

ABSTRACT

Title of Research Paper : Study of Problems and Impacts of Forest Conservation Policy among the Highlander Communities in Thailand: A Case Study of a Hmong Community, Ban Khun Klang, Doi Inthanon National Park, Chomthong District, Chiang Mai Province

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This study of problems and impacts of the state policy on forest conservation among the highlander communities, a case study of the Hmong Community, Doi Inthanon National Park, Chomthong District, Chiang Mai, has 3 purposes. It studies the problems and impacts of the forest conservation policy on the security of tenure of highlanders; on their land utilization; and on their dependence on and consumption of forest products.

Results of the study found that the Hmong Community of Ban Khun Klang in the middle region of Doi Inthanon National Park, has been greatly affected by the measures of the forest conservation policy. In regard to security of tenure of the community, in the Hmong cultural context, communities locate at the highest point in the mountains where abundant forest resources and there are water sources. Ban Khun Klang was therefore settled in a reserved watershed area, Zone 1A, where all activity is forbidden. State officials therefore used the tactic of forcing the Hmong community to relocate. Officials surveyed the community area and implemented a project to relocate the community to a degraded forest outside reserved forest, by offering a compensation package including a new house, farmland and public utility infrastructure. The 1990-1994 Doi Inthanon National Park Master Plan includes plans to use force towards Hmong communities. Thus, Ban Khun Klang was limiting community areas and forbidding the construction of permanent housing. The policy was also used to create conflict between the Conservation Section and Hmong people and between lowlanders and Hmong people by exploiting social movements and trends during 1996-1999.

Landholdings at Baan Khun Klang are only average 5 rai per household, which is rather small in view of the increasing size of households. This is a result of policy which does not recognize rights to farm by rotational farming, according the community's culture. Large areas of fallow forest have been reforested. The policy specifies forest status in ways that do not conform to reality. 'Forest' is taken to mean an area with no private own by law, anyone who practises agriculture in an area for which they do not have title is considered to have encroached. Villagers have constantly been arrested and fined. At present, the Hmong in Baan Khun Klang farm in an area removed from the National Park. This is insufficient for their needs but the community is fortunate to have the assistance of a Royal Project of plant temperate crops and flowers. These Corps require little area and can be grown year-round.

With regard to the use of forest products, most heads of households have used the forest as a source of food, medicine, game, and lumber for housing. But under the policy, villagers cannot use forest products at all, especially lumber and game.

The impact of the policy on the highlanders has been great since the forest conservation policy of the state is a policy of coercion rather than a policy of consensus. Those who set the policy view forest conservation from ecology aspect only, without giving importance to the communities living in the forest. Various measures therefore have an impact on the security of tenure, land utilization and the use of forest products which the highlanders regard as theirs, which is completely opposite to the policy. These measures have failed to instill an awareness of conservation among the highlanders, but have forced conflict and a lack of cooperation in forest conservation together with the sense that they are not stewards of the forest, adversely affecting forest conservation.

Recommendations in policy development from this study are that policy should be set in conformity with the reality on the ground by recognizing the way of life of communities in residing and adjusting the boundaries of reserve forests appropriately. Communities should involve to a role in managing and protecting the forest. In additional, forest conservation should recognize the tenure of highlanders so as to create security of tenure and habitation of communities. This will create a partnership in supporting successful forest conservation.