the interlocutors;
- A review meeting with the village head to review experiences and for the village head to sign the minutes of the meeting.

With lessons learnt from phase 1, major changes were introduced, including the following:

- The quality of discussions and exchange of information was improved, for example by encouraging group discussions in an open atmosphere that encouraged a greater number of villagers to participate in discussions and express their views;
- The process of decision-making on consent or non-consent was improved by substituting signature of sheets by voting by show of hands, and finally by secret balloting using colour ballot sheets. This ensured closer adherence to FPIC principles, the effect of pressure of a majority is avoided, and recording of votes by the interlocutors is simplified;
- The review meeting with the village head was introduced to learn experiences and to sign the minutes of the meeting so as to ensure the authenticity and community representativeness of reports made by the interlocutors.

As a result from these improvements and modifications, the rate of household representation increased; villagers became much more active in participating in discussion groups and plenary sessions; and were more confident in expressing their opinions and in voting. More comments were received on, and contributions made to the programme; and effective relationships with the village head and villagers were established and strengthened for future cooperation.

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Total
	10-17 Apr.	17-23 May	6-11 June	21 days
<b>Lam Ha:</b> Quantity of villagers participating	935	1,295	523	2,753
Percentages of all households represented	42.7%	56.2%	63.9%	52.6%
<b>Di Linh:</b> Quantity of villagers participating	454	1,014	1,642	3,110
Percentages of all households represented	56%	63.2%	55.1%	67.2%
<b>Total:</b> Quantity of villagers participating	1,389	2,309	2,165	5,863
Percentages of all households represented	46.3%	59.1%	57%	54.7%
<b>Communes</b>	7	7	6	20
<b>Villages</b>	22	31	25	78

**Lessons learnt from conducting the village events are summarized in Table 5, below. The key points were:**

- To create a positive atmosphere of the meeting that interests participants;
- Presentations need to be structured in a simple and general way that connect all sections and is understandable by the villagers;
- Active persons need to be encouraged to involve the whole villagers to participate;
- Discussion by the villagers should be facilitated in order to avoid digressions (prepared questions for specific groups, advance explanations, felt pens);
- Performance and rewards need to be combined;
- Ethnic minority interlocutor's ability should be brought into full play;
- Each succeeding section of the meeting needs to be logically linked to the preceding;
- Voting and gift offering need to be organized in a clear and orderly fashion.

**Lessons learnt from the completion of the village events:**

- Take advantage of a review meeting with village officials to complete the minutes of the meeting, and to formalize the results;
- Offer gifts: speakers, banners, posters and others for the locality to keep on raising awareness;
- Evaluate and learn experiences by each group after each FPIC
- Hold a review meeting for the whole team to exchange and learn experiences for improvement;
- Maintain effective liaison with the localities in order to improve cooperation for the cause of forest protection and development;
- Update information on the program (when follow up activities take place);
- Local people are interested in benefits such as sustainable livelihoods;
- Having developed a local contingent of facilitators and interlocutors; make good use of them!



**Step 6:**  
**Recording of**  
**Consent**  
**Decision**

- The key activities in this step consisted of:
- Guiding local people in understanding the requirements to express their opinions about consent or non-consent to taking part in the programme implementation; and to speak out benefits, difficulties and challenges that are likely to be faced during the participation;
  - Giving a presentation on voting methods and procedures to express consent or non-consent;
  - Counting the votes and publicizing the result during the meeting with the village head and officials.

There were several adjustments to the way of expressing consent or non-consent. During FPIC 1, signing of a consent sheet was tried initially and then replaced by show-of-hands voting due to some fears being expressed by local people that signing their names might leave them open to recriminations if viewed to have made the “wrong” decision. However, with voting by show of hands is impossible to avoid the effect or pressure of a majority, and is also difficult to record accurately.

Consequently, starting in phase 3, the interlocutors started using ballot papers with different colours for male and female participants and two ballot boxes for consent and/or non-consent ballot papers. Participants were able to deposit their paper in the desired ballot box in secret as it puts behind a curtain. This method helps local people enable to freely express their opinions.

Voting results were certified by the village head who was involved in the process, working alongside the interlocutor group.




**Step 7:**  
**Documentation  
and Reporting**

- The key activities in this step consisted of:
- Guiding local people in understanding the requirements to express their opinions about consent or non-consent to taking part in the programme implementation; and to speak out benefits, difficulties and challenges that are likely to be faced during the participation;
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Voting results were certified by the village head who was involved in the process, working alongside the interlocutor group.




