

## 2.4 Forest Resources

Up to the seventeenth century, Vietnam was covered with dense tropical forests which covered the deltas, the foot of mountains and low hills. The forests of lim, huynh, de, etc. are all peak, or climatic, forests.

At the end of the twentieth century, forest cover has diminished to only nine million hectares. Deforested land is 12 million ha. Forested land can only be found mostly in the Central Highland. The areas of barren land differ in each socio-economic zone, accounting for nearly 3 million ha in the northwest alone. If the classification is based on the types of vegetation covers, the forests that grow on medium high mountains reach 4 million ha, the forests on low land nearly 1 million and those on high mountains 1 million ha.

Over the past decades the depletion of forest cover has increased sharply. As indicated in Figure 2.4.1, forest area was 14,272,000 ha in 1943 and fell to 9,184,283 ha in 1987, accounting for just 28% of the total land area.

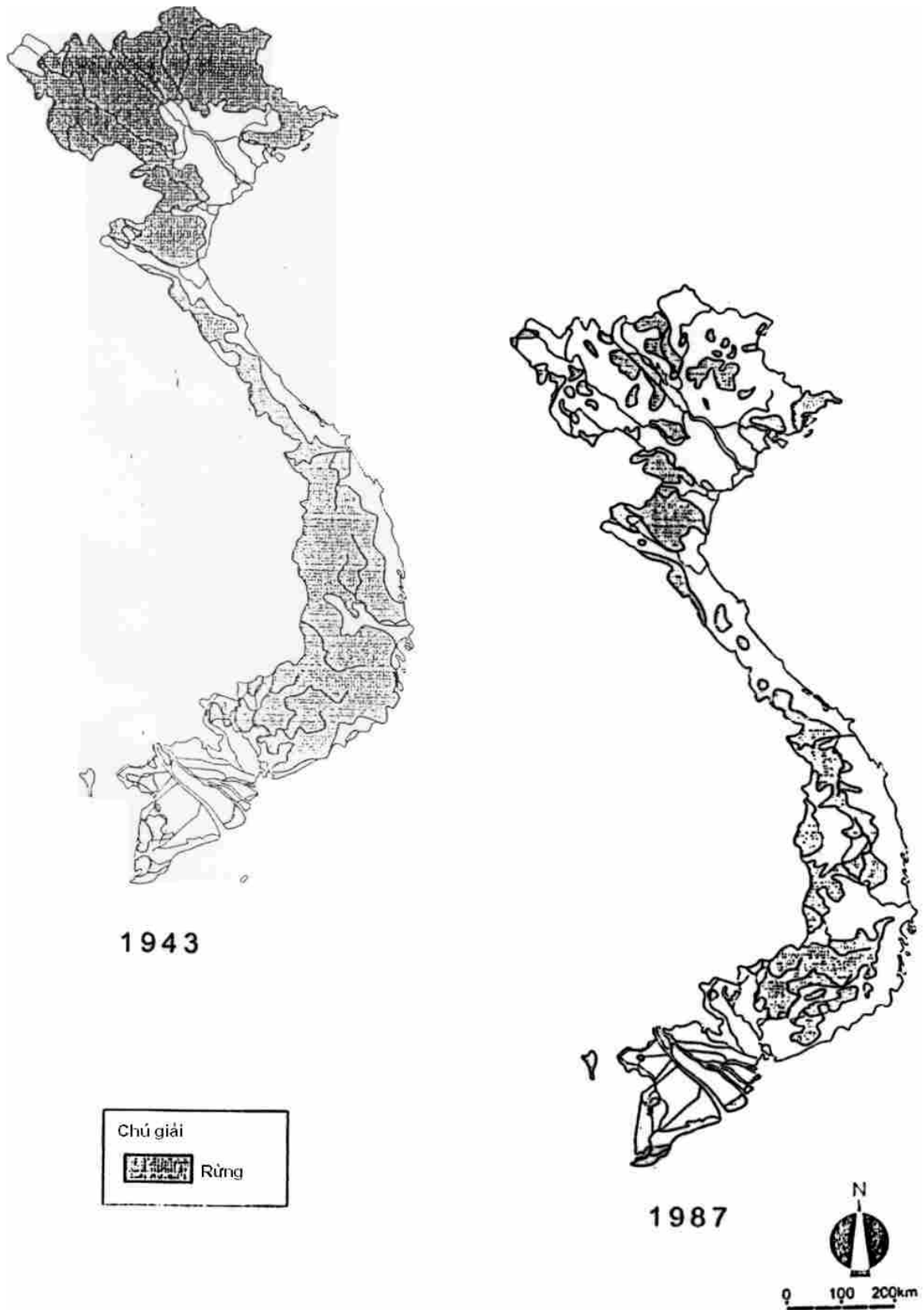
Twelve percent of the population (approximately 8 million) lives in forested land, surviving on cutting trees. Another 35% (approximately 18 million) depends on forests. Some one million people are leading shifting cultivation.

According to statistics, forested lands annually decrease by 200,000, as a result of forest fire and shifting cultivation. In addition, a large forest area in the Central Highland and southeast has been converted to plantations of rubber, coffee, tea, and cotton in recent years.

Mr. Ho Chi Minh said that "Forest is gold. If we know how to conserve and use it well, it will be very precious. Destruction of the forest will lead to serious effects to both life and productivity." Thus, the Government of Vietnam has made the effort to promote reforestation and worked to increase forest cover by 100,000 ha a year.

VITRANSS-proposed projects should thus include adequate measures to strengthen transport systems that would, for example, support the plantations in the Central Highland and the Southeast, while taking into consideration the forest preservation program of government.

Figure 2.4.1 Reduction of Forest Cover in Vietnam between 1943-1987



## 2.5 Land Resources

The distribution of land resources in Vietnam is as follows:

- Farmland : 8,028,000 ha
- Forest lands : 9,184,000 ha
- Land for special purpose (transport, mines, water reservoirs) : 972,000 ha
- Residential areas : 818,000 ha
- Barren land (including 11,268,000 ha in mountainous areas) 13,890,000 ha

Agricultural production is limited to seven agricultural zones: the midland, the mountainous North, the Red River delta, the northern Central Coast, the southern Central Coast, the Central Highland, the Southeast and the Mekong River delta. The delta regions of the Mekong and Red rivers are heavily populated and almost entirely devoted to paddy cultivation. Elsewhere in the country the area suitable for paddy is limited and such land is used intensively. Other inland valleys and low fertile hills are farmed and the total area under permanent agriculture and settlement is eight million hectares or 25% of the country. Due to a sharp increase in population, the farming area per capita has constantly fallen down: 1,318 in 1980, 1,159 in 1985 and 1,086 in 1990.

In reality, forested land is only nine million hectares or 28% of the country and only three million hectares are dense forests. An alarming 13 million ha or 40% of the country is barren lands, of which about one million hectares are rocky mountains. The rest is former forest cover that has been cleared for a number of reasons and degraded to a serious extent. Reasons for the loss of forest cover include logging, forest fires, war damage, excessive collection of firewood, and hillside farming. In addition, government's resettlement policies for cultural communities in mountainous areas have led to the clearance of many valuable forested lands.