



## **Deforestation in the Central Highlands: Implications for Minority Ethnic Communities and a Number of Recommendations**

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### **Abstract**

In recent decades, natural forests in Vietnam were continuously devastated, becoming one of the top problems in Vietnam. In particular, natural forests in the Central Highlands have been severely decreased. This has left enormous implications, from the destroyed ecological environment, the regressive traditional culture of about 20 ethnic minorities living here to the social insecurity. But most importantly, forests are the whole life of ethnic minority people and they depend on forests.

**Keywords:** Central Highlands, deforestation, ethnic minorities, ecological environment, human culture.



## 1. Rationale

Vietnam's mountains occupy 3/4 of the whole country area, inhabited by ethnic minorities. If it was said "wide land, few inhabitants" in the past, today it is completely different: mountainous still, but the land has been dwindled, and the inhabitants have been more crowded. As in the Central Highlands, the total natural land area is still 5.46 million hectares, the population in 1975 was only 1.1 million, but 5.5 million<sup>1</sup> by 2014, of which the ethnic minority population was about 1.4 million (25% of the population). In mountainous areas, there is a small amount of field land. The land is mainly forest land, hill land, and there are many Rocky Mountains. In the recent decades, natural forests were gradually depleted, water resources dried up, failing to meet the needs of the ethnic minority people. Thus, some ethnic minority people did not "settle down", and migrated freely. This has drawn many pressures from home and abroad. Some ethnic minority people expressed their unhappiness and unstable solidarity, affecting the political security, social order and safety, and protection of the national borders, etc.

These problems have many causes, both subjective and objective, but in this writing, we mention only the problem of natural forest depletion and its implications for the life of the ethnic minority people in the Central Highlands. At the same time, we suggest some solutions thereto.

## 2. Implications of deforestation

### 2.1. *The role of forests in ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands*

For the Central Highlanders<sup>2</sup>, forests are not just a resource, even not "environment" in the strict sense of the natural environment as we often say. For them, it is much simpler and more basic: forests are everything. Forests are their whole life and themselves, and the people here are an integral part of the forests.

The Central highlanders live in and protect the forests by "eating the forests". The Central Highlanders call "lam ray" - taking food out of the forests as "eating the forests", completely like the way we say breastfeeding, as mothers give us blood and life. For them, the forests are their mothers. Their bodies are a solid part of the Mother Forest.

Customary laws of the Central Highlanders impose severe penalties on those who commit the crime of deforestation, even the clearing of forests for cultivation. They never touch the upstream forests and primitive forests, because they perceive the forests as divinities and in relation to culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference in [http://www.gopfp.gov.vn/so-6-170;jsessionid=CAD24CC5A203522CEBE41BB94947E491?p\\_p\\_id=62\\_INSTANCE\\_Z5vv&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=0&p\\_p\\_state=normal&p\\_p\\_mode=view&p\\_p\\_col\\_id=column-3&p\\_p\\_col\\_count=1&\\_62\\_INSTANCE\\_Z5vv\\_struts\\_action=%2Fjournal\\_articles%2Fview&\\_62\\_INSTANCE\\_Z5vv\\_groupId=18&\\_62\\_INSTANCE\\_Z5vv\\_articleId=2242843&\\_62\\_INSTANCE\\_Z5vv\\_version=1.0](http://www.gopfp.gov.vn/so-6-170;jsessionid=CAD24CC5A203522CEBE41BB94947E491?p_p_id=62_INSTANCE_Z5vv&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-3&p_p_col_count=1&_62_INSTANCE_Z5vv_struts_action=%2Fjournal_articles%2Fview&_62_INSTANCE_Z5vv_groupId=18&_62_INSTANCE_Z5vv_articleId=2242843&_62_INSTANCE_Z5vv_version=1.0), accessed on 20/8/2018.

<sup>2</sup> In this article: the Central Highlanders, the Central Highlands people, and the Central Highlands ethnic minority people indicate the same Central Highlands ethnic minorities.



First of all, the forests are the living space of the Central Highlands ethnic minorities. There is no hamlet or village separated from the forests, forest land. The forests not only provide for their daily life but also are the basis of production, the culture in the life of the people.

The forests are not only space, but also time. The people here take the forest space to measure time, to calculate the pace of their life. Human life is rhythmic with the eternal cycle of nature, namely the forests. That forest space - time is the relative space - time of each village. Village is the basic unit of human life in that space - time.

The Central Highlanders practice shifting cultivation, not nomadic farming. See the majestic Rong (Communal) house of Ba Na people, Xo Dang people, and the impressive long houses of Ede people. Obviously they are not the architecture of the nomads.

The Central Highlanders do not practice nomadic farming, but instead alternate farming - the method of cultivation appropriate for on sloping land. They use burning cultivation for food production for a few years on a plot and then move to another plot, leaving the previous plot for fallowing for tens of years, more than enough for the plot to grow into forests before they return. That is the best way to both get food out of the forests and nurture the forests in the conditions that the population density is not too high. It means that the people here take their food from the forests, then return the land to the forests, restore the forests.

The life of the Central Highlanders is a life that follows and adheres to the rhythm of the forests. Thus, it can be said that the forests are the center of everyday life, and their universe. The Central Highland culture is a forest culture. The Central Highlanders never destroy the forests. For them, deforestation is also suicide. It is more severe than suicide in the material sense. Deforesters are bad, no longer human. If they do not have enough land to live today and are forced to destroy the forests for the last piece of food, then it is the deadlock that they never want.