**Step 8:  
Verification and  
Evaluation**

An independent agency (The Centre for People and Forests, RECOFTC) was contracted by the global component of the UN-REDD Programme to prepare a methodology for verification and evaluation of the FPIC process. The methodology was developed through an expert workshop held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in May, 2010. RECOFTC was subsequently invited to apply this methodology in order to verify and evaluate the results of the FPIC process under the UN-REDD Programme in Viet Nam.

The verification and evaluation process involved a team of four independent experts, all Vietnamese nationals, to facilitate travel in the field and to allow effective discussion with local people. The team spent the period June 11th – 17th in Lam Dong, overlapping with phase 3 of FPIC implementation. Although this compromised their ability to verify the results of phase 3, it was valuable in allowing an ore thorough evaluation of the process.

Findings from the evaluation and verification mission indicate that UN-REDD Vietnam Program was able to adapt the general guidance from UN-REDD regional office to the Vietnamese circumstances and local contexts in Lam Dong province. Most parts of the FPIC principles were adhered to and guiding steps to undertake FPIC was followed with modifications. Some highlighted issues includes (i) Insufficient information provided to local people: although UN-REDD Vietnam tried various means to communicate with local people, necessary information about climate change, the information on risks and cost associated with participation in REDD program for local people was not provided (ii) Lack of a grievance and review mechanism: no mechanism exists that is independent of the FPIC team to review any complaint made by local people.



**Conclusions  
and Implications  
for Conducting  
FPIC for REDD+**

The UN-REDD Programme in Viet Nam moved quickly to pilot an FPIC process in Lam Dong province, partly to comply with the provisions of the UNDRIP with respect to its own activities, but more importantly in order to generate lessons on how to conduct FPIC for REDD+.

Such a process had never been attempted before – although there are numerous examples of FPIC processes, including some from the forest sector, these have always dealt with rather narrow issues with clear and direct economic and social implications (e.g., oil palm development, mining and prospecting, etc.). In contrast, REDD+ is a broad, complex, and as yet not fully defined

concept, dealing with a commodity that cannot be seen (reduced emissions of greenhouse gases) and benefits and risks that are difficult to describe, let alone quantify. Furthermore, FPIC for REDD+ will need to deal with geographic and social scales far beyond previous FPIC exercises. The 80 villages involved in this pilot exercise represent a tiny fraction of those which will need to be involved in FPIC for REDD+

Without a lot of previous experience on which to design the process, the UN-REDD Programme made a conscious decision to try to implement FPIC, honouring the well-established principles as far as was possible, and accepting that the process would not be perfect, and errors would be made. For this reason, the independent evaluation and verification of the process was organized as soon as possible after the exercise (in fact, even before completion of phase 3) precisely in order to identify lessons, including errors made during the pilot FPIC process.

Based on experiences gained and the feedback provided by the independent evaluation, some clear conclusions and lessons can be drawn regarding implementation of FPIC for REDD+.

Other lessons or conclusions emerging from the pilot exercise include:

*Preparatory phase* Education and awareness raising at all levels is essential, and is more difficult than might be assumed. The concept of climate change, the role of forests in climate change, and the potential to generate income from reducing emissions from forests are all difficult to grasp, even for well-educated government officials, and much harder for under-educated local officials. The pilot FPIC process in Viet Nam recognized this and substantially increased awareness raising efforts, but should have invested even greater levels of effort.

A detailed analysis of the social, ethnological and linguistic status of the target province and the spatial distribution of forest and forest-dependent communities is essential in planning an efficient and effective FPIC exercise. For large-scale FPIC, good linkages to authorities holding such information need to be established.

Languages are important, but this does not mean that every language needs to be addressed. Ethnic minorities living among larger ethnic groups may be adequately fluent in another minority language. This was the case in some parts of the pilot districts, where K'ho was the lingua franca, spoken by other ethnic



minorities who might use their own language in the home. In some locations, even K'ho were more literate in Vietnamese, but appeared to appreciate having materials in their own language.

