

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background and Rationale**

Nowadays, decentralization is a dominant theme in the discussion of policy of natural resource management in general, and particularly forest management. Decentralization has emerged as a major strategy for many national governments to achieve development goals, provide public services, and undertake environmental conservation (Agrawal and Ostrom, 2001). Governments believe that decentralization not only can improve service delivery by bringing decision-making and implementation closer to the target population, but also can cut the central government's costs and improve efficiency by reducing the size of the central bureaucracy (Dupar and et al., 2002).

In Vietnam, decentralization has occurred within special sectors such as forestry, agriculture, and so on (Dupar and et al., 2002). Decentralization of forestry in Vietnam can be traced back from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. Before the economic reform policy, popularly known as Đổi Mới (Renovation) that was initiated in 1986, forest management had been highly centralized. Under the Đổi Mới policy, the government has allocated forestland to households and individuals for planting both protection, and production forests since 1994. Management authority was directly transferred from the state to the households and individuals through the FLA policy. There are two main objectives of FLA policy. Firstly, handing authority of forest resource management over to local people, the state expects that local people will be able to obtain additional benefits generated by forest management activities and forestland resources. Secondly, by encouraging participation of local people in forest management, it is presumed that communities/villagers will be able to effectively manage allocated forests, which were formerly assigned to state forest

enterprises and others state agencies. Devolving rights to local people can bridge the gap between customary and statutory rights, heighten tenure security, and harmonize relations between government and local resource users (Meinzen-Dick and Knox, 2001).

Decentralization of forest management has taken place under two forms: deconcentration or administrative decentralization and political or democratic decentralization. Regarding the state administration of forest and forestland, the government has decentralized the state managerial responsibilities to the People's Committee (local government) at various levels (provincial, district, and commune), and assigned more tasks for government agencies at local levels. According to the Land Law of 2003, the PPC has the authority to allocate forest and forestland, and to issue LUC to organizations. The DPC has the authority to allocate forest and forestland, and to issue LUC to communities, households and individuals. Under FLA policy, the state allocates forest and forestland to households and individuals for stable and long-term use for forestry purposes for the term of 50 years. The forest or forestland recipients have rights, namely, the right to transfer, exchange, lease, inherit, mortgage, re-lease, offer land use rights, guarantee, and contribute money by land use rights. But at the same time, they must use forest and forestland with the right purposes that are stipulated by the FLA policy.

In Thua Thien Hue province, FLA has been initiated since 1995 through the implementation of project VIE/020/ITA (funded by the FAO). Thuong Lo commune of Nam Dong district was chosen as the pilot commune for the FLA implementation. Under this project, Nam Dong district's authority allocated "forestry land<sup>1</sup> without a forest cover" to households for reforestation. In 2000, the provincial authority has initiated a trial of allocating natural forest to the community and household groups. Thuy Yen Thuong village (Phu Loc district) was selected for this trial. Natural forest allocation has subsequently expanded to other communes, such as Loc Hoa (Phu Loc district), Huong Loc, and Thuong Quang (Nam Dong district) through the foundation

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<sup>1</sup> Forestry land is the land designated primarily for use in silviculture production, including land with natural forest, land under afforestation, and land used for forestry purposes such as afforestation, forest nursery, and protection for natural rehabilitation, forest enrichment and experimental research on silviculture (Article 43, Land Law of Vietnam, 1993).

of a SNVforHue (Dutch NGO) in 2003. Of these locations, Thuong Quang commune was chosen for this study. There are two main reasons for the selection of this research site. Firstly, Thuong Quang commune is in a remote area. More than 50 percent of its population is Cờ Tu people who have lived closely to the forest from time immemorial, while the above-mentioned communes are Kinh people, except Thuong Lo commune. Secondly, there has not yet been any deep research on forest decentralization in Thuong Quang commune so far.

