
Vietnam: Government promotes “bioinvasion”

The spread of exotic species in natural ecosystems worldwide, known as “bioinvasion”, is deserving increasing attention and causing concern. Several plants, including tree species, have been identified as behaving like weeds. For example an African species of acacia (*A. nilotica*) is being promoted in regions of Africa where it is exotic as well as in India, while in Indonesia and Australia they are trying to eradicate it as a result of its invasive behaviour. At least 19 pine species have invaded various Southern countries’ ecosystems. Eucalyptus also appear on weed lists in many countries and its invasions are displacing what remains of the native vegetation in areas of the Mediterranean region. The invasion by alien species is one of the main causes of forest degradation in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese government is ignoring this problem.

An area of 5 million hectares is planned to be planted with trees nationwide by 2010. The new “reforestation” project, approved at the 10th National Assembly in 1997, involves 53 provinces and cities with almost 20 million people, and will cost an estimated of more than US\$ 4.5 billion. No native species will be used in this project aimed to increase present national forest cover from the current 30.2% (according to other sources, 28%) to 43%. “Forest cover” is an ambiguous concept, used in official statistics, that hides how much correspond to natural forests and how much to tree plantations, called “planted forests”.

In parallel with this project, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is now carrying out activities to “green” 10,000 hectares of barren hills in the northern mountainous provinces of Lai Chau and Son La by aerial seeding. 7.5 tonnes of pine and acacia seeds –both invading species- have already been spread in Dien Bien district of Lai Chau province.

Sources: Chris Bright, “Life out of Bounds”, Worldwatch Institute, 1998; Government Approves Socio-Economic Development Projects, Ha Noi, June 15 (VNA); Aerial Seeding Project Carried out in Lai Chau and Son La Provinces, Ha Noi, June 20, 1999 (VNA)