



Tropentag, October 5-7, 2011, Bonn

“Development on the margin”

## Local Soil Knowledge in Vietnam’s Northern Mountainous Region: A Case Study among Different Ethnic Groups

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### Abstract

In the last decades the world-wide demand for agricultural products increased strongly caused by population and wealth increase. Due to its rapid growth of population and economy within the last 20 years Vietnam is a good example for this process. Agriculture was intensified and expanded into fragile agro-ecological areas like the northern mountainous region (NMR) involving soil degradation by erosion and depletion as well as deforestation. The greater part of the population there belongs to ethnic minorities. They live mainly from farming and rank among the poorest people in Vietnam. So they are hit hardest by the mentioned problems.

Local soil knowledge is seen as a key factor to develop sustainable agriculture. Therefore this study is supposed to figure out the local soil knowledge among different ethnic minorities in Son La province in NMR. Six villages in Yen Chau district were selected, two of them inhabited by H’Mong minority, two by Black Thai, one by both, H’Mong and Black Thai, and another by Black Thai and Kinh majority. For all villages socio-economic and pedological data were already available from subprojects of the SFB 564 (Sustainable Land Use and Rural Development in Mountainous Regions of Southeast Asia). The socio-economic data was used to figure out influences to local knowledge like ethnicity, access to markets, education or wealth. The pedological data will help to explain local soil types and their properties from the soil-scientific point of view.

The local knowledge was collected by workshops based on “Participatory Rural Appraisal”. In each village one workshop was held which was split in three parts: the first with older farmers, the second with younger farmers and the third as combination of both groups with discussion of the results, creating a local soil map and a transect walk. This should reveal the knowledge flow within the villages and the impact of events during the last decades.

By this methods the soil classification system of the people in the NMR, reasons for their classification, its impact on their farming and their awareness of impacts of land use intensification on soil properties and productivity were analyzed.

**Keywords:** Ethnopedology, local knowledge, Vietnam