



Tropentag, October 9-11, 2007, Witzenhausen

“Utilisation of diversity in land use systems:
Sustainable and organic approaches to meet human needs”

Forestland Management by the Hmong Ethnic Group for Sustainable Livelihood in the Northern Uplands of Viet Nam

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Abstract

The current forest policy in Viet Nam pursues to improve livelihood of rural populations. Essential tools are devolution of forest management to none-state entities and governmental programs/projects to restore the forest cover. However, conflicts over tenure and use of forestland between local people and state institutions have continued and even have been entailing.

This study is conducted to deepen understanding of the customary use and management of forestland of the Hmong ethnic group and to examine governmental reforestation programs. Arguments for policy-makers and programme implementers will be identified in favour of sustainable utilisation and management of forest land resources. The ‘Human Ecosystem’ model by Machlis et al. (1997) is adopted to conceptualise the research. A set of methods including Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Land use inventory, and Forest inventory is applied to collect both qualitative and quantitative data in the selected study village and area.

Results of the study show the particularities of the customary claim for forestland and the use of forest resources as they are timber exploitation, fuelwood and NTFP collection, spiritual ceremony, etc. of the villagers in their living territory. Main uses of the variety of collected forest products are to fulfil local subsistence needs. Owing to the spiritual belief, customary tenure and rules, and traditional and none-traditional institutions the uses of forest are strictly regulated resulting in the locally designed development of forest management. The governmental Land Use Planning and Reforestation Project 661 have been planned and implemented following top-down approach by state institutions missing coordination with each other as well as compatibility with and involvement of grass root level planning. Yet, the existing conflicts over the use of forestland between villagers and the governmental policy implementers (e.g. Forest Protection Unit, Management Board of Project 661) turn out in threats for sustainable management of forest resources. It is expected that following the cycles of conflict and cooperation can harmonise the interests of the involved stakeholders channeling co-management of forestland resources for sustainable improvement of livelihood of the local population.

Keywords: Conflict cycle, customary rules, customary tenure, forest policy, forest landuse, human ecosystem, subsistence