## **1.2. Statement of Problems**

As with most ethnic minorities in the country, the Cờ Tu people living in Thuong Quang commune formerly lived inside the natural forest areas in high mountain locations. In the Cờ Tu's traditional society, land and forests are considered as common property (ghost forests, spiritual forests, watershed areas, etc.) or private property (land for shifting cultivation and gardens; and resident land). The Cờ Tu people used and managed this land and forest under customary laws. In the village's domain, natural resources are owned by community/village. A village patriarch served as a representative of villagers and was in charge of management of natural resources and social aspects, and solving problems which emerged within the village and between villages. The households/villagers owned as many plots as possible, but they were allowed to own only those plots that belonged to their village and that were not being used by other villagers. Meanwhile, forest products were considered to be open-access. Villagers gained benefit from forest through shifting cultivation, by collecting non-timber forest products and hunting, and by cutting solely timber for building houses and making coffins. The Cờ Tu's livelihood strategy has depended on natural resources. Their livelihood activities are mainly shifting cultivation, gathering, and hunting for subsistence purposes. Each villager must abide by the strict rules on rights and obligations of natural resources utilization and management, which are constructed by villagers. These rules are not only effective within the village, but also neighboring villages. Definition of ownerships is the foundation through which the community has effectively managed natural resources. Therefore, land and forest tenure conflict within a village and between villages seldom occurred.

After the liberation in 1975, upland areas were considered as potential regions for expanding agricultural production, and the government established Thuong Quang commune as a new economic zone. The government settled Co Tu people at the forest edges, and migrated Kinh people from the lowland to Thuong Quang. In addition, the state treated forests as a revenue resource and separated nature from the rural communities' livelihoods to meet the demands of a globalised timber economy by using scientific forestry (Lang and Pye, 2001). The government established State Forest Enterprises (SFE) in Nam Dong district (Khe Tre SFE and Nam Dong SFE), and assigned Khe Tre SFE to manage and utilize whole natural forest areas in Thuong Quang, the main task of which is logging. The Co Tu people no longer have the right of management and utilization of forest. They are not allowed to practice shifting cultivation. In this manner, the state tends to neglect the existence of the Co Tu people who have been living with the forest from time immemorial. Rather than be considered managers and protectors of the forest that they considered as their homeland, the Co Tu people were now illegally practicing shifting cultivation, and viewed as destroying the forests. As a result, conflicts of benefits from forests between villagers and Khe Tre SFE emerged.

Since 1994 the Khe Tre SFE has engaged the Co Tu people in forest protection activities according to their annual management plan through contract. Under this approach, the Co Tu's customary laws of forest management were ignored. The state made forests a commodity that is separate from rural societies, local knowledge systems, and livelihoods (TERRA, 2001). The heart of the policy on natural forest protection contract is that the state (Khe Tre SFE) hires villagers to protect their forests. Therefore, although Khe Tre SFE has contracted with villagers for forest protection, the contracted forests continue to be destroyed. There are two main causes: (1) contracts for forest protection are short term and unstable. The contracting budget completely depends on the annual plan of government and taxes from logging, and does not provide villagers with benefits. Villagers are not allowed to cut timber, hunt, or implement shifting cultivation, while Khe Tre SFE cut thousands of cubic meters of timber annually; (2) due to the shortage of production land, the Co Tu people continue to practice shifting cultivation in those forests. When the Co Tu people are resettled by the government, they are guided to cultivate wet rice by the government, although the area provided is small and its

productivity is very low. Furthermore, they are not allowed to use the forest for shifting cultivation and only receive small benefits from the forest through the forest protection contract with Khe Tre SFE (about 477ha of natural forest are contracted for 3USD/ha/year). The Cờ Tu people have confronted many problems such as losing rights of access to forest, shortage of land for production, poverty, and so on.

During the last decades, forests in Thuong Quang commune were degrading day by day and now much of the forest is poor or degraded. It was generally believed that the local peoples' control over forest resources would lead to sustainable forest and forestland management if their long-term benefits are connected closely with forests. The provincial government therefore has withdrawn part of the natural forest area of Khe Tre SFE to allocate it to household groups for a period of 50 years beginning in 2003. In this manner, the provincial government adopts FLA by allocating natural forest to households. There are various incentives to local governments for allocate natural forest to households and the community. According to Lung (2003), many provincial leaders have been seeking political, organizational, and social solutions in order to protect forests, including pilot allocation of natural forests to farmers. Looking at political aspects in FLA in Dac Lak province, Nghi (2002) pointed out that the provincial government has initiated a FLA pilot project because they not only try to protect forest resources due to internal and external pressure of environmental protection, but also to increase chances of promotion and to pursue political fame.

