



Tropentag, October 6-8, 2009, Hamburg

“Biophysical and Socio-economic Frame Conditions
for the Sustainable Management
of Natural Resources”

Interrelation Between Customary Forest Use by Hmong People and Governmental Forest Project in Vietnam

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Abstract

Numerous ethnic minority groups have been living on the uplands of Vietnam for a long time. Understanding of forest use by these ethnic groups and appropriate decision-making are crucial for improvement of forest management intervention. This study looks into forest use by the Hmong people and a governmental forest project in Vietnam. The Human Ecosystem Model is employed to frame the study. In three sedentary Hmong villages a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, such as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Forest Inventory and Household Survey, is used to capture required data. The findings show forest uses by Hmong villagers serving preferably for their subsistence. Uses of the forests customarily claimed by households, clans and village as a whole are strictly regulated by customary tenure, customary rules, and traditional/village institutions rather than by formal tenure, rules, and institutions. The government's forest project which still has been planned and implemented following technocratic approach has not shown results as what were expected, but entailed conflicts between the state and the villagers over the forest resources. It is concluded that elements of the local human social system, particularly customary social order and traditional/village institutions, have to be taken into account in the government's forest project. Tripartite project planning that involves Forest Department, local people and a mediator has been elaborated as a potential means to harmonise the governmental intention with customary use of forest resources. By making use of the Human Ecosystem Model or human ecosystem approach, local-specific strategies of sustainable use and management of the forest resources fulfilling both state's and local people's agenda are able to be worked out.

Keywords: Customary Rules, Customary Tenure, Forest Conflicts, Forest Project, Forest Resources, Harmonisation, human Ecosystem, Traditional Institutions