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INCLUSION OF MINORITIES IN PUBLIC LIFE
IN LAOS, THAILAND AND VIETNAM

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1. Ethnic compositions in Laos, Vietnam and Thailand

Conventionally, the population of the Lao People's Democratic Republic is divided into four very broad categories, each of which corresponding to an ethnolinguistic family: the Tai-Kadai family, who account for about 66 % of the total population; the Austroasiatic family, divided between Mon-Khmer and Viet-Muang speakers and accounting for about 23%, and the peoples from Tibeto-Burman (2.7%) and Sino-Tibetan (7.4%) ethnolinguistic families, who account for about 10%; the remaining 1% of the population is made up of ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese populations) (Bounthay and Taillard 2000). However, depending on the system of classification, the number of ethnic groups in Laos can greatly vary. Thus, while the latest Lao population census (2000) shows 49 groupings; a recent survey revealed 236 ethnic groups (Chamberlain et. al.1996). The ethnic Lao proper, the socio-politically dominant group, comprise perhaps 35% of the total population and are distributed in the lowlands, primarily along the Mekong and Nam Ou rivers. Other lowland areas are inhabited by ethnic groups related to Lao who speak a variety of Tai-Kadai languages. Members of the Austroasiatic family, generally acknowledged to be the original inhabitants of the country, are found throughout the country in both upland and lowland environments. Tibeto-Burman speakers arrived recently from south-west China, while the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) peoples, likewise recent arrivals, came from southern and south-east China. These latter two families are confined primarily to highland areas in the northern provinces.

Table 1. The ethnic groups of Laos

I.   Lao-Thai/Tai Kadai : 8 groups

Groups	Subgroups
Lao	Phouan, Kaleung, Bo, Yooy, Nyo
Phuthai/Phu Thay	
-Tai	Tai Dam, Tai Deng, Tai Khao, Tai Moey
Lue	Keun
Yuan	Kalom, Ngiau
Saek	
Yàng	
Thai Neua/Tay Neua	

II.   Mon-Khmer : 32 groups

Kmmu/Khmou	Kmmu Ou, Kmmu Lue, Kmmu Nyouan, Kmmu Khrong, Kmmu Rok, Kmmu Kwène, Kmmu Mè, Kmmu Kasak, Kmmu Cheuang
Plai/Prai/Pray	Thin
Sìngmun/Ksing Moul	
Phong	Phong Piat, Phong Lane, Phong Fène, Phong Chapouang
Thaen/Thène	
Idu/Oe Du	
Bìt	
Làmet	
Samtao	Doi
Kàtang	Pha Keo
Màkong	Trouy, Phoua, Maroy, Trong
T'li/T'ri	
Tà-Oy	
Y'lù/Y'rù/Jrou	Jrou Kong, Jrou Dak
Tlieng/TriengTriang	
Yàe	
Làvi	
Blao/Brao	Kavèt, Halang
Kàtu	Triu, Dak Kang
Oy	Sapouan, Sok, Inthi
Klieng/Krieng	Chatong, Ko'
Sàdang	Kayong, Sadang Douan
Lalàk/Raràk/Halak	
Suay	
Khmer	
Pàkò	Kado, Kanay
Tùm	Liha, Thay Cham, Thay Pong
Nguan	
Mon	
K'li/K'ri[1]	Maleng, Mlabri
Chéng	

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[1] 'K'ri is one language that belongs to the Vietic (or Viet-Muang) subgroups.

III.　Hmong-Mien/Miao-Yao: 2 groups

Hmong	
Iumien	

IV.　Sino-Tibetan: 7 groups[2]

Akha	Akha Chi Cho, Akha Pouly, Akha Pana, Akha Fé, Akha Nou Kouy, Akha Louma, Akha Oe Pya, Akha Mou Chi, Akha Ya Oe, Akha Kong Sat
Sìngsili	Phou Yot, Tapat, Ban Tang, Cha Ho, Lao Xeng, Phay (Phong Saly) Lao Pane, Phong Kou, Phong Set
Lahu	Lahu Dam, Lahu Khao, Kouy
Sila	
Hayi	
Lolo	
Hor	

Sources: Assessment of the ethnic groups' names in the Lao PDR accepted during the Lao Front for National Construction meeting on 13–14 August 2000 in Vientiane, personal communication; World Bank (2002); Bounthavy and Taillard (2000).

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[2] The Sino-Tibetan language family consists of two families: Sinitic (Chinese) and Tibeto-Burman. Most of the languages in this family in Laos belong to the Tibeto-Burman familiy, the only exception are the Chinese Ho.

The ethnic Kinh, the lowland Vietnamese majority, account for approximately 85 % of the population in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). The remaining 15 % belong to one of the remaining 53 ethnic denominations listed in the 1999 census (see Table below). According to this national survey, the ethnic groups in Vietnam, officially named after 'national minorities', are distributed between two ethnolinguistic families of very different sizes: the Austro-asiatic linguistic family and the Malayo-Polynesian linguistic family. The former includes the Viet-Muong (to whom belong the ethnic Kinh) and the Mon-Khmer groups, as well as the Hmong-Yao, the Tay-Thai and the Ca Dai groups, although the last three populations are not known to speak a language of Austro-asiatic origins (we have followed here the Vietnamese official spellings). On the other hand, the Malayo-Polynesian ethnolinguistic family is comprised of four ethnic minority peoples only and merely accounts for 1% of the population. There are two main upland minority areas in Vietnam: one is on the northern border extending to the northwest of the country. Here the highlands are dominated by various Tai groups, along with Hmong, Yao, and various Mon-Khmer speaking peoples. Most of these groups, except for the Mon-Khmer, came from China and in that sense are not considered as indigenous minorities. The people of the Central Highlands[3], generally Austronesian or Mon-Khmer speakers, however, more properly fit the term indigenous peoples. They are commonly acknowledged to be the original inhabitants of the mountainous regions in south-western Vietnam.

The system adopted for the Lao and Vietnamese censuses appears to attempt to follow the Chinese practice of amalgamating ethnic groups of a common family or subgroup under a single term thereby reducing the total number of groups. The Marxist-Leninist regimes of China, Vietnam and Laos all sent their cadres to the highland areas to list the populations and to collect data dealing with the material aspects of their lifestyle in order to promote the ethnic groups under a so-called supra-national culture. Ethnographic studies and censuses reflected indeed the belief that cultural recognition would narrow the gap between peoples. An 'ethnic group' in these countries accordingly may be defined as a fixed entity, upon which is imposed a set of characteristics that have been accepted as 'correct' and sufficiently distinctive. That seems to be in effect the basis for an 'ethnic group' to appear on the Lao and Vietnamese census lists.

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[3] After 1975, the area was renamed after Tây Nguyên, or "Western Plateau". The Central Highlands officially include the four provinces of Kontum, Gia Lai (Pleiku), Dac Lac (Buon Ma Thuot) and Lâm Dông (Da Lat). But many of the Annam Cordillera upland areas, or Truong Son, and their indigenous populations are located on other provinces bordering these four.