One of the most important characteristics of the traditional social organization in the Central Highlands is the role of the village. In the Central Highlands, the basic and unique unit of the traditional society is Village. For this reason, it is not sufficient to meet the production relations of organizational forms such as agricultural farms, forestry farms, household farms, ... The most important infrastructure of the community that forms the foundation of the Central Highland society is the ownership of village communities over land and forests.

In the Central Highlands, although the mountains and forests are immense, they are all owned. Each piece of land, each specific forest has its own specific owner, which is the specific village community. Each village has a specific boundary, from water body to water body, from rock to hillside, from mountain pass to hill foot, etc. The boundaries have been defined for thousands of generations, and are recognized in terms that are generally accepted and passed from one generation to the next.

It is noteworthy that such space includes not only residential land, but also the entire production forestland, where the villagers make fields for alternate farming, and also the sacred forests that relate to the spiritual life of the villagers. Such whole land and forests are the living space of the villages; in absence thereof, the villages are no longer villages.



The collective ownership of land and forests of the village communities is maintained and managed by a system of customary laws that the Central Highlanders preserve and run by councils of village elders including the people who understand the land, the mountains and forests, and the customs, have production experience, virtue and prestige, and are appointed by the villagers. The land and forests in the village space are allocated to households by the councils of village elders for cultivation, living and preservation according to the strict regulations prescribed in the customary laws.

The land of the villages, its boundaries and purity are sacred, and may be trespassed or defiled by nobody. Trespassing and defilement of the village land are the biggest humiliation for the village communities, and must be severely punished.

The war throughout the last century has laid a strong impact on the Central Highlands, but fundamentally it has not broken down the unique social structure of the Central Highlands, proving its enduring vitality. The solid structure of the village communities is one of the key strengths for the people here to stand up to the severe challenges.

### ***2.3. The situation of deforestation in the last four decades***

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, by 2016, the country had approximately 14.38 million hectares of forests. Of which, natural forest area was over 10.24 million ha; plantation forest area 4.13 million ha. The area of forests eligible for national coverage reckoning was 13.63 million ha - corresponding to the coverage ratio of 41.19%. Compared with 2015, the area of forest eligible for national coverage reckoning increased by more than 110,000 hectares, and the forest area for national coverage reckoning was over 13.52 million hectares, corresponding to the forest coverage ratio of 40.84%.<sup>3</sup>

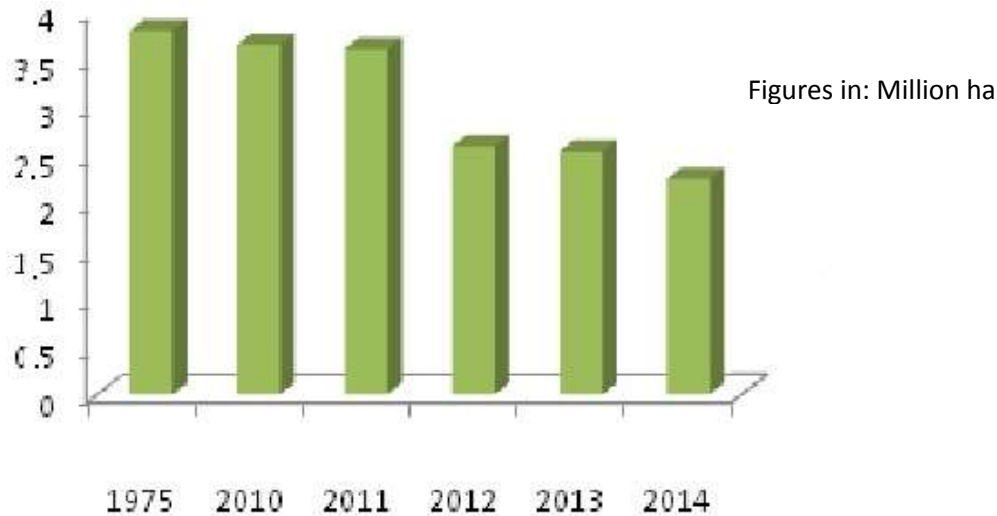
In the period of 1990-2013, the area of natural forests and plantation forests increased, but the annual growth rate was negligible. According to a report by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, for the period of 2011-2015, *"It is worrying that the quality of natural forests continues to decline. Although the forest coverage ratio is likely to increase, it is mainly planted forest with low biodiversity values, while natural forests with high biodiversity level have low conservation rate."*

Although the forest area was recorded as increasing, the forest quality was a matter of question. In 1945, the total forest area was recorded at 14.3 million hectares. In 1995, due to natural forest encroached and converted into other uses and over-exploited, the area was only 8.25 million hectares. Or, from 1945 to 1995, the area of natural forests of the entire country decreased by 6.05 million ha. And 10 years later, in 2005, this area was just over 7.2 million hectares. Thus, each year, about 100,000 ha of natural forests were lost. In the Central Highlands alone, according to the General Directorate of Forestry, from 1975 to the end of 2013, about 32.8% of the natural forest area was lost, down from 3.8 million hectares to 2.5 million hectares. The rate of natural forest loss was up to 33,600 ha / year (Figure 1). The coverage declined sharply and consistently, from 67% in 1976 to 61% in 1990, 54.7% in 2000, and 49.7% in 2012<sup>4</sup>. Forests in the Central Highlands

<sup>3</sup> <https://baomoi.com/rung-bi-tan-pha-hiem-hoa-khon-luong/c/24041440.epi>, accessed on 25/8/2018.