Previously, forests had been managed through contracts with villagers, although this was ineffective and contracted forest was still being destroyed. Now, forest management has shifted from contracting with villagers to allocating to villagers. In this context, a question is raised on what happens to forest management in the Cờ Tu ethnic community after forest decentralization. It not only depends on powers and rights that are given up, and accountability relations, but also depends on social relations among social actors. Discretionary powers give local people a reason to engage with the state and to begin demanding that decisions conform to their needs. However, in some cases, since new rights to exploit forests may be exercised with urgency by users who believe that the government will take these rights away in the near future, forest decentralization may cause over-cutting. For example, more



recently, exploitation has been intense under Indonesia's decentralization (Ribot, 2002a).

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The study tried to answer the following questions:

- (1) Why have local governments in Thua Thien Hue province adopted forest decentralization?
- (2) What have been the roles, incentives and capacities of various social actors involved in forest decentralization?
- (3) How has forest decentralization changed power, property and accountability relations among social actors in forest management?
- (4) How has forest decentralization shaped local forest politics in the Cờ Tu ethnic community?

### **1.4. Research Objectives**

- (1) To examine the specific conditions and processes in which local governments have carried out FLA.
- (2) To investigate the roles, incentives, and capacities of social actors involved in the process of forest decentralization at various levels.
- (3) To analyze the relationships between social actors under forest decentralization in terms of decision-making powers, rights given up, and accountability relations.
- (4) To contextualize changes in local forest politics in the Cờ Tu ethnic community under forest decentralization.

### **1.5 Conceptual Framework of Study**

Figure 1.1 shows the conceptual framework for this study. Decentralization is considered through multiple dimensions and scales.