Table 2. The ethnic groups of Vietnam

Official name	Language group	Language family	Approximate population size (1999)
1. Kinh (Việt)	Viêt-Muong	Austro-Asiatic	65,795, 718
2. Tày	Tay-Thai	Austro-Asiatic	1,477,514
3. Thái	Tay-Thai	Austro-Asiatic	1,328,725
4. Mừờng	Viet-Muong	Austro-Asiatic	1,137,515
5. Khmer	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	1,055,174
6. Hoa	Sinitic/Han	Sino-Tibetan	862,371
7. Nùng	Tay-Thai	Austro-Asiatic	856,412
8. Hmông	Hmông-Dao	Austro-Asiatic	787,604
9. Dao	Hmông-Dao	Austro-Asiatic	620,538
10. Gia-rai	Malayo-Polynesian	Austronesian	317,557
11. Ê-dê	Malayo-Polynesian	Austronesian	270,348
12. Ba-na	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	174,456
13. Sàn Chay	Tay-Thai	Austronesian	147,315
14. Chăm	Malayo-Polynesian	Austronesian	132,873
15. Cơ-ho	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	128,723
16. Xơ-đăng	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	127,148
17. Sán Dìu	Sinitic/Han	Sino-Tibetan	126,237
18. Hrê	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	113,111
19. Ra-glai	Malayo-Polynesian	Austronesian	96,931
20. Mnông	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	92,451
21. Thổ	Viêt-Muong	Austro-Asiatic	68,394
22. Xtiêng	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	66,788
23. Khơ-mú	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	56,542
24. Bru-Vân Kiều	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	55,559
25. Cơ-tu	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	50,458
26. Giáy	Tay-Thai	Austro-Asiatic	49,098
27. Ta-ôi	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	34,960
28. Mạ	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	33,338
29. Gié-triêng	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	30,243
30. Co	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	27,766
31. Chơ-ro	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	22,567
32. Xinh-mun	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	18,018
33. Hà Nhì	Tibeto-Burman	Sino-Tibetan	17,535
34. Chu-ru	Malayo-Polynesian	Austronesian	14,978
35. Lào	Tay-Thai	Austro-Asiatic	11,611
36. La Chí	Kadai (Cơ Lao)	Austro-Asiatic	10,765
37. Kháng	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	10,272
38. Phù Lá	Tibeto-Burman	Sino-Tibetan	9,046
39. La Hủ	Tibeto-Burman	Sino-Tibetan	6,874
40. La Ha	Kadai (Cơ Lao)	Austro-Asiatic	5,686
41. Pà Thẻn	Hmông-Dao	Austro-Asiatic	5,569
42. Lự	Tay-Thai	Austro-Asiatic	4,964
43. Ngái	Sinitic/Han	Sino-Tibetan	4,841
44. Chứt	Viêt-Muong	Austro-Asiatic	3,829
45. Lô Lô	Tibeto-Burman	Sino-Tibetan	3,307
46. Mảng	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	2,663
47. Cơ Lao	Kadai (Cơ Lao)	Austro-Asiatic	1,865
48. Bố Y	Tay-Thai	Austro-Asiatic	1,864
49. Cống	Tibeto-Burman	Sino-Tibetan	1,676
50. Si La	Tibeto-Burman	Sino-Tibetan	840
51. Pu Péo	Kadai (Cơ Lao)	Austro-Asiatic	705
52. Rơ-măm	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	352
53. Brâu	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	313
54. Ơ-đu	Môn-Khmer	Austro-Asiatic	301
55. overseas origin			39,532
56.Unidentified			1,333
Total			**76,323,173**

Sources: Neejfes et al.(2002); *Ethnic Minorities Populations in Viet Nam: 1979,1989 and 1999*, **www.undp.org.vn/projects/vie96010/cemma/vie96010/populations.htm (accessed on 20 January 2003).**

Thailand is also a land of cultural diversity. However, all the censuses since the 1920s have shown very little ethnic diversity for the simple reason that Thai population surveys do not include ethnic self-identification in their criterion. Yet, the Thai ethnic group (speakers of Standard Thai, central Thai and southern Thai, but excluding Sino-Thai and Thai Muslims) merely make up half of the total population. The country has indeed distinctive ethnic and ethnoregional minorities. By "ethnoregional", one means cultural differences that are commonly acknowledged to define one specific region of the country rather than a distinctive people (Keyes 1997: 213). This is the case of two Tai-speakers minority groups, namely the Isan people from North-eastern Thailand and the Khon Muang from Northern Thailand. These two peoples account for approximately 23% and 9% of the population, respectively. Another people with distinctive cultural differences are the Thai-speaking Muslims, some of whom identify themselves as Malay. A majority of them live in the southern and southernmost parts of the country, while the rest resides in Bangkok and in areas around Bangkok. The Thai Malay in southernmost provinces and the Thai Muslims in Central and Southern Thailand comprise about 2% of the total population each. The Chinese (speakers of Chinese languages) and those of Chinese origins (also identify as the Sino-Thai or *lūk cīn* (literally "Chinese children") and speakers of Thai language) form a urban-based minority in Bangkok and in other provincial towns. The two groups account for approximately 11% of the population.

However, the only peoples who have been subjected to policies that are explicitly based on a recognition of ethnic difference are those who have been labelled as "hill peoples" (*chāo khao*). The term "hill peoples" or "hill tribes" came into official use in 1959 when the Thai government set up a special committee to deal with the "hill tribe problem". The upland peoples were indeed perceived at that time to pose a threat to Thailand's national security. Nine ethnic groups have been officially identified as "hill tribes" and granted a legal status: the Hmong/Miao (Green and White Hmong), Mien/Yao, Lahu, Lisu, Akha, Karen (Sgaw and Pwo), Lawa/Lua', Htin/T'in and Khamu/Khmu. However, several other minority groups, especially those locating in the areas that border on Laos and Cambodia and in some southern parts of the country, get no official recognition (such as the Kui, the Khmer, or the Mon). Most of the peoples included under that category are settled in the upland areas of northern Thailand; however, some are also found in the western hills along the border with Burma. Those highlangers that are being categorized as "Hill Tribes" are also usually divided into two types of shifting cultivators: secondary forest and primary forest swiddeners (Delang 2002: 490). The first group include the Karen and the Lua, and account for about 362, 000 people (Goudineau and Vienne 2001). They traditionally have practiced the rotational shifting cultivation system. The primary forest swiddeners, or pioneering shifting cultivators, include the Hmong, Lahu, Yao, Akha, H'Tin and Lisu, and are numbered about 346, 000 people (Goudineau and Vienne 2001). These 'hill tribes' form a population of between 600,000 and 700,000 people, or about 1% of the total population (Keyes 1997; Schliesinger 2000, Goudineau and Vienne 2001).

Not all those designated as 'hill peoples' are indigenous minorities. The Lahu, Akha, Lisu, Yao and the Hmong have all ancestral links with China. The three Tibeto-Burman-speaking peoples (the Lahu, Akha and Lisu) came through the Burmese Shan states in the late nineteenth century from China's Yunnan province. The two Miao-Yao-speaking peoples (the Hmong and the Mien) probably penetrated into the lands tributary to Siam in the early 1880s. On the other hand, the Austroasiatic (of the Mon-Khmer division)-speaking peoples (the Lawa, Htin and the Khmu) are commonly considered as being the modern inheritors of the indigenous culture of not only northern Thailand, but also of adjacent areas of Burma, Southwest China, Laos and northern

Vietnam (Walker 1992). The case of the Karen-speakers, the largest single ethnolinguistic minority group in North Thailand (around 350,000 people); the next most numerous hill people, the Hmong, constitute perhaps a third of this number (around 112,000), is more difficult to assess. Although local Karen legends maintain that they were here before the arrival of the Tai in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries C.E, specialists have been so far unable to confirm or to disprove this view.

Table 3. The ethnic and ethnoregional groups in Thailand

Category	Location	Number	Percentage
Thai (speakers of Standard Thai, Central Thai, and southern Thai, but not including Sino-Thai or Thai Muslims)	Throughout the Country	29,700,000	49.5
Ethnoregionally distinctive Tai-Speakers - Northeastern Thai (Isan, Lao) - Northern Thai (Khon Muang, Yuan)	NortheasternThailand Northern Thailand	13,680,000 5,400,000	22.8 9.0
Religiously distinctive Tai-speakers - Thai Muslims	Central and southern Thailand	1,200,000	2.0
Chinese and Sino-Thai - Chinese (speakers of Chinese languages) - Sino-Thai (*lūk cīn*) (speakers of Thai)	Bangkok and other urban areas	4,620,000 2,160,000	7.7 3.6
Thai Malay	Southernmost provinces	1,140,000	1.9
Other distinctive indigenous minorities - Khmer and Kui (Suai) - Hill peoples (*chao khao*) - Mon	Borderlands with Cambodia Mainly northern Thailand + small numbers along the border with Burma Central Thailand	1,320,000 600,000 less than 60,000	2.2 1.0 less than 0.1
Other distinctive minorities (Vietnamese, Indians, Burmese)	Bangkok and northeastern Thailand	120,000	0.2
Total		≅**60,000,000**	**100.0**

Source: Keyes (1997)

Table 4. "Hill Tribes" of Thailand

Official name	Population (1995)
Karen	321,900
Hmong	124,211
Lahu	73,252
Akha	48,468
Mien	40,371
Htin	32,755
Lisu	27,899
Lawa	15,711
Khmu	10,153
Total	**694,720**

Source: Tribal Research Institute, Service and Publicity Section, Chiang Mai, 1995

2. Constitutional recognition for specific rights ?

Throughout the Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (1991) reference is made to the multi-ethnicity of the population of Laos. The Party's belief in the construction of a polyethnic society is still clearly emphasised in the preamble, which opens thus : « The multi-ethnic Lao people have existed and developed on this beloved land for thousands of years ». Nevertheless, only a single article specifically comments on the ethnic minorities. Article 8 commits the state to promoting "unity and equality " among all ethnic groups , which have the right "to protect, preserve, and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation". The state is also committed "to gradually develop and upgrade" the socio-economic conditions of minority groups and "[a]ll acts of creating division and discrimination among ethnic groups are prohibited.". Apart from these provisions, no special constitutional status is granted to ethnic groups with regard to their parliamentary representation. Indeed, the Lao government's minority policy has consistently been not to differentiate between ethnic groups. For example, the creation of nationality minority zones was neither promised nor realised in Laos, unlike in China; rather, the long-standing principle is that of "unity on the basis of equality" with the integration of the minorities into the political, social and economic life of the country.

