



STAKEHOLDER AGENCY  
IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY:  
**ARTICULATING CO-GOVERNANCE  
IN VIETNAM**

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May 2011

Neil Powell, Åsa Gerger Swartling and Hoang Minh Ha (editors)

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Published by: .....

**Citation:** Neil Powell, Åsa Gerger Swartling and Hoang Minh Ha (editors).  
2011. Stakeholder Agency in Rural Development Policy:  
Articulating Co-governance in Vietnam, Hanoi-Vietnam.  
World Agroforestry Centre ICRAF. 166p

**Photo credits:**

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79, 121, 139 and 141  
ICRAF Vietnam/ Kira de Groot: Page 3  
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ICRAF Vietnam: Page 97  
Vietnam National Museum of Nature/ Tran Viet Thanh: Page 61  
Toquocvietnam.gov.vn: Page 41

**Design and layout:** Bui Hang Giang

**Printed by:** Viet Anh PT CO., LTD

## FOREWORD

It is with great joy we see this publication on Stakeholder Agency in Rural Development Policy. This book is an outcome of a long journey, and a strong engagement and commitment by the editors, which contributes in many unique ways to our understanding of policy implementation in rural development in Vietnam. Unlike many publications the editors have involved the case study authors throughout the drafting process through a series of dialogues, seminars and write shops, thereby deepening the academic learning on the many and complex issues involved. The blend of case studies by junior and senior research students, experienced researchers and senior policy analysts in combination with a rich and detailed analysis of concepts and findings in the introduction and conclusions by the editors will make this book an excellent contribution to academic training as well as to policy and project implementation in rural development.

When we started to work with the Sustainable Rural Development project in Vietnam (RDViet), rural development was given little attention in academic training and research. For the ten universities and research institutes that have been part of the project, RDViet gave unique opportunities in strengthening the capacity of planning, designing and implementing multi-disciplinary rural development research, in linking natural and social sciences, and in networking and communicating across levels from grassroots to policy makers. The rich set of case studies in this book by M Sc students, Ph D students, partner researchers and collaborators is an outcome of this. It provides in-depth illustrations on lessons to be learnt from such interdisciplinary and inclusive approaches and furthers our understanding of the many difficult decisions people make between conservation, improving livelihoods and economic development. The editors' analysis of the many complex issues in stakeholder participation in governance, in policy implementation and space for local negotiations during this very dynamic period of rural development in Vietnam provide that added value that will make this book an important reading for academic institutions as well as those involved in policy implementation and rural development projects.

We thank the editors who brought us the original idea of writing the book and congratulate them for this excellent achievement which we are sure will bring inspiration to many readers in years to come.

***Britta Ogle & Le Duc Ngoan***  
***Directors and Coordinators for the RDViet Project***

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>COMINGO</b>	Committee for Foreign NGO Affairs
<b>CPC</b>	Commune People's Committee
<b>CPRGS</b>	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>DARD</b>	Department of Agricultural and Rural development
<b>DCD</b>	District cadastral department
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (UK)
<b>DFPD</b>	District forest protection department
<b>DPC</b>	District People's Committee
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FWG</b>	Fieldwork group
<b>GDD</b>	Grass roots Democracy Decree
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>GTZ</b>	German Development Agency
<b>HUAF</b>	Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry
<b>IAIA</b>	International Association for Impact Assessment
<b>ICDP</b>	Integrated Conservation and Development Projects
<b>ICRAF</b>	World Agroforestry Center
<b>IIED</b>	International Institute for Environment and Development
<b>INGOs</b>	International non-governmental organizations
<b>IPSARD</b>	Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and <i>Rural Development</i>
<b>IUCN</b>	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
<b>JICA</b>	Japan International Cooperation Agency
<b>LoA</b>	Law of Association
<b>LRC</b>	Land Registration Council
<b>LUPLA</b>	Land Use Planning and Land Allocation
<b>MARD</b>	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
<b>MERD</b>	Mangrove Ecosystem Research Division
<b>MoHA</b>	Ministry of Home Affairs
<b>MoST</b>	Ministry of Science and Technology
<b>NISTPASS</b>	National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies
<b>NOMAFSI</b>	Northern Mountainous Agro-forestry Science Institute
<b>PAD</b>	Protected Areas and Development
<b>PAM</b>	Programme Alimentaire Mondial (World Food Programme)
<b>PEARL</b>	Partnership for Adaptation to Global Environmental Changes
<b>PPC</b>	Provincial People's Committee
<b>PRA</b>	Participatory rural appraisal
<b>RDViet</b>	Research Cooperation for Sustainable Rural Development in Vietnam
<b>SAREC</b>	Sida's Department for Research Cooperation
<b>SEDP</b>	Socio-economic Development Plan
<b>SEI</b>	Stockholm Environment Institute
<b>SIANI</b>	Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiative
<b>Sida</b>	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
<b>SNV</b>	Netherlands Development Organization