<sup>4</sup> <https://trithucvn.net/tin-tuc-vn/rung-viet-nam-dang-bi-tan-pha-nhu-the-nao-qua-hinh-anh-ve-tinh.html>, accessed on 25/8/2018.

continue to shrink through each dry season and every forest field cultivation season. In the period of 2010-2015 alone, the Central Highland provinces issued investment licenses to 700 projects on forest land with an area of nearly 216,000 hectares, of which about 100,000 hectares were converted to rubber planting.<sup>5</sup>



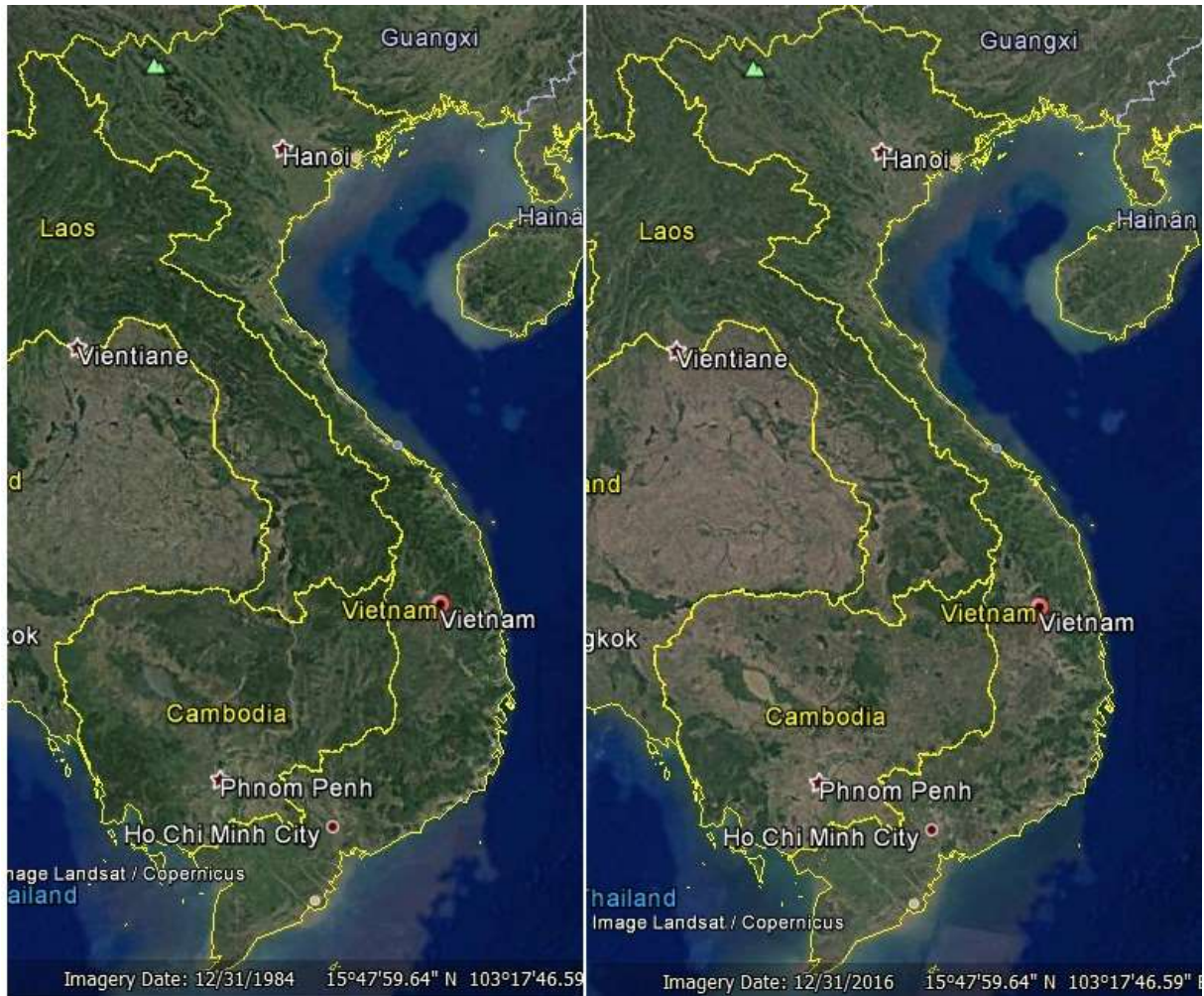
**Figure 1: Movements in forest area in the Central Highlands in the period of 1975-2014**

Source: <http://tapchimoitruong.vn/pages/article.aspx?item=Bài-học-từ-việc-mất-rừng-ở-khu-vực-Tây-Nguyên-và-giải-pháp-bảo-vệ-rừng-tại-Việt-Nam-41560>, accessed on 25/8/2018.