In 1992, the Minority Policy was recast to include all of the ethnic minorities in the country and is entitled, *Resolution of the Party Central Organization Concerning Ethnic Minority Affairs in the New Era.* This is the foundation of ethnic minority policy today. The overall policy concerning ethnic minorities focuses on the following:

- The Strengthening of national sentiment.
- The Realization of equality between ethnic minorities.
- Increasing the level of solidarity among ethnic minorities as members of the greater Lao Nation
- The Resolution of problems of inflexible and vengeful thinking, as well as economic and cultural inequality.

- Gradually improving the living conditions of the ethnic minorities.
- Expanding, to the greatest extent possible, the cultural heritage and ethnic identity of each group as well as their capacity to participate in the affairs of the nation.

With respect to education, that same Resolution stressed that the network of formal primary education should be expanded to guarantee that all children of school age attend school. In addition, the policy calls for a revival of the "ethnic youth" schools in mountainous areas, which were in place in liberated zones during the war, with the condition that quality should be emphasized. It is pointed out that minority children have the same rights to education as other children in the lowlands and cities. A detailed plan for teacher training is called for, directed at the ethnic minorities in remote areas, together with a policy and the personnel for its realization. Here, most importantly, the mandate is given for the relevant organization to urgently research the writing systems of the Hmong and the Khmou using the Lao alphabet as was formerly used in the old liberated zones for use in areas occupied by these ethnic minorities, to be studied together with the Lao language and alphabet.

The Vietnamese communists' minority policy was very similar to the People's Republic of China's model. Article 3 of the amended 1960 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam reiterated the policy of autonomous zones for territorially-based minority groups (The Constitution of Viêt-Nam: 1946-1959-1980-1992: 42-23). After their victory over the French, the Vietminh rewarded its minority supporters by creating in 1955 and 1956 two Autonomous Regions - respectively, the Tai-Meo zone in the Northwest and the Viet Bac zone in the Northeast. However, the reunification of the country in 1975 heralded a return to the minority policy of the 1946 Constitution which had made no mention of self-determination. Thus, ignoring the provisions of the 1960 Constitution, the government announced on December 29, 1975, its decision to dissolve the Autonomous Regions.

Since then, the Vietnamese state has continuously applied a policy of formal recognition of ethnic equality. In contrast to a neighbouring country like Thailand, Vietnam attributes full citizenship to its ethnic minority peoples as stated in the current 1992 Constitution and in the legislation. One article (Article 5, Chapter One) refers specifically to the "national minorities". It again stresses the "unified State of all nationalities living on the territory of Vietnam" as well as promotes "a policy of equality, solidarity and mutual assistance among all nationalities, and forbids all acts acts of national discrimination and division." In addition, and more importantly in terms of concrete policies of ethnic equality, it emphasises that "every nationality has the right to use its own language and system of writing" as well as "to preserve its national identity, and to promote its fine customs, habits, traditions and culture." Finally, the Constitution calls for a policy of socio-economic development that should aim to "gradually raise the material and spiritual living conditions of the national minorities."

Like in Laos, ethnic minorities in Vietnam have no specific rights with regard to political autonomy. However, as prescribed in Article 36 of the Constitution, the state is also committed to develop preferential treatment towards ethnic minorities, such as in health and in education (for example, the creation of ethnic minority boarding schools (like in Laos) and lower entry requirements and quota for minority children) through "priority investment… reserved for educational work in the highlands, in regions inhabited by national minorities and in regions encountering special difficulties" (*1992 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*, www.vietnamembassy-usa.org/learn/gov-constitution.php3, accessed on 15 November 2002).

THAILAND

The Thai Constitution adopted in 1997, and also called "People's Charter", contains several sections that stress the principle of non-discrimination towards ethnic minorities. These sections are the following:

- Section 28: "A person can invoke human dignity or exercise his or her rights and liberties in so far as it is not in violation of rights and liberties of other persons or contrary to this Constitution or good morals…"

- Section 30: "All persons are equal before the law and shall enjoy equal protection under the law. Men and women shall enjoy equal rights. Unjust discrimination against a person on the grounds of the difference in origin, race, language, sex, age, physical or health condition, personal status, economic or social standing, religious belief, education or constitutionally political view, shall not be permitted…"

- Section 38: "A person shall enjoy full liberty to profess a religion, a religious sect or creed, and observe religious precepts or exercise a form of worship in accordance with his or her belief; provided that it is not contrary to his or her civic duties, public order or good morals."[4]

- Section 46: "Persons so assembling as to be a traditional community shall have the right to conserve or restore their customs, local knowledge, arts or good culture of their community and of the nation and participate in the managementm maintenance, preservation and exploitation of natural resources and the environment in a balanced fashion and persistently as provided by law."

Beside these provisions, the Thai Constitution also stipulates an extensive range of rights that every "Thai people" should benefit from, such as the rights for 12 years of compulsory and free education (Section 43) and for public health service (Section 52), the freedom of speech (Section 39), association (Section 45), movement (Section 36), and of forming a political party (Section 47) (*Constitution of The Kingdom of Thailand*, www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd, accessed on 27 January 2003). However, the lack of citizenship for many members of ethnic minority groups, despite for some of them having settled in Thailand for several generations, deprives them of those rights. This issue will be discussed below.

3. Ethnic minority policies: dilemmas between state development and cultural diversity

LAOS

For the government of the Lao PDR, rural development should be permanent, sedentary and environmentally friendly, as well as include commercially oriented cultivation. Since the Fourth Party Congress in 1986, the reduction of shifting cultivation has been one of the Lao government's major priority programs. Reiterating this emphasis in the Resolution of Rural Development (1994), the reduction of shifting cultivation has again been brought to the fore in

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[4] It is not specified what "good morals" refer to, though.

rural development strategy, and is inextricably linked with other Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) programs. There are, of course, no laws or policies that overtly or directly seek to prevent economic development for ethnic minorities in the Lao PDR. There are, nonetheless, indirect or unforeseen problems which have emerged as a result of well-intentioned programs and policies, in particular the policies of land-forest allocation and of resettlement.

Most of the country's ethnic minorities live in upland areas and practice some form of shifting cultivation. The practice of shifting cultivation, both pioneering and rotational, is sustainable when the demographic density is low[5]. Rotational shifting cultivation with a proper fallow period of 10 to 20 years even ensures higher yields than many cases of lowland production. It has been estimated that for densities of between 12 and 15 persons/km², the practice of shifting cultivation is durable, i.e. no significant degradation of the soil/yields and re-growth of forest cover –for a density up to 12 persons/ km² in the latter case (Chazée 1994). But with the increased population pressure and the transition to the market economy, this form of agricultural system appears increasingly unsustainable. Clearly, the program for reduction/stabilization of shifting cultivation partly derives from the concern for preservation due to perceived ecological and economic problems arising from shifting cultivation activities[6]. In addition, increased pressure on potential swidden land also stem from a demand for exportable timber. Indeed, the export of timber and timber products is a major source of income[7]. The restrictions on swidden agriculture have not been imposed purely in response to ecological concerns but also because of the government's immediate need to export timber products and to preserve existing forest for eventual exploitation.