<b>SSM</b>	Soft systems methodology
<b>SWECIA</b>	Swedish research programme on Climate, Impacts and Adaptation
<b>TEW</b>	Towards ethnic women
<b>UNCED</b>	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNECE</b>	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
<b>VASS</b>	Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences
<b>VAST</b>	Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology
<b>VFF</b>	Vietnam Fatherland Front
<b>VND</b>	Vietnam Dong
<b>VUFO</b>	Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations
<b>VUSTA</b>	Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Association
<b>WCD</b>	World Commission on Dams
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>WWF</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature



# KEY CONCEPTS

**“Accountability” perspective:** the theory that the increase in public participation and in grass roots democracy is an outcome of bottom-up demands translating into new initiatives through the exercise of democracy within the Communist Party.

**Actor-oriented Approach:** pays attention to social actors, although it may also be true that important structural changes result from the impact of outside forces. All forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing realities of the individuals and social groups affected, and are in this way mediated and transformed by the same actors and structures. An approach that understands social change is therefore needed, one which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of both internal and external factors and relationships, and which recognizes the central role played by human action and consciousness (Long, 2001).

**Boundary:** In the rural development sector, the typical boundaries that circumscribe systems of interest are manifested as basins, provinces, and so on.

**Co-governance:** Social actors involved and participating in the core activities of the state.

**Community Conservation Areas:** areas managed by indigenous and local communities through customary law or other effective means (Sherl et al., 2004).

**Decentralization:** is often seen to have currency across the political spectrum as a popular remedy for reforming public bureaucracies with an excessive concentration of decision-making authority at the central government level (Turner and Hulme, 1997).

**The “democratization” expectation:** interprets the Grass roots Democracy Decree (GDD) as a step towards introducing democracy and public participation from outside Vietnam.

**Grass roots democracy movement:** a movement motivated by several expectations, including: (1) the instrumental, whereby the mainstreaming of participation is considered a means for reducing the transaction costs associated with policy implementation; (2) that participation will lead to enhanced democratization and accountability in policy processes; and (3) that the institutionalization of participation by way of policy will reduce the strength of the ongoing struggle between the state and civil society for greater participation.

**Governance:** is made up of various spheres from where change is inspired, classified by Perroegh (1960) and Boulding (1970), and seen in Paquet (1999a) as the public, the private and the civic sphere, in terms purposeful action.

**Inclusive management approaches:** a form of collaborative management between local communities and technical advisers to ensure that local communities have a major stake in decision-making and receive a major share of the benefits from protected areas (Tisen and Bennett, 2000, cited in Sherl et al., 2004).

**Instrumentalist perspective:** suggests that implementation of policy connected to the GDD will lead to improved efficiency in the decentralization of rural agriculture. Several participants in the present study describe how the GDD is growing out of the government's positive experiences with public participation.

**Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs):** biodiversity conservation projects with rural development components. This is an approach that aspires to combine social development with conservation goals. These projects look to meet biodiversity conservation objectives through the use of socio-economic investment tools.

