

Transforming the "model" approach to upland rural development in Vietnam

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Abstract: Three quarters of Vietnam's land area is in the uplands and foothills, which contain some of the poorest communes in the country. The Ngoc Lac Natural Resources Conservation and Management Project, in Thanh Hoa Province, is one of several large upland rural development projects that receives substantial funding from foreign governments in Vietnam. The project was designed in 1995 to address the environmental constraints to socio-economic development of Ngoc Lac District, while improving agricultural production and natural resources management. During the first three years of operation, the project focused on the introduction and dissemination of various "model" technological packages for improved agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry. These models included tree nurseries, sloping agricultural land technologies, integrated fish pond-livestock pen-home garden systems, and several animal husbandry activities. However, the distribution of the models was not socially equitable, the sustainability of the models by model farming households proved problematic, and the adoption of these technology practices by non-model households was quite low. Four lessons can be identified from past rural development experience: beware of "participatory" rural appraisal, start small and go slowly, introduce limited technologies, and help farmers adapt the technologies. There are two promising initiatives underway in Vietnam. These are the participatory curriculum development and the participatory technology development initiatives of the Social Forestry Support Program. ?? 2001 Kluwer Academic Publishers.

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