*Human Resources for FPIC* Eventually, the FPIC process will need to be institutionalized, and this should logically be mainstreamed into the socio-economic development and land use planning processes in Viet Nam and other countries having similar processes. The Ordinance on Implementation of Democracy in Communes establishes the right of local communities to be consulted on these and other processes (though their right to provide or withhold consent is not enshrined in the Ordinance). Therefore, since REDD+ is merely one issue to be considered in socio-economic development and land use planning, FPIC for REDD+ should be encompassed in FPIC for these broader processes. In the context of Viet Nam, this means a significant role for the Ministry of Planning and Investment and its provincial Departments of Planning and Investment.

However, while this is a long-term goal, in the immediate future FPIC for REDD+ will need to rely on specially convened teams of interlocutors – either recruited directly for the purpose, as in Viet Nam, or under the auspices of selected local independent CSOs. Recruitment of individuals who are intellectually and emotionally suited to the exercise is critical. Furthermore, experience in the pilot exercise demonstrated that natural variation in the capacities and experience of individual interlocutors meant that the training process needed to be more closely tailored to the needs of individuals than was achieved in the pilot.



## Local FPIC Events

In Viet Nam, as in many other countries, local communities tend to be distrustful of new initiatives, especially if viewed as having government support. Similarly, not having had real experience of genuine consultation or the right to provide or withhold consent, it is difficult to build the necessary trust in a new process with regard to a new and complex issue. In the pilot FPIC exercise there was a suspicion at the outset that the time planned for local events would prove to be insufficient, and the external evaluation confirmed this. It is clear that local FPIC events need to be multi-phased, with an introductory session, followed by an opportunity for the community to reflect, followed by another consultation to allow any new questions or uncertainties to be addressed, and after another period of reflection, a decision-making process. Thus, at least three visits to each village should be planned – obviously by the same interlocutors – meaning that logistics planning needs to be done very carefully.

For similar reasons, the method of reaching and recording a decision proved to be complicated, with three different methods tried in the three phases of the pilot. Members of local communities are wary of signing a document. In the case of Viet Nam, where literacy is high, even in remote areas, this simply reflects a fear that a documentary record of a decision deemed by “authorities” as being “wrong” might leave individuals at risk of retribution; but in other countries, literacy rates also need to be considered. However, the initially selected alternative, namely a show of hands was also clearly not democratic, since there was evidence of peer pressure over-riding individual feelings as large numbers of hands were raised. Some form of secret ballot, if necessary using colour-coded ballots, with the results publically tallied and endorsed by the village head seems to be the best option. The results also need to be publicized after the meeting.

In the ethnically heterogeneous communities of Viet Nam, managing multiple ethnic groups proved to be problematic. There was some evidence that ethnic minorities attended FPIC events in lower proportions than Kinh and/or participated less readily in the discussion. Organizing discussion groups along ethnic lines, with members of the groups able to reach group decisions in secret, and then vote accordingly, and with interlocutors providing

support to individual discussion groups would seem to offer the best solution.

The independent evaluation revealed that villagers often were not clear about what they had agreed to. Most believed that they were agreeing to the concept of forest conservation – which is certainly part of the implications of REDD+, but not the whole story. During initial village events, interlocutors may find it useful to pose the question (more than once) as to what the villagers understand they are being asked about. This would then allow further explanation or correction of inaccurate impressions.



**Follow-up action** These fall under two categories. Firstly, there is a need to ensure that communities are kept informed of the entire process, and the final conclusions. In an operational REDD+ setting, the final conclusion would consist of a commune, district, and provincial socio-economic development and land use plan that reflects each community's expressed desires regarding REDD+.

However, the other category of follow-up actions deals with the expectations of the villagers. Villagers in Viet Nam and elsewhere tend to focus on short-term benefits. One of the most commonly asked questions in the pilot exercise was “when will we see some benefits” (and “how much”). This makes the timing of the FPIC process – and interpretation of the “Prior” in FPIC awkward. The process should be sufficiently in advance of any decisions or actions to honour the principle of “Prior”, but not so much in advance that the villagers lose interest and commitment. When REDD+ and FPIC are effectively mainstreamed into planning, this issue will disappear, but for starting up FPIC and REDD+, expectations of benefits will need to be carefully managed. In the REDD+ programme in Viet Nam, the concept of “participation payments” is being considered – for example, for inputs on participatory monitoring – and this might be a useful approach to generate modest but rapid benefits to local communities.



Please contact UN-REDD Viet Nam for the full report.

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