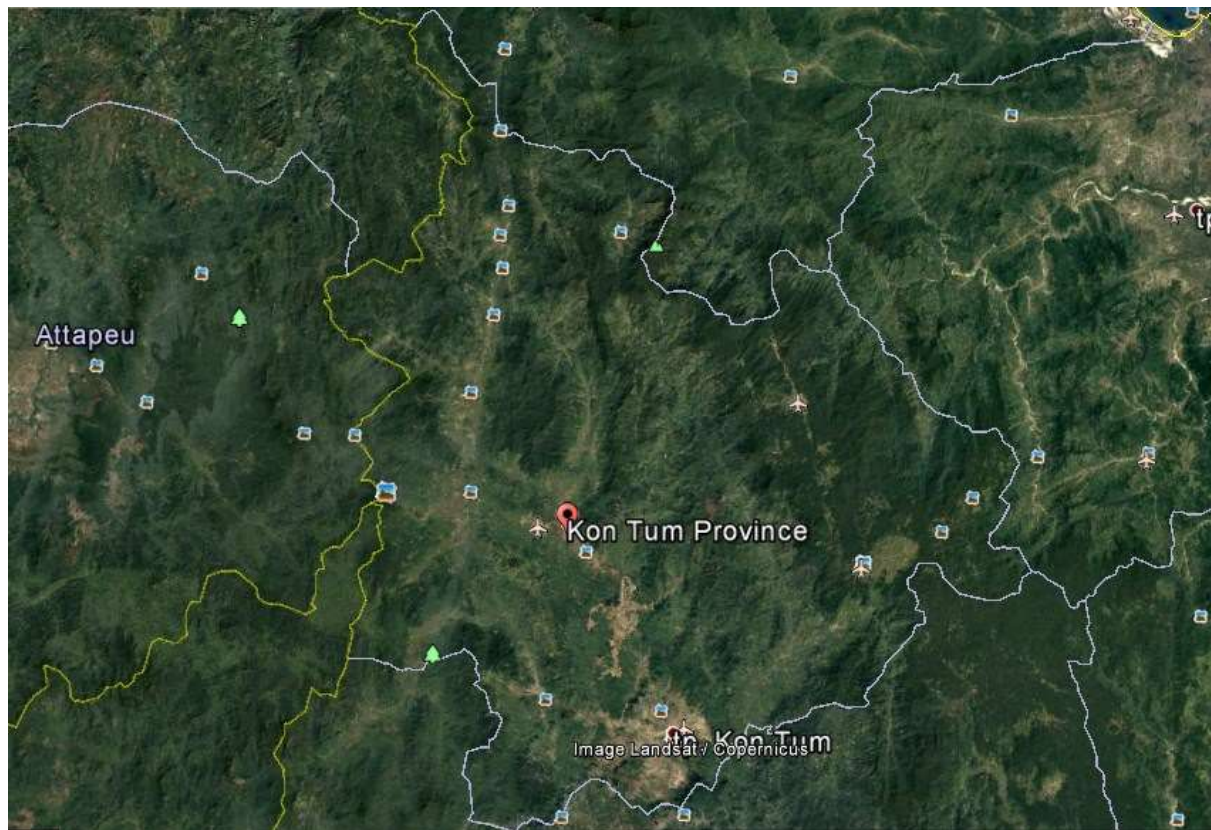
Vietnam's natural forest area is declining at a "dizzying pace". A comparative research on the archived images from Google Earth from 1984 to 2016 (Figures 2a, 2b, 2c) shows many white patches running along the country, especially in the Central Highlands and Northern Mountains. In particular, the forest coverage ratio in the Central Highlands has been severely impaired. At present, the forest coverage is only about 40%, of which primary forests account for only about 10%. Satellite images (Figure 3) show that five provinces in the Central Highlands, including Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Dak Lak, Dak Nong and Lam Dong, almost have no forest.

<sup>5</sup> <https://baotintuc.vn/goc-nhin/he-luy-cua-nan-pha-rung-20160324215533172.htm>, accessed on 25/8/2018.



