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Sustainable Land Use and Rural Development in Mountainous Regions of Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Rapid population growth reinforced by policy-induced migration (resettlement policies, demarcation of conservation areas, construction of dams) has increased the pressure on land in the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia to an extent that degradation processes take on self-escalating dynamics with declining soil fertility and agricultural productivity pushing people into more poverty, and poverty leading to reduced fallow periods and degradation of natural resources. The Uplands Program (Sonderforschungsbereich 564) wants to contribute to a better management of natural resources and to an improvement of rural livelihoods in these mountainous regions of northern Thailand and northern Vietnam. Through the Program's participatory approach the priorities of the stakeholders involved in the management of natural resources and in rural development processes will be integrated. Participation, sustainability and interdisciplinarity are central components of the Research Program.

The Program focuses on two main research fields mutually interlinked: sustainable land use and sustainable rural development. The basic hypothesis is that sustainable land use can only be achieved if off-farm employment is created and an appropriate institutional framework is designed.

Research on sustainable land use concentrates on the stabilization of land use systems in mountainous regions requiring a system approach encompassing an entire watershed area. The research field comprises three project areas: soil, water and energy conservation, bio-diversity in agro-eco systems, plant and animal resources and sustainable and integrated production systems. Research on sustainable rural development focuses on analysing opportunities to better integrate sustainable land use systems into the regional development process. By elaborating appropriate technologies for the local industrial processing of agricultural products as well as by designing suitable institutions and policy measures, the evolution of sustainable land use systems and agricultural practices will be supported. Processing and marketing of agricultural products and rural institutions and policies are the main research fields.

The Program is set up to cooperate with the Chiang Mai University and the Kasetsart University in Thailand, complemented by Maejo University and Silpakorn University. In Vietnam the Program cooperates with the Hanoi Agricultural University, the Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry and the two science institutes: Vietnam Agricultural Science Institute and the National Institute of Animal Husbandry. In addition, the Program cooperates with many bi-lateral and international research programs in both countries.

Keywords: Rural development, sustainable land use system, Southeast Asia, SFB