Introduction
Watershed degradation in the Lower Mekong Basin is severe and the riparian States with the Mekong River Commission have initiated counteraction to halt this process and rehabilitate affected areas.

The MRC/GTZ funded regional project “Sustainable Management of Resources in the Lower Mekong Basin (SMRP)” addresses the problem of watershed degradation in the riparian countries of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

In Vietnam the project develops and tests natural resource management strategies in its project areas conducted by the Buon Me Thuot field office. These measures aim to test promising approaches in PNRM at improving the ecological and hydrological functions of the upper watersheds in Dak Lak project area and at increasing the income of the target group. Successful measures will be disseminated in a larger area.

Figure 1: Degraded Natural Resources

Project sites
At present the project is working in 20 villages in the communes Dak Phoi Lak district and Ea Sol in Ea Hleo district. The target group in the project area is mainly M’Nong and Ja Rai ethnic minority people who are still heavily dependent on shifting cultivation to sustain their living. Due to the increasing population density as well as plantation and agricultural encroachment this practice is not sustainable any more and a soft transition from shifting cultivation to permanent cultivation has to take place.

Project implementation
The regional project is co-ordinated by the Mekong River Commission and supports regional networking. The Dak Lak component is implemented through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and its provincial body (DARD).

On district and commune level a close co-operation with government institutions and other projects ensures an effective allocation of resources and the sustainability of successful measures.

Networking with other projects and programs in and outside Vietnam prevents a duplication of efforts and facilitates dissemination of experiences.

Project Activities
During the first project phase from 01.12.95 – 31.12.97 participatory problem assessment and confidence building measures have laid the ground to develop approaches and methods for participatory natural resource management jointly with communities and government organisations.

Intensive exposure and training of partner and project staff created an understanding for the need of participatory development and implementation of measures with all stakeholders.

Most of the project components have been initiated during the first project phase and are continued in the second phase (1.1.98 – 31.8.2001). The project is active in the following fields:

Land use Planning and Land Allocation (Forest Land Allocation)

Land allocation has been proceeding throughout Vietnam. However, in order for there to be a smooth transition from shifting cultivation to permanent agriculture and for forests to be best protected secure land titles for forest land also need to be issued. Forest land allocation, however, is very complex and has lagged far behind. Close cooperation is needed with the communities and government agencies responsible for carrying out the allocations in order to ensure equitable and sustainable division of forest land and effective protection and use. In the end, developed technical and organizational knowledge should be institutionalized.
Forest Management Systems

Many minority groups in Dak Lak Province are still heavily dependent on the forest for shifting cultivation and for timber and non-timber forest products. Forest management has been mainly in the hand of government agencies, while traditional forest management systems of ethnic minorities were seldom recognized nor acknowledged. In order for forest protection to be effective, new, inventive forest management systems need to be developed together with the communities and the respective government agencies.

Figure 3: Forest land allocated to the local farmers

For further information on project activities and available project reports please contact:

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Figure 4: The map of project area