As a matter of fact, the difficulties with the policy to "stop slash-and-burn cultivation" seem to be a problem of terminology. Swidden cultivation is usually broadly classified into two types: rotational (*hay moun vian*) and pioneering (*hay leuan loy*). In practice, the government treats differently the two types of shifting cultivation. Thus, while the pioneering shifting cultivation is clearly seen as potentially more damaging for the environment - it is this term that is used in the Socioeconomic Development Strategy and Five-Year Plan (GOL 2001), which should be eliminated; the sedentary or rotational mode of cultivation is more or less indulged. Indeed, the authorities have realised that the objective of eradicating shifting cultivation is unlikely to be

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[5] The rotational shifting cultivation system involves rotating the fields that belong to the village territory rather than moving the villages. After a few years of cropping (generally one to three years) the fields are left fallow for long periods, during which the villagers will clear a new field that will be in time 'abandoned' as well. This clearing process will continue until the farmers return to the original field whose regeneration has been completed, and a rotational cycle is thus achieved. The pioneering type of shifting cultivation requires that the highlands (e.g., tops of mountains, upper watersheds and uplands) are clear cut and cultivated for several seasons until the soils are depleted. Unlike secondary forest swiddeners, pioneering or mobile farmers never return to previously cultivated fields and seek out either primary forest or relatively long secondary growth forest for the next cycle.

[6] A number of studies have been conducted to assess the rate of deforestation in Lao PDR. However, the variation in methodology makes comparisons difficult. The recent estimates on forest cover range from 53% (FAO, 1995) to 40 % (Forest Cover Monitoring Project (FCMP, 1997) (FCMP/GTZ, 1999). Detailed studies on the causes of deforestation are lacking, but FCMP data shows that during the 1993-1997 period, areas covered by forest were converted to following land uses: wood and shrubland (25%), shifting cultivation (63%) and permanent agriculture (12%). Clearing of dense forest[6] (5%) is rare. Almost all deforested areas (95%) had been degraded before they were cleared (FCMP/GTZ, 1999). In Lao PDR, conversion of forest to wood and shrubland is usually caused either by forest fire or clear-cutting of sites for future hydropower reservoirs.

[7] Laos has increased exports of woods and wood products to the point where it was the primary source of foreign exchange in 1998, accounting for $US 115.4 million (34,3% of total exports), followed by garment exports ($US 70,2 millions/20,8% of total exports) and sales of hydrolectricity power ($US 60,7 millions/18% of total exports) (*The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Profile 2001. Cambodia; Laos*: 73).

achieved. Accordingly, the term "stabilization" has replaced the one of "eradication", while some shifting fields are now euphemistically reported as being *souan* (gardens) rather than *hay* for non-rice crops. While tolerated however, it is felt that this agroecosystem should evolve towards more commercially oriented cropping. Only in this way could such cultivation receive official recognition as "permanent production" (According to the Instruction on Land-Forest Allocation for Management and Use issued by the MAF (No.0822/AF, August 1996), the land type bearing permanent production areas includes paddy field, construction area and garden land (*souan*)) as opposed to "shifting cultivation." Therefore it is assumed that the intent of the policy was to control only the pioneering practices. The difficulties, therefore, appear to be the result of communication problems between the agricultural and forestry specialists at the Central level, and those at provincial and district levels (World Bank 2002: 41).

Land-forest allocation program

The land-forest allocation is based on the concept of permanent agriculture. The program primarily targets lands that do not bear a permanent production, which complies with the objective of discouraging shifting cultivation. Indeed, the program of land allocation is viewed as a major instrument for stabilising this agricultural practice. On the contrary, paddy field lands – as well as construction and garden areas (banana, sugar cane, fruit trees, etc.)- are not subject to re-allocation since they are classified as permanent production, i.e., a permanently settled agricultural system combined with a diversified, commercial (or partially commercial) and environment-friendly production. The key principle of the land allocation appears to be the maximization of the relation between the size of the land allocated and the capacity to produce and the income resources of the household (ILO 2000).

Effects of land-forest allocation on indigenous livelihood

The worst problem has been reduction of fallow periods. In most cases fallow periods are restricted to an average of 3-4 years[8]. Land allocation was not envisioned as a policy that would shorten fallow cycles, but because of implementation by unqualified district officials this was the end result, causing considerable environmental and agricultural damage to the areas affected. Up to 3 fallow periods of 3-4 years each, the soil is still fertile and allows enough amounts of yields to ensure food subsistence. However, when the land is cultivated more than 3 times, rejuvenation of biomass and soils is insufficient to regenerate proper forest. More intensive cropping of these sloping lands with little soil amelioration and an inadequate time for soil rejuvenation, facilitates declining fertility and destruction of soil structure, thus reducing crop yields. Accordingly, increased lack of cover and soil damage leads to erosion. In addition, the local authorities face the shortage of available suitable land to allocate, especially in mountainous zones in northern regions. Meanwhile, among those families who have been given paddy land, a majority of them find them unproductive due to poor soil or inefficient or non-existent irrigation schemes. Villagers also have difficulty in adapting to their new environment, speaking nostalgically of the great diversity of crops and forest products in the upland plots compared to the relatively monotonous environment of the paddy.

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[8] In the northwestern provinces of Oudomxay and Louang Namtha, the fallow cycle was limited to 3 years –though, fallow of 6 or 8 years were still tolerated; in Louang Prabang, Xieng Khouang and Houa Phanh, it was restricted to 4 years. But this data may be outdated (Chazée 1994). However, it is almost certain that the duration of the fallow periods have not been increased as regards the actual government policy.

Technical assistance is also lacking to support either paddy or permanent upland cropping. The land-forest allocation programme indeed suffers from a lack of Government qualified personnel as well as from a poor implementation, involving biased administrative practices by local authorities and lowlanders clearing land only to gain title to uplands. These practices have forced villagers to travel to remote areas to create swiddens in forested areas non-exploited or inaccessible by officials. The result has been impoverishment of swidden families through decreased rice yields and increased deterioration and degeneration of wildlife and forest resources by families attempting to compensate for rice shortages. Worse, villagers criticise the land-allocation as not only unfair but also as being one of the main causes of poverty[9] (measure of which is primarily based on the degree of rice sufficiency and number of livestock, especially cows and buffaloes) (ADB 2001).

Land traditional use vs. State land allocation

Due to language and cultural differences, especially relating to traditional perceptions of land and its use, many of these ethnic groups do not really understand the land-forest allocation process, and thus do not fully participate in it. For instance, the rule that divides the forestland within the village territory into different categories appears rather arbitrary while one is aware of the multiple aspects that trees may represent in local people's beliefs. Thus, for the Katu, the trees have spirits that the villagers must not discontent because the latter hold the decision whether to let them work the field they have cleared. Likewise, lands, which have not been processed by human beings, must obtain the spirits' approbation before being occupied. Indeed, spirits must agree to leave the place and let the villagers live on it. Without their agreement, the population cannot go and organise the location for fear that the spirits might provoke some disasters.

It is important to point out that, during the stage of settlement, there are as many rites and criteria of selection as there are minority groups. Traditionally, within most ethnic groups, there are clearly proscribed rules of behaviours for the use of shifting fields and plots over time. For example, the Poussang group in the district of Namo (Louang Namtha) first search for a place with a forestland in the east, and not in the west (prediction of sickness), and a location in the west for the cemetery. The land must be at an altitude higher than 900 m, the soil must be fertile and bamboo shoots in abundance for housing construction. Secondly, the site must be validated through a religious test, which consists of placing three seeds of rice in a small hole, then covered by a boil for a few hours. One seed represents the population, the second one animals and the third one vegetable production. If one of them disappears or has moved, the village will not choose the place (Chazée 1997). On a different level, given their migratory way of life and their social organisation that is based on a strong patrilineal clan system, the Hmong essentially rely on the clan solidarity when they want to move to another place. Accordingly, a household wishing to move to some other areas will always contact clan relatives in the settlement of their destination and negotiate with them about the proposed relocation, as the latter will act as sponsors for the new arrivals.

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[9] The other causes of poverty identified are: natural disasters, man-made traumas (poor implementation of projects and programs, including those of the Government) (ADB 2001: xiv).

Resettlement Policy

A remarkable pioneering study on the impacts of the government's resettlement policy on the relocated villages has been conducted in 1996 by a team of five researchers under the supervision of Yves Goudineau, an anthropologist, in collaboration with the Department of Non-Formal Education of the Ministry of Education[10]. The study covered six provinces: Luang Namtha, Oudomxai and Xieng Khouang in the north; Attapeu, Saravane and Sekong in the south; including twenty-two districts and sixty-seven displaced villages; with around a thousand families interviewed.