**Khoan 100:** The “contract-based system for groups and households” was introduced in 1981. Households were appointed to take responsibility for certain parts of the production process, with cooperatives playing a minor and supporting role. The household contract, or contract 10-khoan muoi, contained stipulations on “the firm” and the equal status of all economic components. Farming households were legally recognized as “self-controlled economic units”, and cooperatives, in their new formats, as independently financed organizations. Farmers now joined the new cooperatives, or joint labour groups, voluntarily, in a spirit of equality and mutual benefit.

**Mobilizational authoritarianism (or a state corporatist perspective):** a situation in which channels for society to influence the state exist, but within limits (Conway, 2003).

**Normalize practices, or coerce collective action:** Collective action is the pursuit of a goal or goals by more than one person. It challenges or provides an alternative course to the pursuit of rational selfish behaviour advocated by neo-classical economics.

**Participation:** means “a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them” (World Bank, 1996:3). Rhetorically, participation is often portrayed as the non-electoral face of democracy, and many modern democracies have included in their constitutions legal and institutional tools for stakeholder involvement in decision-making as well as in the enforcement of public policy.

**Policy:** refers to government intentions on certain topics. These intentions in turn can be seen as *prescriptive* where there is limited freedom for alternative interpretations. This is in contrast to *non-prescriptive* intentions, which allow for a set of different of interpretations. The *rationality* underlying policies can be understood as: (1) *instrumental*, when the output of policy is given the greatest consideration; (2) *procedural*, whereby the procedures by which policies are implemented are prioritized; and (3) *process-oriented*, where the manner in which processes of policy implementation (e.g., its transparency, the degree of stakeholder participation, etc.) are enacted is prioritized. These three rationalities find their roots in the conceptualization of instrumental, procedural and communicative rationalities in Habermas (1971).

**“Power struggle” perspective:** In the perspective of many international organizations such as development agencies, international NGOs and UN agencies, policy is understood as one outcome of an ongoing power struggle between the state and the grass roots. This perspective is nested within a Western Enlightenment worldview in which grass roots are interpreted as a “civil society”. This perspective considers how NGOs are struggling to obtain an acceptable environment in which to carry out their supporting activities, and grass roots democracy is seen as a question of community empowerment.

**Programme 327:** A programme for re-greening the uplands launched by the Government of Vietnam in 1993. As part of this programme, forest land was leased for 50 years or distributed through management contracts. Much of this land was planted with trees or left to regenerate naturally.

**The reform (or doi moi):** promulgated at the Fourth National Congress in 1986. Since the reform, Vietnam has embarked on an open door policy towards the market economy, and governance reform has been characterized primarily by a process of decentralization (World Bank, 2005).

**Resilience:** the capacity to “maintain the functionality of a system when it is disturbed. To maintain the elements needed to renew or reorganize the system in order to maintain its main functions” (Carl Folke et

al., 2002). The term is used in the sense of the capacity of households and communities to “bounce back” and recover after a shock or disaster.

**Rural development:** Rural development processes have conventionally been governed by two underlying approaches. First, where the context is understood as primarily hard systems and hence problems are addressed through “instrumental” interventions such as agricultural engineering or bio-monitoring in isolation from their social context; and, second, a “strategic” interventionist approach, which is applied when a change in the behaviour (selfish behaviour) of stakeholders is required. This intervention typically manifests itself as fiscal policies, regulatory measures and awareness-raising.

**Self-organized collective action:** refers to the form of collective action inherent within the domains of the economy and civil society. “Self” implies organization undertaken independent of polity’s “moral authority”.

**Social capital:** consists of social resources such as networks, memberships of groups and relationships of trust, as well as access to the wider institutions of society on which people draw in pursuit of their livelihood.

**Soft systems methodology (SSM):** is an approach to solving complex unstructured human problems based on holistic analysis and systems thinking. SSM is a participatory methodology that helps different stakeholders to understand each other’s perspectives. It focuses on creating the human activity systems and human relationships needed for an organization or group to achieve a common purpose. The methodology is based on clarifying unstructured or messy problem situations by designing ideal or conceptual human activity systems that would help to improve the situation. These conceptual models are then compared with the problem situation in order to identify desirable and feasible change. The methodology integrates thinking about the logic of how to improve a situation with what is socially and politically feasible.

