

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

This chapter concludes the major findings of the study by summing up what has been discussed in the previous chapters following the research objectives. Then the outcomes will be synthesized again with theoretical discussions to see the agreements and differences between the results and academic thought. In addition, policy implications, field obstacles, and recommendations for further research will be addressed.

6.1 The Major Findings of the Study

A village with its historically, socially, and ecologically unique aspects was illustrated. It has a rainy season and a dry season, frequent floods and storms, and a traditional landscape of rice fields, buffalo, and stacks of rice straw. It has its own traditional ceremonies and beliefs. Within the community, people have their own responsibilities according to their age, ability, and gender. Livelihood is mainly based on agriculture with a long history of change and adaptation. In the village, the mangrove forest not only plays a physical role as a natural barrier and provider of natural resources, but it is also a crucial part of their culture. The mangrove restoration project in Quang Phong Commune, from the Vietnam-America War until now, is an interesting case to study. This case clearly shows the relationship between politics and environmental knowledge and the relationship between nature and humans. The policy works differently in different contexts, and it has been affected by not only specific laws or governance but also by the way the policy is transferred to the grassroots level and the way those local people interact with their nature.

Firstly, in Vietnam, decentralization in natural resources management operated in 1990 after the Doi Moi policy. In theory, the project before Doi Moi policy was under the impact of a centralized approach; however, in reality, in both periods of time, these

projects brought out different ideas of what centralized and decentralized really mean and what kind of policy actually plays out on the ground. In the mangrove restoration project in 1978, the main participants are from the Phong Tan Veterans Association (old Quang Phong) and the Commune's Elderly Association, while the other villagers did practically no participation in the project. Conversely, in the new projects, participation seemed to be broader, but the participants were still chosen by the Farmer Association representative. Thus, the level of decentralization here in these projects seems to be different just in theory, but in practice, it depends on how local government embedded the policy into the context. If the local officer understood the policy in the right direction and he/she also knew the way to adjust it to the local context, decentralization seems work more effectively in the area.

Before and after Doi Moi policy, the projects seemed to have different results. Firstly, Vietnam, as a country, has a long history of rice paddy cultivation, in which people live in community and cultivate in groups as a collective action. In Vietnam before Doi Moi policy, local villagers still cultivated the same as the previous system. All of the paddy land belonged to the PTAC, and each person would get points according to their work. In the mangrove restoration project in 1978 used this agricultural cooperative system in an effective way and led to the active participation of the participants. In the project, all of the participants received the same amount of points as their work in the rice paddy fields. This meant that mangrove restoration activity was also a part of their daily livelihood.

In the later project after the Doi Moi policy, under the political and economic change, mangrove restoration in Quang Phong concentrated more in the conservation aspect more than the others aspects. However, in the new project, during the period of decentralization of natural resources, some villagers participated inactively without clearly understanding the purpose of the project, while others actively participated by applying their traditional way of mangrove planting in combination with new technology from the project. Additionally, there is still the problem of limited access to resources in the mangrove granted by property rights resulting from the forestry policy in Vietnam.

Secondly, mangrove forests are still not clearly classified in the law, and there is no law that refers to mangrove restoration specifically. However, nowadays, in the era of

climate change, there are some new documents that refer to climate change adaptation and realize the role of mangrove forests. When the power is transferred to different levels of administration, the understanding can sometimes become different, depending on how different institutions perceive it. Additionally, the decision-making process still lacks the engagement of lower institutions on the national mechanism scale. It is believed that decision-making processes should be on a balance between individual and group interests because institutions are organized by a group of individuals who have an interest in a specific topic. The case study also showed that historical context changed over time, and the political context also changed, leading to a change in the socio-economic context as well as the traditional culture. Political and ecological priorities cannot be separated. These factors affect the outcome of environmental projects, whether they are embedded into the social context or not.