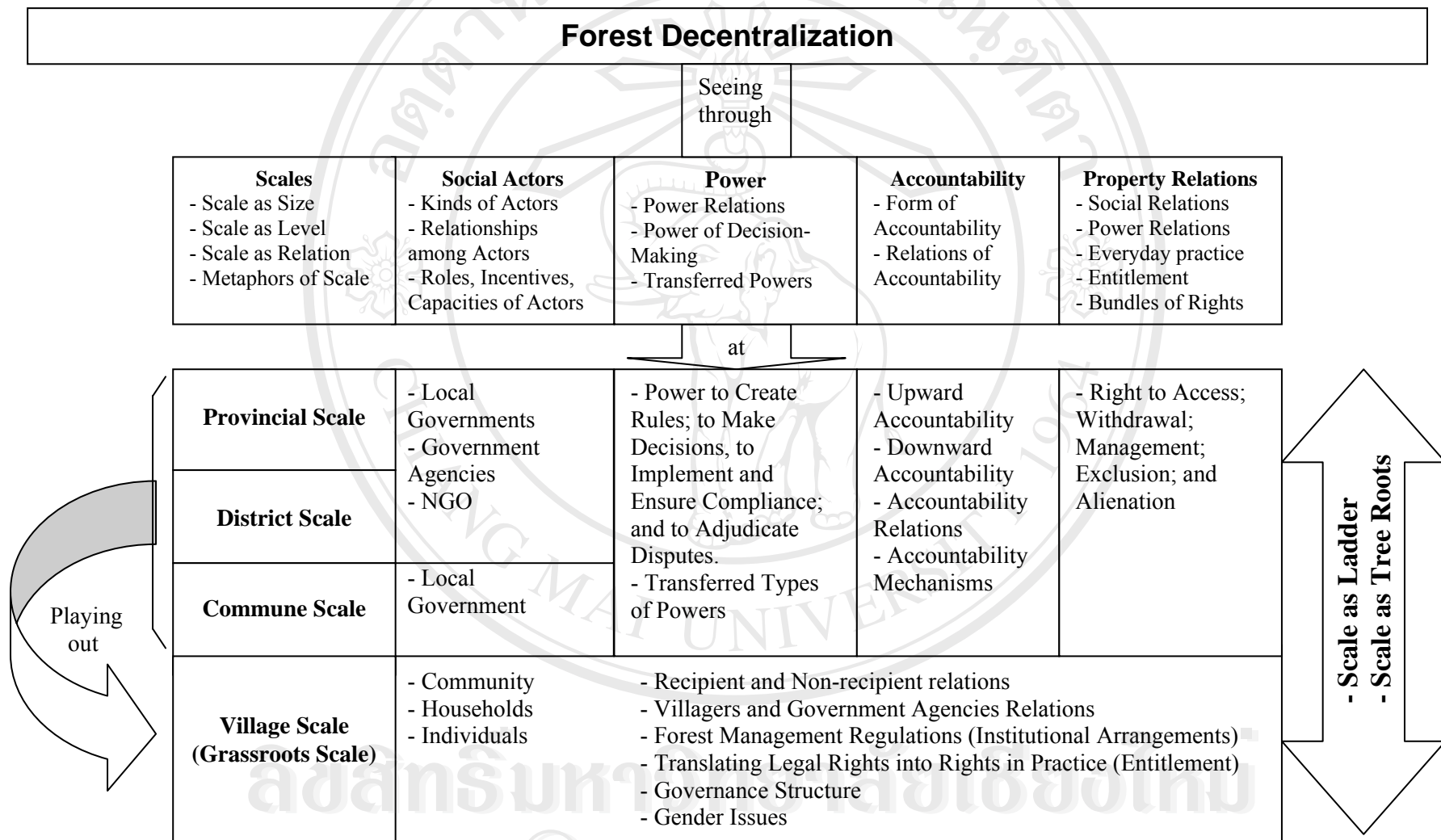


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The study's conceptual framework views the FLA as forest decentralization. Generally, the social actors involved in the FLA can be divided into four groups as follows: (1) User groups (community, household group, and household), (2) The local government (People's Committee) from the provincial, district and commune levels, (3) The government agencies from provincial and district level, and (4) NGOs and Projects. The institutional landscape in FLA includes both vertical and horizontal relations. The lower local government is administratively managed by the upper level according to strict principles (in this case, scales as ladder). Meanwhile, government agency is not only administratively managed by local government at the same level, but also is professionally managed by another at the upper level. Similarly, relationships between/among user groups and other social actors also consist of vertical and horizontal dimensions (in these case, scales as tree roots).

This framework consists of two halves. The upper half is useful to examine the FLA policy at provincial, district, commune, and grassroots (village) levels, in which focus is placed on the last three levels, because the FLA process mainly takes place at these levels. The lower half helps researcher to explore what happen to forest management in Cờ Tu ethnic community under FLA.

Given such a framework, I first identify social actors who are involved in FLA and examine how they have performed in the process of FLA at various scales with their roles, incentives and capacities. Those roles can be roles in decision-making, resource mobilization, rules enforcement, monitoring, and so on. Incentives can refer to costs (financial and opportunity costs), benefits (tangible and intangible), and property rights. Capacities can consider financial resources, human resources (labour, knowledge and skills).

Secondly, at the village (grassroots) scale, the FLA policy creates new social actors, so-called forest recipients and non-recipients. Therefore, it not only changes relationships between villagers, but also between villagers and other social actors. Additionally, translating legal rights into rights in-practice plays an important role, as it will determine whether or not the FLA policy is successful. Therefore, this study analyzes the local forest politics of forest decentralization by focusing on how social relations change in the Cờ Tu ethnic community in terms of power of decision-



making, accountability, property rights; how to translate legal rights into rights in practice; how to change the governance structure; and gender issues.

## **1.6 Research Methods**

### **1.6.1 Research Site Selection**

My research has begun since March, 2004. In order to choose my research site, I first reviewed secondary data about the FLA in Thua Thien Hue province since March, 2004. Thuong Quang commune was chosen for my study area for two main reasons as presented in the first section. Secondly, I visited seven villages in Thuong Quang commune in the process of selecting my research site.

Since my study focuses on changes in local forest politics in the Co Tu community under the FLA, the selection of research site was based on the following criteria: (1) all of the villagers are Co Tu people; (2) the community is poor and has long depended on natural resources (land and forest) for its subsistence, and without access to these resources the community would barely survive; and (3) the community has been involved in the FLA process, with this criterion including village with many forest recipients and village with few forest recipients. Among these villages, I have found that A Rang and A Ka villages met the above criteria to be a good example for my study. In the A Rang village, the forest recipients occupy around 88 percent (30/34 households), while in the A Ka village the figure is 12 percent (6/54 households).

