Policy communication and the Impact of Agricultural Communities on Karst Landscapes: An Example from Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng National Park, Vietnam

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Karst landscapes are vulnerable to agricultural development. Interconnectedness between surface activities and subsurface environments make karst landscapes susceptible to soil erosion and water contamination, both of which increase when agricultural intensification occurs. To mitigate the negative consequences of agriculture on karst landscapes, increased implementation of policy to regulate human activities and communication of these policies is needed. This study occurred in Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng (PN-KB) National Park, Vietnam, a UNESCO World Heritage site with agricultural communities and mediocre success in protecting its karst terrain. Interviews, observations, and GPS were used to analyze the effectiveness of policy communication and karst protection in the Park. It was found that karst protection policy in PN-KB is minimally communicated and, when communicated, delivered in the wrong way to the wrong individuals. Despite the known harm agriculture causes to karst landscapes, destructive agriculture still occurs frequently and is often supported by government officials. Information on karst landscapes and policies is concentrated among park officials and rarely presented in an informal setting, leaving those in frequent contact with the karst landscape—farmers—without information on the vulnerability of karst terrain to agriculture and the subsequent impacts on human and biological health. In analyzing the situation in PN-KB, general conclusions on policy to protect karst terrain in agricultural regions can be drawn. The successful communication of karst science and implementation of policy to protect the landscape requires information to be presented formally to governing officials and local representatives and then informally communicated social networks of general citizens.