Thirdly, participation of local villagers in projects has been affected by many factors. These include the understanding about local desires and respecting local knowledge, local livelihood and the role of the project leader. Additionally, the role of the village leader is really important in the local context. For example, in the case of the shrimp farm or in the case of raising awareness about mangroves, no one could do better than the village leader who was respected by local villagers and understood the context well. Mangrove restoration is a very complex process. It is not only about ecological restoration but also culture recovery, so that it needs to promote local autonomy in decision-making processes. Training and caring (tree tending) processes need to be considered more, also.

Lastly, scientific knowledge seems to be dominant in these projects, as environmental governance always considers this kind of knowledge more in mangrove restoration; whereas local knowledge is almost ignored in the policy. Local people use their traditional knowledge on environmental knowledge and livelihood strategies. They used mangrove forests as a source of their daily income, and they also used their knowledge to regenerate the forest during the mangrove restoration in 1978. They used their knowledge to calculate the time of tides and how to collect the seeds and seedlings. However, in the newer projects this knowledge is not considered as same as the previous one. There is no meeting for stakeholders to participate, and there is no discussion in the

decision-making process or implementation process. In this case, local knowledge can be a tool for negotiation with the government. Local villagers use their knowledge to identify the soil type, manage their crops, and predict the weather to decide the suitable time for harvesting. They use plant and animal behavior to know about the changing of weather or the coming of a storm. However, nowadays, because of the impact of overpopulation, the change of weather, this kind of knowledge need to be adapt to fix with the change. Under the new era, it is believed that local people can integrate their knowledge with scientific knowledge to negotiate a better outcome. Both kinds of knowledge seem to be in opposition with each other, but they are competing and intertwined simultaneously. Thus, a combination of both is the solution for new policy under changing environmental conditions. In this case, the role of local government is very important in connecting and interpreting policy into the local context.

One last point to mention here is the new findings found during the research. Firstly, the village headman and village board have more power than first presumed. They can construct the change and raise awareness of the local villagers by adopting the policy and introducing it into local context. The case of the shrimp farm concessions and mangrove restoration awareness showed this creative combination when the local villagers knew how to adopt new knowledge to deal with the change in environment and the law. When they cannot change the policy, they can adapt to it in their own ways. Secondly, some of the local villagers know how to negotiate by extending their network and adapting to changes, as in the case of the Farmer Association representative. They can also adapt using scientific knowledge and local knowledge, as in the case of the shrimp farmer planting mangrove trees. Lastly, the role of women in the area was not as expected; the fact that the project leader in 1978 was a woman who managed a whole team of elderly and veteran people was a surprise. Her role showed that the role of women is not always as a subordinate in comparison with men.

6.2 Theoretical Discussions of the Findings

The main argument of the research can be divided into three major points: decentralization, environmentality, and environmental knowledge. Firstly, this research takes a look at the level of decentralization and how local villagers are involved in the decision-making process and implementation process. Then, environmental governance

is considered in terms of access control and how different levels of understanding about the policy work in specific contexts. Finally, the study examines the type of knowledge that has been used in the projects and the capacity of a combination these types as a better solution in mangrove restoration. All in all, the study aims to discover how political context, socio-economic context and environmental context link together and how human-nature interaction works in the project.

At first, this research using the concept of decentralization of natural resources takes a look at both administrative decentralization and democratic decentralization. Decentralization, here, looked at transferring decision making authority (Meinzen-Dick and Knox, 2001; Chusak and Vandergeest, 2010) and how it also plays a part in which power is transferred from the state to lower institutions in their political administration processes (Johnson, 2001; Larson, 2008). However, decentralization is not a simple process, as many scholars have pointed out previously; it needs a connection among its components: social actors, power, and accountability. The involvement of all actors with a clear understanding of the power in the decision-making process and with accountability upward and downward will help decentralization work effectively. In the study, the fact is that decentralization in mangrove restoration is conducted in only administrative decentralization and democratic decentralization is just a theory. In addition, the central government transfers the power (rights) of forest use to the lower levels of administration, not directly to the villagers. The power of decision-making processes and implementation processes are limited and depend on the local authority. Although the previous project in the past was successful in terms of autonomy participation thanks to the work of former local government officer, in general, local people have no chance to participate in the decision-making process. It is believed that democratic decentralization aims to increase local people's participation in local decision-making processes (Ribot, 2002), however, in this case, this kind of decentralization seems to have failed in reality. Thus, it would be better if the policy maker can consider a pre-meeting with all stakeholders before the implementation of the policy or projects.