As the main report points out, population shifts are not a new phenomenon: they occurred in the past with the semi-nomadic or nomadic agricultural practices, or due to seasonal migrations for labour work; until the arrival of the French in the nineteenth century which were the first to attempt to control the population by 'fixing' them. But the successive wars in the twentieth century - the Indochina War and especially, the American War - brought about considerable migrations of thousands of families entrapped between the two zones of influences. After 1975, the population relocations, however, were no longer caused by circumstantial events, but fully included within the government's national planning for rural development. At present, the fundamental difference between the past movements and the current resettlements is the government's will to definitely sedentarise the highland villagers in specifically targeted lowland areas.

Resettlement is the government response to the conflict between swidden farming and state interest in forest resources. It is thus promoted as a means for general economic development and is also used (though not acknowledged) as a mechanism for control or surveillance of politically suspect minority groups. But, the policy has also clearly an ideological purpose, i.e. to integrate ethnic minorities into the national culture. The Iresons, thus, bitterly concluded as early as 1991 that "the resettlement becomes another means by which ethnic minorities are Laoized as they are 'developed' " (Iresons 1991: 935-936). The (explicit as well as implicit) objectives of the resettlement policy echo cultural losses noticed in the relocated villages, and mentioned in the 1997 Goudineau report:

> The most obvious signs of cultural rupture caused by relocation are given by the development of houses and the evolution of dress. The adoption of Lao Loum style dwellings (houses on stilts designed to accommodate, on average, one family) is strongly encouraged in the new villages by the local authorities, who provide advisors to explain how to build houses or construct an example house for the village chief. The new habitat, while having some advantages (in terms of hygiene and light) is often at odds with the architectural and social traditions of the hilltribes who are used, for example, to long houses (able to house up to a hundred people) as some southern austro-asiatic groups are (in Sekong, Saravane), or built on the ground houses as are the Miao-Yao of the north. The difference is not merely technical but signifies the loss of an ancient architectural skill or art …

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[10] Goudineau Yves (ed.), *Resettlement & Social Characteristics of New Villages. Basic needs for resettled communities in the Lao PDR. An Orstom Survey*, UNESCO, 1997. The work was commissioned by UNESCO and partly financed by UNDP, New York.

(Goudineau 1997: 35)

A resettlement to the lowland areas undoubtedly leads the upland families to break with their natural environment and cultural habits. While swiddening is a sustainable way of livelihood in a context of low population density, these bio-cultural complex systems are extremely fragile in the face of economic, social and cultural changes[11].

Education

The 1995 Census data show that 23% of the Lao never went to school as compared with 34 % for the Phu Thay, 56 % for the Khmu, and 67 % of the Hmong. Among two of the smallest ethnic groups, 94 % of the Akha and 96 % of the Lahu never attended school. Approximately 50% of the population speak Lao as their first language. Data provided in Annual Bulletins report enrolments by geographical (lowland, foothill, mountains) distribution rather than by ethnic or linguistic grouping. Thus, it is difficult to determine access and equity by ethnicity using the Ministry of Education statistical data. However, since many ethnic minority populations live in remote mountainous regions where provision of schools and teachers is more difficult, one can assume that ethnic minorities have reduced access to schooling partly because of their geographical location. Another important deterrent to education is the need for children to work with the family.

Topography and livelihood are not the only factors that explain the very low ethnic minority children's school attendance; language and cultural barriers also put constraint on these children's opportunities to have access to formal school curriculum. The development of ethnic minority boarding schools, under the Government's strong impetus, all of which located in lowland areas and close to urban zones, show that taking children where the services and infrastructures are, without qualified personnel and proper assessment, is not the best alternative either[12]. The objectives of these boarding schools are not solely to provide education and upgrade their levels to be equal to the rest of population, but also to give opportunities for these children to pursue higher education, to train government's employees and to have student acquainted to urban lifestyle. These boarding schools' curriculum is identical to the nation-wide curriculum. Teachers are, however, mostly Lao speakers. For instance, Ms. Chathala, a trainee expert of Ecole Sans Frontières, an NGO involved in education development projects in Laos, never taught students of Lue, Akha, Lantène, Khmu and Tai Dam origins and did not speak any ethnic minority language either; hence, the challenge for her and for the students to communicate as neither of them speak the other's language. In addition, the materials she used were not handy and insufficient in quantity. Besides, "some groups do not want to leave their homes because they are afraid that the government would take them away from their friends and families" added Ms. Chanthala (ILO 2000). But the worst problem for these children is the loss of their social and cultural environment. These boarding schools confront them in a rather abrupt manner with the mainstream cultural norms to which they are obliged to conform (such as wearing school uniforms, obeying strict schedules, adapting to the urban lifestyle); hence, a high-level of drop-outs.

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[11] However, it is essential to bear in mind that resettlement situations are diverse: For example, it is very difficult to assert that a relocation has been voluntary or not since within a same village, divisions and disagreements are frequent.

[12] Three ethnic minority boarding school in Oudomxay, Savannakhet, and Champasak, are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education; several others are under Provincial Education Offices' authority.

VIETNAM

In Vietnam, ethnic minority peoples comprise about 14% of the population but account for 29% of the poor (Neefjes et al. 2002: 1). Despite government considerable investment in the provision of social services in mountainous areas to support the development of the ethnic minority population, poverty, conflicts over land and resources, lack of medical services and illiteracy are still pervasive in those areas. The cause of the failure of upland development policy, as many observers have pointed out, lies in the inadequacy of the lowland-defined model to the highland environment, which reveals the government's ethnocentric attitude towards rural development (. Although a significantly larger proportion of ethnic minority population lives in the northern mountains (9.3% of the total population), the percentage of poor households among minority groups of the Central Highlands (2.8% of the population) remains higher (only reducing from 92% to 91% between 1993 and 1998, while for the northern highland minorities, the percentage moved from 84% to 73%). Meanwhile, the per capita expenditure of the Central Highland minorities was reduced from 50% of that of the general population in 1993 to 39% in 1998 (see table below). Also, in terms of the human development index, the Central Highlands region is lagging behind the rest of the country. For example, in 1989 life expectancy for the Jarai group was 54.4 years, 13 years less than the life expectancy of the majority, the ethnic Kinh people, despite the Constitution's provision that stipulates a preferential treatment in health care for ethnic minorities (An Independant WriteNet Researcher 2002: 11).

Table 4. Key indicators for majority groups, 1993 and 1998, based on Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VLSS) data

	Poverty headcount (% of people)		Expenditure/capita '000 dong, 1998 prices		Household size		Sample size (weighted)		% of population
	1993	1998	1993	1998	1993	1998	1993	1998	
Vietnam overall	55	36	2,043	2,751	4.97	4.71	4,799	5,999	
Kinh	52	30	2,105	2,899	4.86	5.36	4,145	5,030	88.8
Hoa (Chinese)	11	8	3,843	5119	6.55	6.12	89	121	2.0
Khmer	70	57	1,521	1,882	5.44	6.17	89	122	2.0
Central Highland Minorities	92	91	1,021	1,090	6.28	6.68	103	167	2.8
Northern Highland Minorities	84	73	1,323	1,594	5.33	5.88	373	560	9.3

Notes:
1. Central Highland minorities: Ede, Hre, Koho, Raglai, Bahnar, Sedang, Gietrieng, Ma.
2. Northern Highland minorities: Dao, Hmong, Muong, Nung, Tay, Thai, San Diu, Dan Chay, Tho.

Sources: Neefjes et.al. 2002: 5; from: Baulch et al., 2001 (VLSS93 and VLSS98).

Education and language policy

In addition, the educational facilities in remote areas like the Central Highlands remain insufficient, although enrolment rates for primary schools have increased in ethnic minority areas. A 1999 survey on primary school and lower secondary school enrolments disaggregated by ethnic group shows that more than 60% of minority children (boys and girls) in the Central Highlands go to primary school. However, that percentage drops with regard to lower secondary school attendance: the enrolment rate is on average 11.3% for minority children in the Central Highlands against 64.8% for Kinh Children (Neefjes [*et. al.*]: 6). Moreover, primary education is almost exclusively performed in Vietnamese throughout the country, including in the areas inhabited by ethnic minority peoples. In other words, despite the right of education in mother tongue being stressed in Article 5 of the Constitution, bilingual education is still very much an exception and has not gone beyond the stage of experimentation. As a matter of fact, the lack of education services in the pupils' own language and script is a major cause for minority children's high level of drop-outs at an early stage. Furthermore, not only multilingual schooling is practically absent from the curricula, but the authorities also have to face a scarcity of (lowland) teachers who are willing to go and work in remote areas.

