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XUAN SANG VO: STRENGTHENING ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN VIETNAM: A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO POLLUTION OF THE THI VAI RIVER.
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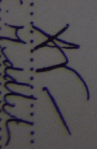
Vedan Vietnam, a fully-owned Taiwanese enterprise, had polluted The Thi Vai River in the South of Vietnam from 1994 to 2008 and had caused negative impact to health and livelihoods of thousands local farmers living along its basin in Ba Ria-Vung Tau, Dong Nai provinces and Ho Chi Minh City. In response to the negative impact caused by the river pollution, local communities had reacted to the case from 1994 to 2011 with different strategy and actors to empower themselves to strengthen local environmental governance and to stop the pollution.

This study aims to investigate the emergence of the concept of environmental governance in Vietnam using the Thi Vai River as a case study. The study also applies Resource Mobilization Theory to evaluate the community's ability to organize themselves to mobilize outside resources and utilize political opportunities between from 1994 and 2011 to protect their livelihoods and health.

To understand how actors interacted together through the time line of the case, residents of Long Tho commune, Dong Nai province and Thanh An commune, Ho Chi Minh City were interviewed together with non-state actors including the media, lawyers, Consumers Protection Associations, and distributors, and governmental authorities from the commune to the provincial level in Dong Nai Province and Ho Chi Minh City.

This case demonstrated a strong conflict in economic growth and environment protection in the period of transition from plan and control economic model to market based economic model in Vietnam which was initiated in 1986 was the main cause of weakening environment protection mechanism. Under this economic transform, natural resources has been gradually increased used by industrial activities which previously had mainly served for agriculture activities which resulted in environmental threats to local communities. In response, local communities had learnt to organize among themselves and network with pro-environment protect actors from state and non-state actors to call for improvement in accountability, legitimacy and enforcement the legal framework to enhance environmental governance.

This study also showed that in the context of improving democracy in Vietnam, communities and non-state actors had more space to participate in environmental governance. Their involvement was an important factor to enhance local environmental governance.

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