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Human-ecological Investigation on the Land Use of Flowery Hmong to Overcome Poverty: a Case Study from Lao Cai Province, Vietnam

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Abstract

In the context of the economic renovation, Vietnam has transferred land-use rights from state and cooperative units under central planning to individual, community and other entities with market orientation. Despite remarkable success in lowland agriculture the advancement within the uplands stays behind the political targets. These regions are predominantly inhabited by ethnic minority groups. The relative isolation from the markets, the ethnic group and location specific customary and subsistence oriented livelihood on the one hand and state claims to implement the governmental forest land-use policy and management on the other hand cause particular problem situations of the local human ecosystems.

This ongoing study examines current land-use systems and seeks to find out potentialities to harmonise the relevant legal regulations with the customary land-use management. Arguments should be elaborated for the continued rural development adopting both the state land-use policy and customary land-use management. In a selected village area the mosaic of land utilisation is analysed from the viewpoint of the villagers, Flowery Hmong, and of the management board of the 661 project which is striving for afforestation/ greening of state claimed protection forest land.

The analysis adopts the 'Human Ecosystem' model as developed by Machlis et al. (1997). It combines 'critical resources' of both the social and the ecosystem and puts them in relation to attributes of 'social order', 'institutions', and 'cycles' of the social system. A tool mix of the RRA approach was used to collect mainly qualitative primary data. The results show the land-use system in the village area and influencing endogenous and exogenous factors. Among them the first ranking is to secure sustenance of the villagers. Furthermore, the results enlighten the current conflict on land and forest utilisation. This has been caused by the governmental land area claims for the 661 project not taking into account the locally available resources for making a living. It is concluded that real participatory land use planning and land allocation could facilitate local people based land and forest land resources management.

Keywords: Customary claims, Market orientation, Participatory planning, Self-sustenance, State land-use policy