Vietnamese ethnic policy in the Central Highlands

The following sections will focus on the Vietnamese ethnic policy in the Central Highlands. As mentioned above, the inhabitants of this region are among the poorest and the most disadvantaged of the country. The Central Highlands comprise an expanding population of approximately four million, of which roughly one million are of indigenous origins. The biggest groups are the Jarai (around 320,000), Ede (over 257,000), Bahnar (181,000), Sedang (128,000), Hre (124,000), Koho (121,000), Raglai (95,000), Mnong (89,000), Stieng (around 66,000) and Bru/Van Kieu (53,000). The smallest groups are the Rmam and the Brau (both around 300, but there are many more Brau across the border in Laos and Cambodia) (An Independent WriteNet Researcher 2002: 5). The Jarai (Jörai, Giarai), Ede (Rhade), Raglai and Churu ethnic groups belong to the Austronesian language family. The Bahnar (Bana), Sedang (Xodang), Hre, Koho (Coho), Mnong, Stieng (Xtieng), Bru-Van Kieu, Katu (Cotu), Gietrieng, Taoi, Ma, Cor (Co), Chrau (Choro), Brau, Rmam (Romam) belong to the Austro-Asiatic language family, like the ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh or Viet). However, many sub-groups have been lumped together in one ethnic group (like the Sre, Nop, Chil and Lat) or mis-classified under one heading, and therefore have lost their visibility and cultural recognition through this homogenisation process. The biggest ethnic groups tend to be associated with particular provinces. Thus, most Bahnar and Sedang can be found in Kontum province; the Jarai dominate Gialai province; the Ede and Mnong are concentrated in Dac Lac province; and many Koho and Ma can be found in Lam Dong.

The long history of conflicts, but also sometimes, alliances between the political authorities (they be French, Vietnamese communists or Vietnamese state) and the Central Highland minorities from the French colonial period up to present time also gives to that area a special resonance in terms of national security. However, since the end of the Third Indochina War (1979-1989), the strategic importance of the Central Highlands has considerably dwindled; in effect, the region appears now more as a hot spot for in-migrations, economic opportunities and environmental

concerns[13]. First, the area is still seen as an "underdevelopped" "vacant" land, only inhabited by scattered populations of culturally "backward" "nomadic" shifting cultivators, in comparison with the more densely populated lowlands, and hence capable of absorbing "excess" population from other parts of Vietnam. Currently, the overall population density in Vietnam is around 230 people/km², while for instance in Dac Lac Province it is around 58 people/km² (Junker 2000: 58). Secondly, the Central Highlands have become a production zone of (more or less lucrative) cash crops (coffee, pepper, rubber, tea) and contain important, albeit limited, natural resources (mineral, timber, water and energy). Therefore, Vietnam's highlands are perceived as endowed with immense unexploited resources that only await Kinh settlement and application of modern technology for their development - not surprisingly, thus, the Central Highlands were known as an Eldorado where quick profits could be made. Thirdly, the Central Highlands still contain (rapidly dwindling) forest reserves and biodiversity. In recent years, the Vietnamese authorities have increasingly recognised the importance and fragility of the upland environment and the danger of deforestation as well as the hydrological functions of the watersheds, the more so because of the negative impacts on the economic and agricultural development of the coastal plains and lowland deltas (soil and water management are crucial for the protection of lowlands against flood).

In-migration to the Central Highlands

The Central Highlands have been rapidly taken over by government policies and programmes and by lowland Vietnamese immigrants. Large-scale migration to the area started after the Reunification in 1975, almost exclusively organised through government relocation programmes. Later on when the organized in-migration slowed down, so-called spontaneous migration of Kinh from the coasts and of ethnic minorities from the more densely populated and less fertile northern highlands of Vietnam[14], picked up and took on massive proportions in the 1990s, and was soon out of control of the authorities. The post-1975 relocation programmes had great ambitions. The aim of the policy was to "rationally" redistribute labour from overpopulated rural areas and cities to the so-called New Economic Zones (NEZ); thus, it was planned to relocate 10 million people by the end of the last century (Evans 1992: 279). However, this figure was never to be attained, and 'only' perhaps 500,000 lowland people went to live and work in the Central Highlands by 1990 (Evans 1992: 281). In total, between 1976 and 2001, the population of the four provinces of the Central Highlands more than tripled from 1.2 million to over 4 million, with the indigenous population merely increasing from 600,000 to about 1 milllion. Although some indigenous groups (such as the Ede, the Jarai and the Mnong) still make up the majority in some, especially more remote, zones, they are now the minority in Lam Dong, Dac Lac and Gialai provinces, already outnumbered by people who are not autochthonous to the region. The arrival of these new migrants from the lowlands and the northern highlands, and their often anarchic settlements, created conflicts over land with the indigenous population (Evans 1992; Hardy 1999; Junker 2000), whom, in addition, were often lured or forced to sell off their lands to newcomers or to rich farmers.

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[13] During the consecutive Indochina wars, the Central Highlands had an important strategic status. During the Second Indochina War (1960-1975), the Central Highlands linked the southern part of Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail with the North through Laos and Cambodia which were both heavily involved in the Cold War conflict themselves. During the Third Indochina War which ended with the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia (1979-1989), the Central Highlands was not only a theatre of low-intensity guerrilla war between the Vietnamese state and the minority-led political and military movement, FULRO (Front Unifié de la Lutte des Races Opprimées), but also a military base for operations in Cambodia.

[14] Such groups include the Nung, Tay, Hmong, Dao, and Muong.

Policy of sedentarization

Since the end of the second world war, over half of Vietnam's natural forests have been destroyed (44% of the country were covered with forests in 1945; but only 22% in 1985)[15]. The factors that explain this dramatic environmental loss are manifold: warfare (the use of massive amounts of chemical herbicides by the Americans during the war), commercial timber logging, much of it illegal, clearance of land for agricultural resettlement projects, upland cultivation by both ethnic minorities and migrant settlers, are all partly responsible. It is therefore difficult to pinpoint a sole culprit for the degradation. As elsewhere, however, the indigenous peoples of Vietnam are almost invariably blamed for the deforestation occuring in their environment[16]. Yet, the indigenous populations of the Central Highlands have practiced the rotational type of shifting cultivation for centuries without seriously damaging the forests. Like ethnic minorities in Laos, the Central Highlanders have pursued a sustainable lifelihood by practicing a type of agriculture that allowed for the regeneration of the forests and of the soil fertility, provided that the fallow period was long enough. But few outsiders understood the logic of this agricultural system - thus, pejoratively called it "slash-and-burn" - and confused it with the pioneering type of shifting cultivation as well as associated it with a nomadic lifestyle[17].

Consequently, from 1968 onwards, the Vietnamese government's key policy for upland development focuses on sedentarization and resettlement programmes designed to replace the supposed traditional way of life of *du canh du cu* (migratory fields, migratory residence). The goal of the Fixed Cultivation and Sedentarization Program (*Dinh Canh Dinh Cu*, literally meaning "fixed fields, fixed residence") was subsquently to sedentarize three million people by the year 2000 and thus stop "forest destruction due to shifting cultivation in highland areas" (Le Duy Hang in Rambo et al. 1995: 66). As many observers, including Vietnamese ethnologists, have pointed out, however, only a small percentage of highland people are even quasi-nomadic in the sense of more or less moving their villages. In fact, beside concerns for the environment and the well-being of the population, the issue is also about controlling and disciplining these eluding peoples within the territory of the state. This Fixed Cultivation and Settlement Program thus constitutes a mechanism to 'civilize' the Highlanders, by changing their 'primitive' way of life to be more in line with that of the majority, i.e the Kinh.

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[15] Although 19 million, or 28% of the total land area of Vietnam are still classified as forestland, less than half of it contains any substantial tree cover. A major portion is barren or degraded and stripped of its valuable species (Junker 2000: 58).

[16] For example, Le Duy Hung, from the Department of Fixed Cultivation and Settlement, Hanoi, holds the three million of ethnic minorities practicing shifting cultivation responsible for the destruction of 100,000 ha of forest each year (*in* Rambo, and al. 1995: 63). Nguyen Van Thang, from the Institute of Ethnology, Hanoi, in the same publication, argues however that three quarters of the 200,000 ha annual loss to shifting cultivation are caused by immigrants from the lowlands (*in* Rambo, and al. 1995: 101).