Additionally, in terms of the aspects of power relations and property rights access in decentralization, this study showed that the central government recently has transferred

more power to the local government but not the local people. The Land Law and Forestry Law have been amended many times in order to open more freely transferring of power. The local government has more power to control the forest; however, the power seems to stop at the Commune administration level, and the power just transfers to the powerful people in the community, such as village headmen or Farmer Association representatives. However, the local government officer comes from both government election and villagers' election, so that there is still a potential solution for undertaking the problem of decentralization. In the case of Vietnam, a bottom-up policy is still a goal that feels like a long way away to reach. It is really difficult to change the policy making mechanism. However, as has been pointed out above, the power of local government is quite strong in the local context. Therefore, in relation to mangrove restoration and other related policies, if the local government can apply their power suitably into local context, decentralization can really work in the lower level. At this level, some of the local officers are villagers and some of them are outsiders. When these officers work in harmony together, the result is the combination of local and scientific knowledge for greater efficacy of mangrove restoration.

Moreover, the understanding of environmental governance, such as the Forestry Law, Land Law or mangrove restoration specifically, by people at different administration levels is very different. There is an ambiguous understanding about the law and rights to access the forest. Villagers' rights to access the forest have been limited by the local administration level, and they do not know exactly which law applies to the current project. On the contrary, local administrators understand the general idea of the policy, and the officer who is in charge of the project at District level understands quite clearly what the policy aims to achieve in the project. In addition, the understanding about mangrove restoration and government policy is different between the older generation and younger generation of villagers. The way each interpret a problem is different. Their experiences are different. In relation to environmental governance, their inclusion in dialogue with other stakeholders such as policy makers and policy implementers, will enhance understanding of on-going policies and projects. Additionally, the villagers should conduct their internal meetings as a means of the continuance of learning and sharing among generations. The utilizing of their internal power with the support of external source can be considered as a suitable way for any problem solving solution.

In the theoretical review in chapter 2, a link between ecological and historical contexts of the problem is mentioned. The study showed that both these aspects govern the environment. Mangrove restoration is under the control of government policy, and this policy is under the impact of history. One more thing is that the mangrove is an ecosystem, and the environment here is governed by both history and ecology. People and nature are interacting with each other, and nature is socially constructed. The policy is under the control of the state, but when it comes to the specific context, it has been affected by the culture and the local people there. In this case of mangrove restoration, the interaction obviously exists. Additionally, local knowledge is situated (Nygren, 1999) in the study site. At first glance, the local knowledge seems to have disappeared, but in reality, it has merely changed and adapted to the new era of development. That is simply a process of nature under the effect of economic change after the Doi Moi policy. Local knowledge here in mangrove restoration is used as a tool of environmental conservation in the past and as a tool for livelihood strategy. . Under the development era, the scientific knowledge will contribute the state-of-art of knowledge for the villagers and local officers. Alongside of this, local knowledge plays as a tool to justify the local context. Development comes with cost and benefits, and each kind of knowledge cannot stand alone in the era of development. Thus, both kinds of knowledge can be contested and intertwined for a better solution for not only environmental purpose, but also for developing livelihood strategies under the economic development era in Vietnam.

Finally, this study showed that the concept of the politics of scale is shaped by the understanding of different actors and how they shaped the scale of decision making processes. The different views about mangrove restoration among different stakeholder's changes the direction of mangrove restoration from what the central government had first imagined. At the ground level, mangrove restoration still looks at the conservation aspect and almost forgets the need of local people. As a result, mangrove restoration does not meet the desired outcome of the project. Therefore, it can be seen that a policy problem needs to be considered not only in the root of problem, but also all the way of its process from decision-making all the way through to the implementation and evaluation stages.