### **1.6.2 Data Collection Methods**

The study collected both primary and secondary data. In order to obtain relevant data for the study, I have employed and combined several techniques that included secondary data review, interview, participation and non-participation observation, group discussion, household survey, and some PRA tools such as mapping, and wealth ranking.

Secondary data review was used to obtain information related to research issues, which were general socio-economic conditions, forestry policies, institutional landscape, and other aspects relevant to the study site. Secondary data was collected from various sources including statistical books, laws and legal documents related to forestry policy from local governments and state agencies; articles from journals and newspapers; and so on. In order to get information on Thuong Quang commune's socio-economic conditions, I first reviewed official reports of the CPC, then compared these with the yearly statistical books of the district. I obtained laws and regulations related to FLA policy from the Thua Thien Hue province's FDD. In addition, I also collected data on the FLA policy in Thuong Quang such as list of recipients, allocated forest area, the FLA implementation process, the administrative units that were established under the FLA, and so forth from the Nam Dong district's FPU, SNVforHue, and the Thuong Quang CPC.

In my collection of primary data, I employed and combined the methods as follows: key informant interview, household survey, group discussion, non-participant and participant observation, and PRA tools such as wealth ranking, and mapping.

In order to gather primary data, I first selected key informants. The selected key informants were divided into internal key informants and external key informants. Internal key informants consisted of village elders, village patriarch (traditional village headman), village headman, and heads of forest recipient groups. External key informants who involved in the FLA encompassed staff of FDD, FPU, Khe Tre SFE, NREO, ARDO, and SNVforHue and Chairman of Thuong Quang CPC, Commune's Cadastral Officer, Commune's Agricultural and Forestry Officer.

I used two types of interview: semi-structured interview (SSI) and in-depth interview. In SSI, questions are open-ended, and many questions were developed during the interview to obtain more relevant information. The in-depth interview is more informal with a few predetermined general topics. Interview, therefore, helped me to know the social phenomenon that unfolded as the informants viewed it, not as I viewed it.

In interviewing external key informants, I have learned their ideas and viewpoints about forest decentralization, and why they have supported the FLA

policy. In addition, I have also gained information concerning their roles, motivations, and capacities, relations between/among stakeholders involved in the FLA, as well as rights and obligations of recipients in principle. When I first interviewed external key informant, they only provided me with information regarding laws and regulations. After that, I visited them again and we informally talked. It was then that, I understood what they really thought about the FLA policy and what happened in practice under the FLA policy.

For my first visit to the village, I asked staff of Khe Tre SFE to accompany me, I met many difficulties when I talked with internal key informants, because I was considered as an outsider. The second time, I decided to visit the villages alone. I stayed one week in the village, trying to get acquainted with villagers and introducing myself and the purpose of my work. I first asked the village headmen and village patriarchs to introduce me to their villagers. I visited internal key informant families and several households and went to their forest (allocated forest) and we informally talked, thus I have established a good relationship with the villagers. Therefore, I obtained information related to history of community, customs, the relationship between the Co Tu people and forest, and so on. Additionally, I knew not only what types of rights they actually have in practice, but also changes in relationships between state agencies and the villagers, among villagers within village, and villagers of neighboring villages under the FLA policy.

I used group discussion method to address specific topics. I facilitated both forest recipient groups and forest non-recipient groups to discuss particular topics in detail, such as forest tenure, their roles, incentives and capacities when they were involved in FLA implementation process, rights and obligations of forest recipients in law and practice, and relationships between villagers and state agencies before and after FLA implementation. Such a method was useful in cross-checking the key informants' answers. In addition, I also used group discussion to evaluate roles of key social actors such as the CPC, village headman, village patriarch, and head of the recipient group. First, I facilitated participants to enumerate major activities in forest management, and then scored each activity from 1 to 100 according to its level of importance.

I applied a wealth ranking tool (one of the PRA tools) to know the economic status of households. Both A Rang and A Ka villages classified households into three categories: category 1 (better-off), category 2 (medium), and category 3 (poor). The wealth ranking criteria were defined by the village headman, village patriarch, group leaders, and householders that are representative of each group. These criteria included information about rice fields, shifting cultivations, home garden, food security, houses, furniture, income, and other salaries from the commune or retirement pension. Also the number of animal such as buffalos, pigs and chicken was used.