[17] In Vietnamese, the word for dry rice farming/swiddening (*làm rây*) is usually preceded by the words *phám rùng*, 'clearing' or 'process of deforestation', but literally meaning 'destroying the forest'. Thus, shifting cultivation is etymologically and analytically linked to deforestation (Salemink 2000: 127).

Policy of selective preservation

Culture (*van hóa*) in Vietnam refers to the immaterial aspects of life, like language, religion, education, manners and customs. But the socialist transformation of the society appears to go in pair with a highly ethnocentric process of cultural selection. Only traits that are viewed as socially benign and touristically useful (folklore, dances, music, handicrafts) are tolerated and even enhanced through the dual process of folklorization and decontextualisation of culture (Salemink 2000: 137). On the other hand, features perceived as backward (religious beliefs, rituals, multi-family longhouses) or reactionary (feudalistic forms of social organisation) are to be abandoned and have been used to justify the policies of sedentarization and resettlement. As Rambo acutely observes: "the relationship between the Vietnamese state and its ethnic minorities remains a paternalistic one in which the ultimate authority to make decisions about appropriate directions for cultural change remains in the hands of the central government, not in those of the minorities themselves." (Rambo et al; 1995: xvii). There is little doubt that the Vietnamese government wants to promote the country's ethnic and cultural diversity. But they seem to define 'culture' in a very strict sense, which follows the guiding Marxist-Leninist principle of civilising project *vis-à-vis* ethnic minorities.

Impacts on indigenous livelihood

Restrictive policy on swiddening, logging and the massive in-migration since 1975 have reduced the area of land and forest available for the Central Highlanders to practice their system of rotational shifting cultivation in a sustainable way that allows the regeneration of the soil. In the eyes of the Kinh developers, only the small area of field currently under cultivation is entitled to land tenure; the much larger area under fallow, however, is seen as an "empty" wasteland that may be allocated for other uses, including resttlement of migrants from the lowlands and clearing of forests for coffee and pepper gardens. The indigenous peoples' traditional rights on the forest were completely ignored by both the authorities and the settlers who cut the trees for their own use or sale. 75% of the total population in Vietnam is dependent on agriculture and forestry as its source of livelihood. But forest destruction threatens even more indigenous livelihood because highlanders traditionally have relied on the forest to supply many invaluable resources including timber and bamboo for house building, wild animals for meat, wild vegetables and roots that can replace rice at times of crop deficiency, medicinal plants and grazing ground for livestock. In addition, the phenomenal increase of coffee cultivation in the past twenty years has come with a high price for the environment with the degradation of the soil fertility and water resources due to an intensive use of fertilizer, pesticide and water inputs.

The result of these external policies has led to the impoverishment of many highlanders, some of them suffering from malnutrition (Salemink 2000: 133, Bui Cach Tuyen in Rambo et al. 1995: 134). The fact is, as Rambo points out, the "current crisis in highland subsistence is not the result of an inherent flaw in swidden agriculture but has instead been precipitated by land-use changes introduced by exogenous agencies that have failed to recognize the rational basis of indigenous highland systems of land tenure." (Rambo 1995: xviii). Worse, many highlanders who do not want to join the goverment programmes of sedentarization that are disguised behind discourses and policies of reforestation and forest protection (e.g. Programme 327, then superceded by the

Five Million Hectare Programme), move away to continue swidden farming outside the authorities' control. But because of the rapid rate of deforestation, the reduction of land availability, the degradation of soil and water, this form of shifting cultivation is no longer possible; the farmers have, instead, to resort to the pioneering shifting cultivation system, which, in this context of increasing population density, will be even more damaging to the ecological equilibrium of the area (An Independent WriteNet Researcher 2002: 15).

Last but not least, religion remains a highly sensitive issue. The series of protests in February and March 2001 in the Central Highlands were partly revolved around the crucial issue of religious freedom[18]. Since 1980 a significant number of indigenous peoples have converted to Christianity (Stieng, Mnong, Koho, Ede and Jarai in the Central Highlands, as well as the H'Mong in the north), and protestant proselytisers have been particularly successful to attract followers[19]. The Vietnamese state allows freedom of religion; it is, though, constrained by concerns over national security and state order. Since the mid-1990s, there have been regular reports of harassment of Christians in the Central Highlands. The Vietnamese authorities are obviously distressed by this conversion movement as they perceive it as a tool in foreign hands to stir up discontent and discord, and to undermine the country's security.

THAILAND

Thai government's "hill tribes" policies

Until the 1950s, the highlanders in Thailand were more or less neglected by the Thai authorities. Meanwhile, the population in the northern hills increased significantly with the continuing influx of migrants such as the Hmong, Akha, Lisu, Lahu and Mien/Yao who came seeking land or fleeing fighting in their home countries, mainly from China (following Mao troops' victory), Burma (with the outbreak of ethnic rebellions) and Laos (increasingly involved in the first Indochina War). The influx of highland populations from neighbouring countries combined with the fear of communist insurgency prompted the Thai government to tackle the "problems" posed by the "hill tribes" from the late 1950s. The latter were then successively, and sometimes simultaneously, accused of being involved in the communist guerilla movements (1959-1975), destroying the forests and watershed with their shifting cultivation practices (1959 up to present time), and cultivating and trafficking opium (1976-1988) (Narumon 2002: 3). In fact, as Hayami sums up, "the problem of the "hill tribes" was one of the territory and social order of a modernizing state that was strengthening its hold on every square inch of its national territory" (Hayami 1997: 563).

All the ethnic groups, despite various historical backgrounds and different subsistence patterns, were in that process lumped into one category filled with stereotypes, upon which inadequate policies were formulated and enacted from the 1960s. These policies indeed presumed that most hill peoples were illegal recent migrants, destroyers of the country's rich natural resources and lacking of national loyalty. Since the late 1980s, however, the policies based on the image of the

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[18] In February 2001 an unexpected and well-coordinated series of demonstrations and uprisings took place in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, taking the authorities of Vietnam and international observers alike by surprise. Access roads to some of the major provincial and district towns like Buon Ma Thuot and Pleiku were blocked by large groups of people belonging to the indigenous minorities of the region, and local leaders of the Communist Party of Vietnam were chased by groups of minority people in the cities themselves. Riot police responded with force, but apart from such skirmishes, few people were reported injured during the relatively non-violent protests.
[19] estimated by one source at a few hundred thousands in the Central Highlands in the late 1980s (Weggel 1993).

"hill tribes" as a threat to national security and in need of social control have been progressively replaced by a development-oriented strategy focused on community development and the management of community resources (Narumon 2002: 4). However, the misguided perceptions remain: even though the land use of susbsistence patterns in the highlands are diversifying and most highland groups are no longer being dependent on shifting cultivation alone, the discourse that blames the "hill tribes" for deforestation in the highlands is still pervasive. Worse, the "hill people" are also now accused of being forest encroachers for seeking land for cash crop cultivation; yet, the Thai government has been encouraging the commercialization of agricultural products as substitutes for opium.

Today pressure on forest land is greater than ever due to the competition between subsistence agriculture (sedentary and mobile), cash crop cultivation, and state forest regulation and reforestation policies[20], furthermore aggravated by the degradation of the soil and water resources. Against this background of increasing scarcity of land and limitations on forest use, the most current problems for highland populations in agriculture are the lack of land for cash crop cultivation and the conflict between private ownership and customary communal land tenure, or in other words, between state and customary law. Some ethnic groups, among which the Karen, have maintained a subsistence oriented cultivation practice and have been finding difficult to adapt cash crops on a large scale, which requires commercial fertilizers, pesticides and intensive labour. Yet, as land is becoming a valuable resource directly linked to the cash economy, and with the closing forest frontier, there is now competition for land. According to Thai Land Law, all land in principle belongs to the state. But lands that have not been 'occupied' or for which the due process of documentation has not been completed can be used under a title allowing rights of usufruct and inheritance. But such usehold titles presupposing long term use and occupation of the field are deemed to be incompatible with the shifting cultivation system. Also, to secure individual rights over paddy lands, through permits issued by the local administration, means to secure rights over what is recognized as communal land. In a case study of one Karen village in Northern Thailand, there is thus an increasing competition over individual property among those villagers who hold Thai identification cards (not many hill dwellers, however, own identification cards as Thai citizens, which is the precondition for such application), while the communality of land is now only recognized in ritual (Hayami 1997: 569).

