

**The Mekong Delta of Vietnam:  
Socio-Economic Development  
and Wetland Ecosystem Conservation**

*Abstract*

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The people and environment of the Mekong Delta have in recent years been subjected to rapid and extreme changes, affecting urban and agricultural areas and natural ecosystems. Poverty and landlessness are common outcomes. To survive, many turn to the already diminished natural resource base, leading to environmental degradation, increased pressure on natural ecosystems, and further poverty. Means to combat this cycle are to attempt to avoid the need for farmers to sell their land, through sustainable income-raising by diversification of income sources and translational research through schools as educational programmes. Management of these activities -- already the objectives of Hoa An research center -- provides the such results. An example: Wetland ecosystem restoration provides direct benefits such as wood, help to improve the quality of water in the acid sulphate soil areas - typical of the Mekong Delta, specifically by raising its pH and reducing the concentrations of toxic ions of the paddy rice fields; given the paramount importance of water resources in the delta. These results and demonstration plots are used as teaching materials in the schools, through carefully out-door teaching designs. The viability of the integrated farming systems demonstrated wise-use of natural resources; active and successful participation by farmers and teacher-students in the schools, suggested that rural areas using these models can be practicable, economical and sustainable.