Mapping is a visual method that is conducted with a group. The headman of the village, old and young villagers (both men and women), and some heads of household were invited to participate in mapping. First, I facilitated villagers to draw a map of the village, and identify the location of households on the map. I, then, discussed with villagers about forest resources, cropping patterns, land use, and other social facilities in the village.

I used household survey to collect quantitative data such as the number of household members, labors, and information concerning livelihood activities at the household level. I randomly chose fifteen households (recipients), consisting of five households per category in A Rang village, and fifteen households (non-recipients), consisting of five households per category in A Ka village. In order to gather data from households, I first prepared interview guide for household survey and consulted my advisor. Secondly, I used this interview guide to interview the head and some members of the household.

Generally, my research problems were very sensitive issues. Therefore, non-participant observation and participant observation were used during the fieldwork. These methods allowed me to observe the activities of Co Tu people, to understand to some extent their beliefs, customs, and livelihood activities, and to acquire the feel of what happens in the community under the influence of the FLA policy. Additionally, they provided me with the opportunity to ask spontaneous questions to the villagers. In doing so, I gained a deeper understanding and cross-checked the collected information.

In the fieldwork stages, I stayed about three months in the village, where I talked with villagers, particularly in an open-ended and informal manner. Walkthrough and informal conversation helped me not only to acquaint myself with the research site and villagers, but also to obtain more precise information.

### **1.6.3 Data Analysis Methods**

As this is an explanatory study, the gathered data was analyzed and interpreted qualitatively and quantitatively, in which qualitative analysis was predominant, because most of the collected data was qualitative information. In order to answer research questions, the analysis of collected data was combined with a theoretical debate.

In order to answer the research questions and to meet the research objectives, I first analyzed the dynamics of Co Tu people's forest management through belief, customs, indigenous knowledge, and so on. Secondly, I concentrated on issues relating social actors involved in the FLA process by analyzing their roles, incentives, capacities, and their relations, as well as power of decision-making, and accountability relations. Finally, I analyzed changes in local forest politics under FLA policy through various elements such as rights and obligations of forest recipients, governance structure, gender issues, and so on. All of the findings are presented in narrative form.

In addition, quantitative methods were used for the calculation of some socio-economic index such as population, labor, and so on. Tables, graphs, diagrams, maps and photos were also used to illustrate research findings.

### **1.7 Thesis Organization**

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter I is as presented above. Chapter II provides the theoretical and literature review debate concerning the study. It incorporates three main concepts: (1) Dimension of decentralization, which is composed of four sub-concepts including the social actors involved in



decentralization, change in power relations, relations of accountability, and change in property relation; (2) Scale of decentralization; and (3) Everyday local politics.

The background of the study area and research site will be presented in chapter III. The first section is the geographical and socio-economic conditions of Thuong Quang commune-study area. The second section describes and compares the basic information about the research sites such as demographic characteristics, the ethnic identity of the Co tu and village history, village structure, household wealth, and so on. The third section concentrates on the Co tu's livelihood activities in A-Rang and A-Ka villages, including on-farm activities (shifting cultivation, wet-rice and crop farming, home-garden activities and animal husbandry), off-farm activities (hunting, trapping, gathering NTFPs and logging), and non-farm activities (employment and services). The two final sections present the Co tu's indigenous knowledge and customary law on land and forest management.

Chapter IV considers the FLA policy as decentralization in forest management. This chapter first reviews the evolution of forestry policy in Vietnam and the institutional framework of the FLA at a national/central scale. Secondly, it concentrates on analyzing the institutional landscape of the FLA in Thua Thien Hue province, as well as the FLA implementation process in Thuong Quang commune. Finally, it analyzes the roles, incentives and capacities of social actors involved in the FLA process.

Chapter V examines the changes in local forest politics of forest decentralization. This chapter is divided into two major parts. The first part defines local forest politics in context of Thuong Quang commune. The second one examines local forest politics of forest decentralization by focusing on (1) changes in relationship among social actors under the FLA in terms of transfer of powers and property rights, and accountability relations. (2) gaps between legal rights and rights in practice; (3) changes in local governance structure; and (4) gender issues.

The last chapter gives the key findings, theoretical discussions of findings, and recommendations. The recommendations consist of policy implications as well as suggestions for further study.