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Rice Production and a Vision for Mekong's Wetlands

Nguyen Duc Tu

Water and Wetlands Coordinator, IUCN Vietnam

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In last 25 years, in the light of 'doi moi' (reforms) era, Vietnam changed from a country of food-shortage became one of world's leading rice exporters. Rice fields are the predominant land use in the Mekong Delta and now accounts for over half of the nation's rice production. The area is therefore of prime importance to Vietnam's economy, and supports one of the highest human population densities of anywhere on earth. The delta also have a large area of Melaleuca forest, seasonally inundated grassland and swamp, mangrove, mudflats and aquaculture ponds, and interconnecting river channels and canals. This diversity of habitats gives the delta considerable biodiversity importance as well as ecological values which are often overlooked.

Current practice of rice production in delta and climate change, however, affect the key ecological functions of paddy field, namely, flood mitigation, nurturing aquatic ecosystem, and maintaining agro-ecosystems biodiversity. To response to this challenge, consensus vision for the development Mekong Delta is required. The vision needs to integrate national development priorities, climate change scenarios, and wetland use options that can strengthen resilience to climate change while providing important co-benefits in terms of livelihoods and biodiversity. An ecosystem-based adaptation approach, that will invest more in ecosystems (e.g. crop diversification, integrated pest management, or application of multi-use approaches such as rice-fish, rice-shrimp production, opposed to more dykes, canals, and other "hard" measure), needs to be adopted to maintain and increase the resilience and reduce the vulnerability of delta's ecosystems and people in the face of the adverse effects of climate change.