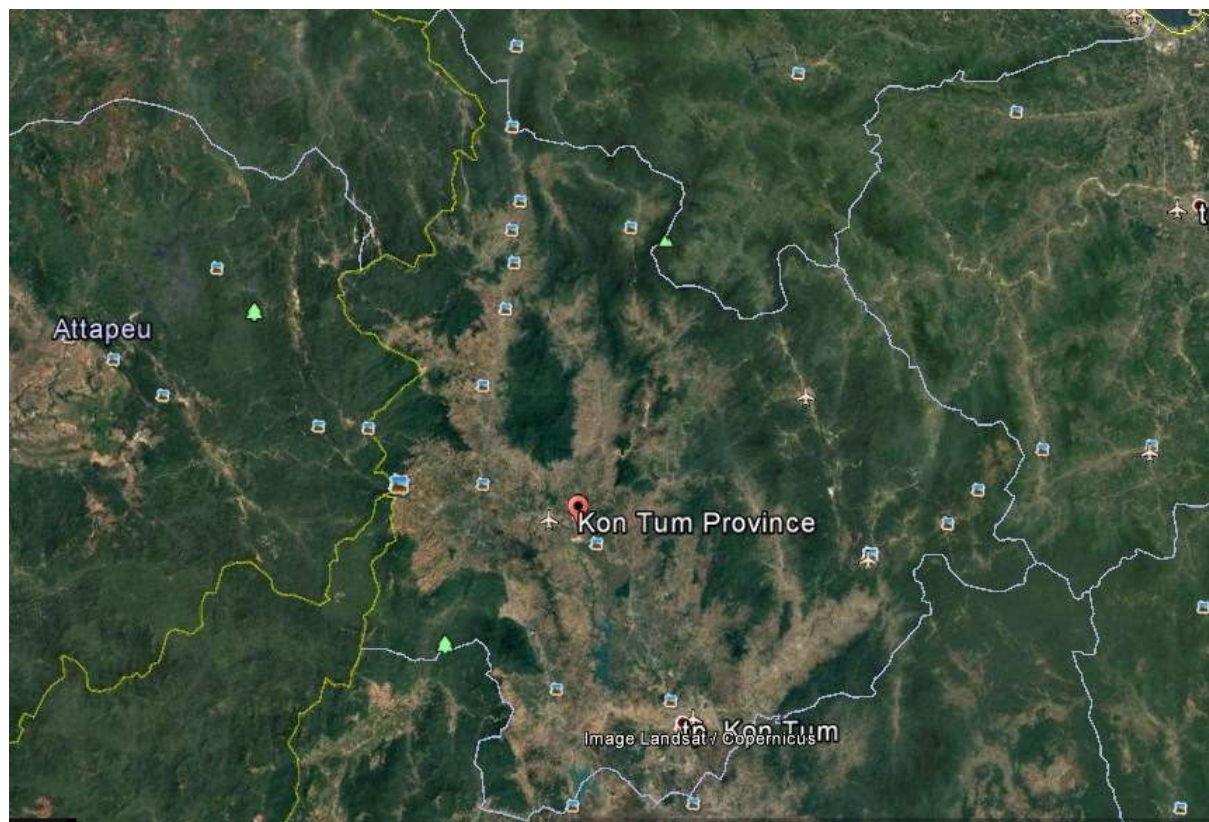


*Figure 2a: Image of Vietnam's Forests in 1984 vs. 2016*



***Figure 2b: Kon Tum's Forests (Central Highlands) in 1984***

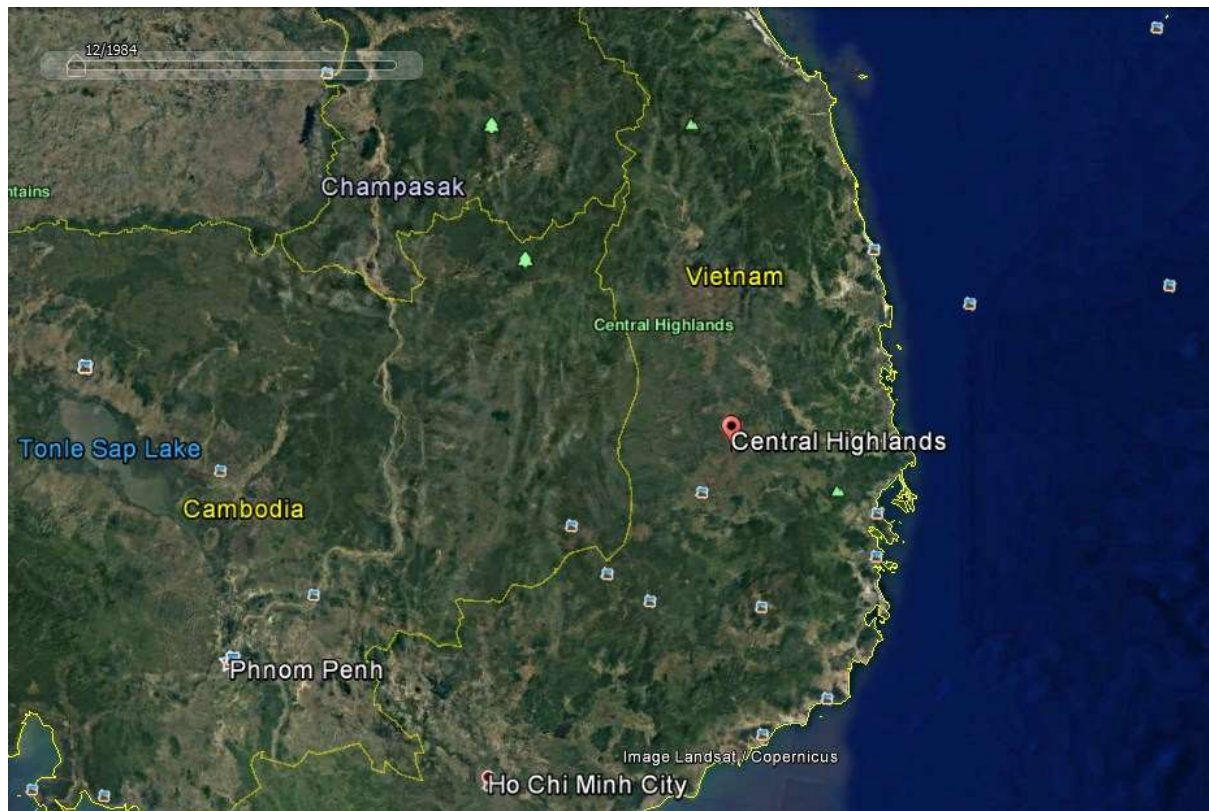




***Figure 2c: Kon Tum's Forests (Central Highlands) in 2016***

Source: <https://trithucvn.net/tin-tuc-vn/rung-viet-nam-dang-bi-tan-pha-nhu-the-nao-qua-hinh-anh-ve-tinh.html>, accessed on 25/8/2018.