6.3 Policy Implications

Based on this research in mangrove restoration in Village 6, the problem between policy and reality has been maintained in the way stakeholders understand the policy and how it works in reality. The difference in understanding causes the difficulty of obtaining results. The role of local government should be taken into account in a way that allows the state to understand the local context and for local people to understand what the purpose of the policy is and the right direction for implementation.

Additionally, the role of NGOs here seems to still be limited in this area. There has been only one small project conducted by Denmark Red Cross through the invitation of the local government in 1992, whereas, the biggest mangrove restoration project in the Central Coast of Vietnam was conducted in Ha Tinh Province with more than 7000 ha in a joint partnership among Denmark, Belgium, and the United Kingdom Red Cross for a period of five years and with more than 80% of trees having developed well until now. In Thua Thien Hue Province, there are varieties of mangrove restoration in Tam Giang Lagoon with the joint efforts among local government, NGOs, and local people, such as the ADAPT projects in Con Te, Huong Phong, Thua Thien Hue since 2008, the WWF and Nokia project with more than 23,000 trees being planting since 2011, or the JICA projects in Tam Giang Lagoon. In these projects, NGOs seem to play a role of mediator who can understand the policy and can also work closely with local people, reducing the gap between policy and reality. It is believed that each area has its own characteristics and knowledge, so what is needed is the understanding from policy makers about the decision-making and implication of processes.

Mangrove restoration projects should find a way to reduce the cost of planting by using the combination of local knowledge and scientific knowledge and concentrate more on the caring process because mangrove ecosystems take time to be restored. Therefore, caring processes play a crucial role in the rehabilitation.

One more thing, it would be better if policy makers put their position to local people in the decision-making process in order to think more clearly about the costs and benefits for all stakeholders. Put another way, local people's livelihood strategies need to be considered more in those projects for a better long-term outcome.

6.4 Research Challenges and Further Recommendations

Firstly, the study was conducted in Village 6, Quang Phong Commune, Quang Binh Province, Vietnam. In the study site, the mangrove restoration projects have been conducted officially since 1978 under the government afforestation policy. This Commune is one of the pilot mangrove restoration during the 1980s. However, because the first project was conducted by the Elderly Association almost 40 years ago, the variation of meetings with the villagers who directly participated to the projects was very difficult to conduct. However, thanks to my network set up during the fieldwork, I did meet with some people who involved in the first project, such as the planter, the Former Chair of the People Committee, and also Former QTFAE officer who was in charge of the project at that time. Although the number of key informants was limited, the information was really useful for my research because they are the key people in the previous project who are deeply entwined in the project itself.

Secondly, the statistic record was not kept well according to the timeline of the projects. In addition, the organization who is in charge of the project had changed due to political restructuring, therefore it took me a very long time to collect all of the data through different levels of administration as well as academic institutions in order to get the essential data for my research.

Thirdly, as an outsider who does research in a very religious area, at the very beginning I had some difficulties in making people share their stories and the village's story about the mangrove forest and related aspects in their lifetime. Fortunately, thanks to a letter of recommendation from DPF, the support from my gate keeper, and my efforts during my two visits, we got closer, and it was easier for me to talk with them naturally about their daily life through their lifetime stories. In addition, although my study is related to mangrove restoration, there is no mangrove restoration project at the time of my fieldwork in 2014 because the last one had concluded (2011 to 2013). However, based on my previous experiences in ADAPT mangrove restoration project in Thua Thien Hue Province and my interaction with local people in the study site, the limitations were reduced in some aspects.

Last but not least, due to time and budget limitations, my study was limited to one commune. However, in practice, the mangrove restoration project is carried out in different places in Vietnam, with various stake holders as well as different contexts. Therefore, the findings of the research are limited, especially in terms of scale. However, thanks to the similarities in political and socio-economic contexts, as well as geography characteristics, the study can be considered as an example for further study about mangrove restoration in the Central Coast of Vietnam.



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