Citizenship and ethnic minorities

As being mentioned above, another major issue that affects ethnic minorities' integration into public life in Thailand is the discriminatory process of citizenship application towards them. In 1997, less than 30% of the ethnic minority population (214, 127 people out of 774, 316) living in the country have been granted the citizenship status (Suppachai 1999: 2). In 1956, the governement conducted a survey to register all the households in the country under the Population Registration Rule (PRR) in order to grant the Household Registration or TR.14 to all Thai people. However, the mountainous areas and its inhabitants were left out in the survey due

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[20] Forested land in Thailand belongs to the state since 1896 and the payment for concessions is required for any use of forest resources. Land that is not permanently occupied or used is categorized as forest and unused land, where any form of occupation and destruction (including logging and swidden cultivation) is illegal. In addition, since 1961, the government has created 87 national parks, 65 forest parks, 46 wildlife conservation areas, 44 no-hunting areas, 15 botanical gardens and 53 arboretums. Most of these protected areas are located in the northern highlands (Delang 2002: 493, from the Royal Forest Department 2000). It is estimated that about 13% of the national territory is covered with forests, compared to 70 % in 1930 (Delang 2002: 494).

mainly to difficult access to the villages and lack of the government's interest. In 1969-1970, security and control measures over the "hill tribes" were however iniated by the government. Over 100,000 of them were recognized in the process as "minorities of the nation" but not as citizens. Between 1985 and 1988, another government survey, the "Singha Phukhao" (Moutain Lion) project, was launched to register all highlanders in Thailand. Then, in 1990, those who were listed under the "Singha Phukhao" programme were given a temporary household registration, a Blue Card, as pre-condition to the issuance of the national identity card. However, the Blue Card holders were allowed to leave the limits of their district only if they were in possession of a special pass. Finally, in 1999, a third survey was carried out especially aiming at those "hill people" who had been left out during the two previous campaigns and therefore had no legal documentation. These people were then given a Green Card with Red Frame.

Many obstacles still hamper the process of citizenship application for the hill tribe people of Thailand:

- The series of state policies and projects regarding minority status since the late 1950s has resulted in an extremely confusing and complex situation where one person belonging to an ethnic group may end up in some cases holding different statuses and even contradictory legal documentation;
- Although many highland peoples have lived in Thailand for several generations, they have no record/document that can prove their long-term residency;
- The complexity of rules and regulations pertaining to citizenship application, many of which the Thai officials have no good command of, burdened furthermore by long bureaucratic procedures;
- The non-visibility of some ethnic minority names that do no appear in the surveys;
- The lack of manpower and financial means to conduct efficiently the citizenship registration project;
- Corruption and lack of transparency;
- Confusion between native, migrant and refugee highlanders.

(Narumon 2002; Suppachai 1999)

4. Conclusion and suggestions

Despite differences in their minority policies, the central authorities in Laos, Vietnam and Thailand share some commonalities in their attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Traditional subsistence patterns in the highlands, i.e. all forms of shifting cultivation, are considered by these countries' governments as backward, wasteful and damaging for the environment and the national economy. In addition, the highlanders' cultural and religious practices are commonly labelled as primitive and superstitious as well as increasingly incompatible with the requirements of state, market and a globalising world. Furthermore, ethnic minorities, even in this relatively more serene polical climate, are still perceived as not being entirely trustworthy and lacking somewhat of this national consciousness. In short, the national discourse on development and culture in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, draws from the ideological view of modernity negatively defined in opposition to (ethnic minority) backwardness.

Yet, indigenous societies have generally managed to establish relatively balanced relationships with their natural environment. These rules are not written and often perceived as 'primitive' and

signs of ignorance by the governments. Because of this image of social, cultural, political and technological 'inferiority', these peoples' knowledge is neglected, if not rejected. Yet, the possibilities of utilizing villagers as resources in the process of conservation of bio-diversity should be taken seriously. Different ethnic groups have traditionally specialized in distinct dimensions of plant and animal diversity. In fact, many cultural taboos permeate the ethnic groups' traditional agricultural systems; their functions are essential, though, for they assure the conservation of floral and faunal resources for future use.

This is a two-fold challenge. The first is to get communities to communicate their traditional values. The second is to get the government officials, international organizations and development workers to recognize the value of this indigenous knowledge. The government officers should subsequently include some members of ethnic groups primarily concerned by the rural development programs, or at least, persons able to communicate with them and culturally sensitive, into the planning and monitoring structures. Functional literacy and materials in minority languages, for example, should be introduced into the agricultural government agents' training courses.

As a matter of fact, in the second half of the 1990s, many Vietnamese researchers and some officials changed their views on swidden farming and customary law, with the mounting evidence that a number of policies were rooted in cultural misconceptions. New ideas resulted in a number of experiments with different natural resource management practices based on local knowledge and local, communal institutions in the highland areas in general, and in the Central Highlands in particular. A programme that would suit both the Government's sustainable development priorities and people's livelihood needs may be the exchange of skills: indigenous knowledge in exchange of agricultural technical skills. The shortage of available suitable land as well as the problems with declining soil fertility and increasing soil erosion on shifting cultivation land will inevitably lead the upland villagers to adapt their agricultural systems. It is therefore equally important to stress that indigenous knowledge or beliefs should not be seen as incompatible with technology and socio-economic development neither be considered as a superior ecological wisdom or sole knowledge on environmental issues (Ovesen 2000).

However, each country has distinctive problems born out of different political, economic and historical circumstances. The policies of land-allocation and resettlement in Laos have caused reversed effects upon ethnic minority communities. The 1997 report on the impacts of the resettlement policy on ethnic minority villages thus warned:

> Resettlement appears to be one of the major causes of cultural rupture in Laos today. It might be said that this is the best way of integrating ethnic groups into the national culture, without which they will remain marginalised. It must be remembered however that the Lao national culture is a multi-ethnic culture […] and that it is necessary to safeguard the cultural heritage of the diverse ethnic groups which form the Lao nation. […] What must be avoided is any dramatic damage to the cultural symbolic fabric as this can always engender movements of a protest nature able to endanger integration itself.

> (Goudineau 1997: 36)

The land-forest allocation program in Laos is viewed by the authorities as one of the main tools for sedentarizing shifting cultivators. But this rigorous land planning needs some flexibility in the field. There is no doubt that the government and its agencies attempt to apply a participatory

approach, but lack of qualified staff greatly hampers their work. Attributes of the land and the forest are obviously not homogenous throughout the country; and in case of ethnic minority peoples, their views on land and forest classification, nature and use might not correspond to those of the Government officials. Therefore, any introduction of 'alien' knowledge into these societies, even with good intentions, has to be done with prior study of the indigenous system and evaluation of the impacts of these programmes.

In Vietnam, the main issue for most communities – access to and ownership of land and natural resources – is likely to become exacerbated by the ongoing in-migration and appropriation of land and resources by (equally poor) people from the north. The so-called "spontaneous" migration is out of control for the central authorities and the receiving provinces, while sending provinces are still encouraging families and communities to leave. The degradation of the ecological environment, which is starting to have disastrous effects in the highlands and in the surrounding lowland areas, will compound the situation and may increase tensions further. In addition, as a consequence of the events of February and March 2001, the Vietnamese authorities may prioritize a security approach that seeks to punish the protesters, although for the time being, it is not clear whether this strategy will prevail over a more development-leaning approach focusing on the roots of the protests. The future of the relations between the Vietnamese authorities, the Kinh and the indigenous population in the Central Highlands will much depend on the Vietnamese government's choice of strategy towards the highlanders, and its degree of politicization.

Thailand offers a much more open political space for NGOs, community leaders and intellectuals to express resistance and dissent against government policies affecting both local communities and the environment. Since 1980s, Thailand has seen a rise in civic activities in environmental issues which, particularly in the case of localized issues, have let to bottom-up action that has halted projects initiated by international organizations and national and local elites. Also, the cooperation between minority leaders and lowland environmentalists has been a strong force in the community forestry movement led by NGOs, intellectuals and some officials, as well as local residents. Accordingly, in Thailand, actions targeting the policy level and led by lowland and highland activists may be more feasible than in Laos and in Vietnam. For example, changes with respect to the conditions of eligibility required for "hill tribe people" to apply for a Thai identification card are being currently asked by Thai activists (Suppachai 1999: 7).

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