**Figure 3:** By the end of 2016, the vast forests in the 5 Central Highlands provinces were only white patches.

Source: <https://trithucvn.net/tin-tuc-vn/rung-viet-nam-dang-bi-tan-pha-nhu-the-nao-qua-hinh-anh-ve-tinh.html>, accessed on 25/8/2018.

### ***Causes of the sharp decline of natural forests in the Central Highlands:***

There are three causes to the decline of natural forest area and biodiversity in the Central Highlands. The *first one* is the conversion of forest use purposes to construction of infrastructure, such as hydropower works, irrigation and transportation works, including agricultural and residential resettlement works and transfer to economic-social development projects of the region. The *second one* is the illegal acts of deforestation to have production land in the face of the competition from other commodity agricultural products, even deforestation to have land to trade illegally. The *third one* is the illegal exploitation of forest animals and plants. In the National Parks and Protected Forests in the Central Highlands, every year, the management boards of these establishments seize hundreds of traps, cargo motorbikes and bicycles (custom-made) for illegal hunting and transportation of forest products.

## **2.3. The implications of deforestation**

### ***2.3.1. With regard to the ecological environment***

- *The occurrence of extreme weather*



According to the Asian Fund, for the past 20 years, Vietnam has been one of the five countries with highest natural disaster risk, with an estimated loss of 1.5% of GDP annually.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the causes such as geography and climate change creating increasingly severe floods in Vietnam, there are direct causes of human beings: clearing of watershed forests to exploit wood, develop agriculture, hydropower, etc., decrease the vegetation in the basin leading to the poor ability of preventing flow, making the flood concentrate faster.

The recent floods in the Central, Central Highlands and Northwest regions have caused severe damage to the people and property. Many areas of the watershed and protection forests in these places have been razed to make room for hydroelectricity, which despoils their ability to regulate upstream water when heavy rain occurs. This is one of the main causes for the severe floods; When the watershed forests are cleared, the intensity of the floods goes up, the water level rises sharply, and the forest trees will no longer have the effect of water resistance and windbreaks to weaken the storm strength, and the roots will take parts of the flood water, etc.

- *Decrease in biodiversity*

In effect, the forests are being destroyed, leading to the decrease in quantity and quality. Forest loss is loss of shelter, habitat of animals, loss of precious genetic resources ... It is estimated that Vietnam is losing 137 species of plants, animals and insects every day due to tropical deforestation. This is equivalent to 50,000 species per year. Deforestation is contributing to the extinction of plant and animal species.

- *Water depletion*

Forests play a very important role in water retention and flood control. Water permeating soil increases the amount of groundwater, by which the water veins supply for the rivers. According to the Disaster Management Steering Committee, droughts and salinity intrusion have put 475,000 households in shortage of clean water. In cultivation, the loss of rice was nearly 248,000 hectares; industrial crops 129,000 hectares, aquatic products over 5,000 hectares, cash crops 19,000 hectares and fruit trees more than 52,000 hectares.<sup>7</sup>

- *Increase in climate change*

Tropical forest ecosystems, such as the Central Highlands, are also a major return source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to form organic matters. Deforestation not only results in ecological imbalances, but also reduces the ability to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and indirectly increases the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted to the atmosphere, contributing to rapid global climate change. As a result, forest area decrease has accelerated the rise of climate change, whereas warming of the Earth also affects the viability and development of plant and animal species.

### **2.3.2. With regard to traditional culture**

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<sup>6</sup> <http://tapchimoitruong.vn/pages/article.aspx?item=Bài-học-từ-việc-mất-rừng-ở-khu-vực-Tây-Nguyên-và-giải-pháp-bảo-vệ-rừng-tại-Việt-Nam-41560>, accessed on 25/8/2018.

<sup>7</sup> As above.



In addition to the ecological and environmental consequences, the dizzyly rapid destruction of forests has contributed to breaking down the traditional cultural structure of ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands. This is a distinct difference from other regions that would like to mention.

- *Loss of community characteristics*

Villages in the Central Highlands are usually formed by the coexistence and association of families of the same bloodline and different clans. Before setting up the villages, in addition to experience in geography, the Central Highlanders often follow a certain spiritual motivation. The internal strength of the villages is determined by the Rong house to the Ba Na, Xo Dang, XTiang, etc., or the long house to the E De, Gia Rai, Co Ho communities. The appearance of the Central Highlands villages is not only for the need to residence, but also expresses their indigenous knowledge, universal outlook and spiritual life.

The Central Highlands village is a traditional social organization, formed and developed in association with the role of village heads and Village Councils on the basis of customary laws. Villages are determined territorially and highly self-governing, considered common properties. The communities are obliged to protect and enjoy the same rights, recognized and accepted by neighboring villages, becoming inviolable "social space". Economic and cultural activities, behavioral and ethical acts of individuals and village communities are performed voluntarily and closely monitored by customary laws.

At present, the model of traditional self-governing villages by customary laws in the Central Highlands is almost disrupted, and the purest type of villages exists only in small number in remote, deep-lying and difficult areas. In favorable land areas appear mixed and inter-ethnic villages between migrants and ethnic groups. Some mixed and inter-ethnic villages create cultural diversity, partly culturally assimilated, difficult to recognize the cultural characteristics of each ethnic group, reducing traditional cultural values. At present, there are three types of villages in the Central Highlands: Pure villages of the Central Highlands; Mixed villages between the local communities and migrant communities; Villages of migrant minorities and Kinh villages. With these three models, the villages operate under the general rule of the government. The "new village chiefs" replace the role of village heads in the Central Highlands village communities at relatively high rates. The intermittent inheritance in the use of "khua buon" (village head) partly reduces the self-governance and community characteristics of the villages. As a rule, the link among the individuals, families, clans, communities gradually becomes loose and separated. In particular, the role of the village heads, traditional village councils is not inherited in the grassroots governments. Rong houses, the long houses of the village heads become "new culture houses". Their function, role and meaning are separated from the role of the communities. The trend of "individual arrangement" has emerged, leading to the potential individualism and the loss of traditional cultural values of the villages in the Central Highlands.

