

THE VEGETATION RECOVERY PROCESS IN FALLOW SWIDDEN AND THE HARVEST OF NTFPS IN A KHMU VILLAGE OF NORTHERN LAO PDR

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effects of traditional swidden cultivation by the Khmu of northern Laos on the recovery process of vegetation during different stages of fallow periods. Nine plots were chosen as samples, in seven different fallow conditions: currently cultivated, two years fallow, four years fallow, seven years fallow, protected forest, production forest and undisturbed forest (these forests also represented fallow periods of 15, 20 and 30 years). In the traditional swidden cultivation of the Khmu, a single crop is made with intervening fallows of more than ten years. Results from the vegetation survey indicated that most of the dominant trees, being *Castanopsis* and *Quercus* of the Fagaceae family, were mainly regenerated from coppice, most often from stumps left from previous cultivation. The current study from the Khmu community in Nam Ha village shows that secondary forests are very complex and rich in species that are important both ecologically and economically. Fallow forest provides the basis for both swidden and the harvest of NTFPs. The various species of NTFPs are regenerated during various stages of fallow. NTFPs have played substantial roles in the villagers' livelihoods, particularly for swiddeners with insufficient rice.

Keywords: Fallow, vegetation, Khmu, swidden, NTFPs.