

The Role of NTFPs in a Shifting Cultivation System in Transition –

A Village Case Study from the Uplands of North Central Vietnam

- For centuries, shifting cultivation has been the most common agricultural system practised by ethnic minorities in the uplands of Mainland Southeast Asia (Kundstadter 1987)
- The traditional practice of shifting cultivation is being replaced with more intensive and market-oriented systems resulting in extensive changes in land use and land cover (Fox 2000)
- Paddy rice cultivation (composite swiddening), animal husbandry, plantations of industrial crops
- Implementation of government policies, economic development, market integration, improved infrastructure and a dubious reputation are major drivers behind the agricultural transformation (Rasul & Thapa 2003; Padoch 2003)

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A transformation of a system based on shifting cultivation...



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...to a system integrating paddy rice cultivation



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- In the Vietnamese uplands, the implementation of the Forest Land Allocation policy causes severe changes in land use and land cover (Castella et. al 2005)
- Three major objectives of the policy:
 - 1) Fixed settlement of ethnic minorities to reduce SC
 - 2) Protection of forest resources
 - 3) Development of plantations to improve living standards
- The transition phase involves several risks for the shifting cultivators
- Land allocation process forces villagers to adopt shorter fallow cycles on a limited area close to the village – reduces production of hill rice, which leads to more hardship and poverty – resource depleting strategies are adopted (Foppes et al. 2004)

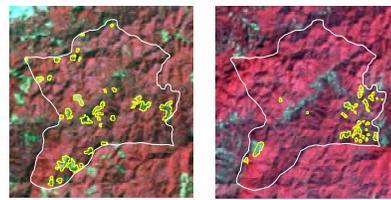
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What role do NTFPs play during this transformation ?

- Periods characterized by agricultural change and transition are often connected with insecurity regarding food production
- NTFPs may play an important buffer role during the process of change - source of food products and income that farmers temporarily can fall back on (Byron and Arnold 1997; Scherr et al. 2003)
- Quantities consumed may not be great in comparison to the main food staples, but NTFPs are used to avoid dietary shortfalls during particular seasons in the year
- The importance of NTFPs often lies more in its timing than in its magnitude – increase flexibility of rural livelihoods

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- In Que village, the Implementation of the Forest Land Allocation Policy in 1998 has reduced the area under SC (from 92 ha in 1991 to 43 ha in 2003)
- Rice production has decreased from 1840 kg rice/household in 1991, to 1100 kg rice/household in 2003 (even when paddy rice cult. and alluvial agriculture is taken into account in 2003)



1991 (92 ha, 50 househ.) 2003 (43 ha, 69 househ.)

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- Even though paddy rice cultivation is initiated in 1999 to compensate, the natural setting prevents sufficient rice production (lack of suitable land and water)
- Farmers sell livestock to generate income – but incomplete
- The collection and sale of NTFPs provides an important economic supplement to the income
- Sale of bamboo shoots in July to September before the harvest of upland rice in October and November – especially crucial for those households not engaged in paddy rice cultivation



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