- *Gradual loss of traditional villages*

The handicraft trades that created the beautiful characteristics of the Central Highlands people now gradually disappear. Currently, many households can operate their handicraft trades perfunctorily in the face of the pressure from industrial goods from other places. And it is difficult



to see the Central Highlanders wearing brocade clothes, except during the traditional festivals. So, if they maintain the traditional brocade weaving craft, then they have few buyers, except for tourists.

- *Destruction of cultural heritage of mankind*

The space of gong culture, after 13 years of being honored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the masterpiece of intangible heritage of oral traditions of mankind<sup>8</sup>, is seen only seldom in festivals and deformed.

Under the influence of many causes, the acting environment is at risk of deformation and disappearance. First of all, the change of regional economic structure makes the production process according to agriculture calendar to change completely. This is followed by a mass influx of migrants in addition to the planning of state-owned agriculture farms, forestry farms and hydropower plants. Cultural interference from many regions converging on the Central Highlands and the unelected acquisition of audiovisual culture on the mass media are also the cause of the shrinking environment of folk culture and folk performances in the Central Highlands. Only in a short time, dozens of festivals typical of the indigenous peoples in the Central Highlands have disappeared, or if they exist, have been changed both the form and meaning.

At present, the change in land use rights changes the habitat in the Central Highlands. Natural disasters, droughts occur due to the outrageous behavior of human beings towards nature. This implication not only warns of climate change, but also causes a decline in humanity in dealing with the environment. Since 1975, traditional community and village ownership of land and forests has changed in accordance with national regulations and nationalization, leading to the decline in the economic fundamentals of the villages, the endogenous strength and the sustainable structure of the villages. The "model of new villages" in the Central Highlands is facing great challenges of the open era.

- *Killing ecological zones*

Ecological zones that have existed through many generations of the Central Highlands people now face death because of deforestation. For example, Serepok is the largest river in Dak Lak and the second largest in the Central Highlands, with many famous waterfalls, large flows, and rich ecosystems. The section of the river through Vietnam's territory is 126 km long, which must burden the buckling load of 10 hydropower plants crossing its flow. The famous Ban Don ecological-cultural tourist zone is located next to the majestic Serepok River. Since the hydroelectric plant sprang up, the river section has dried up. The number of tourists therefore is reduced by more than half. The tourists coming here are not satisfied when seeing the tourist product gradually "diminishes". For example, the Seven Branch waterfall on the Serepok was one of the famous places of interest and an unforgettable destination when tourists arrived in Ban Don (Don Village), now it faces the risk of exhaustion throughout the year, not just in the dry season.

Or Lang Biang at the altitude of more than 2,000 meters above sea level, known as the "roof" of Dalat (Lam Dong), covered all year round in the green pine is now the past due to the use

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<sup>8</sup>[https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kh%C3%B4ng\\_gian\\_v%C4%83n\\_h%C3%B3a\\_C%E1%BB%93ng\\_Chi%C3%A0ng\\_T%C3%A2y\\_Nguy%C3%AAn](https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kh%C3%B4ng_gian_v%C4%83n_h%C3%B3a_C%E1%BB%93ng_Chi%C3%A0ng_T%C3%A2y_Nguy%C3%AAn), accessed on 30/8/2018.





of machine to "raze the hills and forests" to erect green houses to plant flowers. Traditional long houses are replaced by concrete villas in the gradually sparser forests.

### ***2.3.3. With regard to social security***

According to experts, ethnic minority communities concentrate mostly in the Central Highlands and can account for 25% of the 5.5 million people in the region. Ethnic minority people losing their forest land was the cause of the social unrest that led to the violence in the Central Highlands in 2001 and 2004, leading the government to use the armed forces to restore order, causing a wave of people crossing the border to Cambodia and Thailand.<sup>9</sup>

Increasing conflicts between forestry companies and local people, most of them ethnic minority people such as between M'Drak Company and Dak Lak people; between Loc Bac company and Lam Dong people ...<sup>10</sup>

## **3. Some recommendations and major solutions**

### ***3.1. Recommendations***

#### ***3.1.1. For law enforcement agencies***

From the forest situation of the Central Highlands, the story of managing and protecting the "green lungs" has posed a lot of problems to ponder. It is time to look at protecting the ecological environment, protecting the natural resources at the highest, most serious and fiercest level. Besides, there should be solutions to adapt and respond to climate change.

Declaration of closure of forests in the Central Highlands region of the Prime Minister<sup>11</sup> is timely and necessary to protect the existing forest resources. However, it is necessary to clarify the responsibilities of individuals and organizations involved in deforestation and provide comprehensive solutions for forest protection.

The current status of the projects already and being implemented in the whole country should be reviewed. Determination should be made to suspend and revoke the projects that affect natural forests; Licenses should not be granted to the projects of converting natural forest use. In addition, it is necessary to re-evaluate the policies related to the change of forest use purposes in order to amend and promulgate effective policies to ensure the good protection of forest resources and biodiversity resources.

The local functional agencies should be directed to inspect, scan and strictly handle organizations and individuals committing acts of law violation and agencies and forest owners, especially competent persons that are irresponsible and negative, causing the occurrence of forest destruction, encroachment, re-encroachment on forest land, and illegal exploitation of forest resources.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in\\_depth/ngo-urge-land-rights-minor-commun-12112012174750.html](https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/ngo-urge-land-rights-minor-commun-12112012174750.html), accessed on 30/8/2018.

<sup>10</sup> Forest Trends (2013), Land-related conflicts between forestry companies and local people, Hanoi

<sup>11</sup> <https://bnews.vn/chinh-phu-tuyen-bo-dong-cua-rung-tu-nhien/18155.html>, accessed on 30/8/2018.



The inspection, examination, management and supervision of wood processing establishments should be intensified, resolutely handling those that process wood illegally or intentionally fail to comply with the provisions of laws. In addition, the people's supervision should be increased over the performance of tasks of cadres and civil servants, enhancing the participatory role of ethnic minority people in forest protection<sup>12</sup>. Inter-agency coordination should be strengthened in forest protection and detection of violations and criminals, and timely handling.

Communication campaigns should be launched to raise community awareness and build capacity for managers at all levels in forest protection.

### 3.1.2. For the legislature

Ethnic minority communities in Vietnam are increasingly assimilated when the State land policies do not address the issue of preserving land or forests that belong to their ancestors. According to the writer Nguyen Ngoc, a cultural researcher of the Central Highlands: *"In the Central Highlands alone, traditionally speaking, land belongs to the village communities collectively. The scientists call it collective ownership of village communities for land and forests. In fact, in the Central Highlands, previously, there was no distinction between land and forests, i.e. land meant forests, and vice versa. Then there was no forest without an owner! If carefully observed, all the vast forests are distributed to villages. They said that the distribution was from their grandparents or ancestors or that the gods gave them to the ancestors with very clear boundaries"*.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, after 1975, because of the lack of such understanding, the State implemented the nationalization of those forests, as in all other places and for all other properties. So the villages no longer have their own land, no longer have the collective land that was once attached to each village, created the basic foundation, material and economic basis of a village, and when the foundation is no longer, the villages are dying and the village culture disappears. This means the inevitable loss and disappearance of the traditional culture of the Central Highlands. So far the Land Law 2013 has still affirmed the viewpoint of land owned by the whole people, managed by the State as representative and uniform manager, which fails to reflect the reality in the Central Highlands. We think this is the source of all problems. Therefore, the legislature should consider and adjust the contents related to the ownership of land in general, forest land of the ethnic minority peoples in particular.

### 3.2. Solutions

The planning and resettlement of ethnic minority peoples co-existing in the communities to implement a number of agricultural and industrial projects have caused cultural, economic and religious disturbance, especially for local communities; The sudden change of culture and society has blurred the community characteristics, removing the connection between people and the natural environment. In order to develop the Central Highlands towards sustainability, the Central Highlands villages should always be considered an important nucleus.

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<sup>12</sup> Additional reading: Legal Science Information Center (2017), Enhancing the participatory role of ethnic minority peoples in forest protection in the current situation, Hanoi.

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in\\_depth/homeland-right-minority-11-10-2017161828.html](https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/homeland-right-minority-11-10-2017161828.html), accessed on 30/8/2018.



To build the Central Highlands villages in the direction of sustainability, the following basic solutions are needed:

*Firstly*, re-planning the village systems in the Central Highlands in a systematic manner consistent with each ethnic community to facilitate the management and development. Village model represents each community, each ethnic group associated with their cultural, ecological, spiritual environment.

*Secondly*, implementing the parallel mechanism between the customary laws and the State laws in social governance, administration and development coordinating harmoniously the roles of village heads, village councils next to the roles of the mass organizations of the grassroots government. Inheritably selecting the values, roles and functions of traditional villages to promote the strength of the village roles in the new rural model.

*Third*, carrying out the campaign "All people unite to develop cultural life in residential areas", contributing to taking care of livelihoods of ethnic minority peoples in the Central Highlands through solutions on livelihood development, strengthening the capacity of the communities to develop household economy. If the economy does not develop, the life of the people is not improved, it is difficult to talk about developing cultural life in the direction of developing "new countryside" today.

*Fourthly*, raising the intellectual level of ethnic groups in the Central Highlands to provide human resources for the Central Highlands. Training human resources who are local ethnic people, firmly uphold the laws, have professional qualifications, have indigenous knowledge and traditional culture in order to reasonably and effectively promote the roles of social management and development at the grassroots level. Distributing and using human resources in the Central Highlands more reasonably, focusing on local human resources. Providing practical vocational training at grassroots level, developing society and economy in parallel with preserving and promoting traditional cultural values of the ethnic groups.

*Fifthly*, there should be specific mechanisms and policies and cultural and social projects in the Central Highlands to promote the role of the Central Highlands cultural villages according to the roadmap for "cultural tourism", "family tourism" in the direction of sustainable development.

It is hoped that the successful resolution of the institutional issue in combination with implementation of the solutions of rebuilding the Central Highlands villages will overcome the implications created over the past four decades and develop the Central Highlands towards sustainability.

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