**Stakeholders:** are typically defined as any group or individual who can affect or are affected by policies or programmes.

**Structuration:** the theory of structuration takes the analysis beyond the social structures defined by the different domains of governance and explores how human agency is inextricably linked to. It is the acts of individuals that reproduce the social structures. Social structures are seen in this sense as representing institutions, traditions and moral codes. It is suggested that human agents adapt, ignore, bypass and manipulate these, thereby ultimately driving their change and reproduction.

**Surprises and resource dilemmas:** are generally characterized as complex, owing to the high degree of uncertainty as to cause and effect. This generally leads to widely differing accounts of what can or should be done to improve a situation. Situations in which multiple stakeholders with different interests make competing claims over the same resources are often referred to as resource dilemmas.

**Vulnerability:** the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that negatively influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impacts of a hazard. The focus is on the vulnerability of households, in the context of the geographical, socio-economic and institutional environment at the local level.

## PREFACE

Using rural development as a critical lens, this book explores and reflects upon the complex relationship between modes of policy implementation and stakeholder engagement in Vietnam. To enable this, a set of case studies view issues connected to (1) policy formulation and implementation, (2) the rapidly changing governance structures and (3) change processes within interconnected sectors. The authors of this book have all conducted research or undertaken policy development in connection with the *Research Cooperation for Sustainable Rural Development in Vietnam* (RDViet Programme).

Formal research cooperation between Sweden and Vietnam began in 1978. It is currently in its final period and will end in 2011. A number of significant research programmes have been supported during this time. The findings and evidence presented in this book have grown out of one such significant research programme: RDViet is a research and capacity building programme on rural development. It has a coordinating function for research activities within the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and is situated in the rural development sub-programme (see appendix 1 for more information on RDViet). One of the major conclusions of this book is that, owing to the gaps and inefficiencies in present rural development policies, stakeholders can either completely bypass many policies or adapt them in such a way that they are better aligned to their direct needs. Cast in a negative light, this outcome could be viewed as a problem in terms policy of compliance. Findings from the different cases suggest, however, that this trend can instead be viewed as a means to pave the way for a process that has already begun – power sharing and negotiation between the state, the commercial sector and civil society. This conclusion has been taken on board when formulating the PEARL concept, in which Sweden can share its lessons learned on co-governance on a level playing field.

An important feature in the process of writing this book is the inclusion of actors responsible for the development of both rural development policy and the enabling environment for governance in Vietnam. In this regard the participation of the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agricultural and Rural Development (IPSARD), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam and the National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies (NISTPASS) a policy institute under the Ministry of Science and Technology responsible for the policy environment in Vietnam more generally, and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) Vietnam, has been invaluable.

The book has been structured as follows:

Section 1 of this book is an introduction of context, a conceptual framework and main issues raised in the book. It was compiled by the book editors

Section 2 provides an overview of the policy process at the national level. It was reviewed by the national leading scientists in the relevant fields, including Dr Tran Ngoc Ca, Dr Dang Kim Son and Dr Le Duc Ngoan.

Section 3 introduces seven case studies produced by RDViet, SEI and ICRAF Vietnam research works on the topics.

Section 4 provides a reflection on lessons learnt, where findings from case studies introduced were reflected with the conceptual framework. It was compiled by the book editors.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost we would like to thank the authors for narrating the findings from a set of extremely informative research cases and contexts. In this regard we would like to extend a special thanks to Associate Professor Ngoan, from the Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry, and Dr Britta Ogle, from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, who enabled much of the research supporting the book through launching and coordinating the research program for Sustainable Rural Development in Vietnam (RDViet). We would also like to thank the host research institutions of the authors, and in particular the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agricultural and Rural Development (IPSARD), under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam, and the National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies (NISTPASS), under the Ministry of Science and Technology for helping to ensure that the book's findings have policy relevance. The editors are also grateful to RDViet, the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), Vietnam and the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) for supporting the costs associated with editing this book. Over and above the financial support for the work done by the main editors, we should extend a special thanks to Tom Gill from SEI for his editorial work done to improve the overall language in the book. Finally we are also most grateful to ICRAF Vietnam for agreeing to publish this book at such short notice owing to the expected closure of Sida's publication unit. In this regard we would like to extend a special thanks to Nguyen Ngoc Huyen and Lisa Fitzgerald at ICRAF's communication unit for their support in editing and designing the book.



## SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION



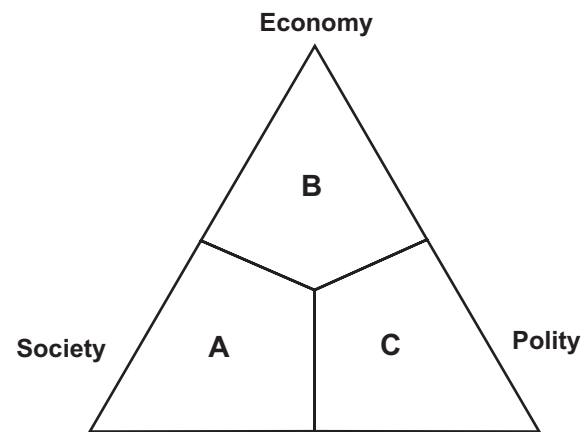
## Chapter 1. Rural development in Vietnam

Neil Powell, Åsa Gerger Swartling and Minh Ha Hoang

A new set of intractable global problems has precipitated the use of dramatic countermeasures. These have been enabled by the strong re-emergence of purposeful governance. Nation states worldwide are underwriting commitments, championed by different international forums, to put in place measures to stabilize markets and carbon loads, mitigate the impact of climate change, and so on. Vietnam, for example, is expecting a cut in export earnings from agro-forestry-fishery products of USD 4.5 billion (down to USD 12.5 billion) in 2009 due to the sharp fall in demand from foreign importers. The threat of climate change, rapidly rising food prices and forecasts of severe water shortages have revived the ailing paradigm that advocates the potential of public structures in implementing desirable change processes. The European Union (EU) has issued a new set of policies targeting a transformation, which led to a substitution of 20 per cent of existing fossil energy supplies with bio-fuels. The new market for biofuels has led to unprecedented actions by the public and private sectors. In Vietnam, the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (MARD) will support measures to mitigate the impacts of the predicted increasing frequency of storms that is likely to occur with the onset of climate change. MARD has invested over USD 100 million between 2008 and 2010 on the restoration and rehabilitation of mangroves in coastal contexts (see Chapter 8).

By agreeing to adopt various measures, nation states are also subscribing to a set of assumptions: (1) that we can identify and link eco/agro systems to issues; (2) that there is an ideal steady state for any eco/agro system; and (3) that science can define this state and determine how to achieve it. Once science has determined how to achieve and maintain the so-called desired state it is the role of the governance system to implement measures to ensure coherent action. Although governance systems are made up of various spheres from which change is inspired – classified by Perroegh (1960) and Boulding (1970), and seen in Paquet (1999a) as the public, private and civic spheres — in terms of purposeful action it is generally

the public sphere that is empowered. It has been suggested that nation states and the public sector have been losing their dominion over governance in recent decades. The governance system is becoming more evenly distributed between spheres (see Figure 1.1), which ultimately results in less than purposeful governance (Paquet, 1999b).



**Figure 1.1.** The Boulding governance triangle  
Source: Paquet, 1999

### 1.1. The conceptual framework of this book

#### Governance structures

Boulding (1970) developed a conceptual representation of the different governance spheres, referred to as the Boulding triangle (see Figure 1.1). The three spheres depict the different structures in society that formally assume responsibility for enabling governance change. These are: the economic sphere (B), where market demand and price mechanisms self-organize change processes; polity (C), where coercive change instruments such as legislation, fiscal measures and information are used to follow a prescribed purpose; and civil society (A), in which cooperation, collective action, reciprocity and solidarity self-organize change processes. Paquet (1999b) writes that a survey of many advanced socio-political economies shows that civil society, the economy and polity each make up approximately one-third of the governance triangle. The recent economic crisis, triggered mostly by the selfish rationality of free markets, the global food crisis and the imminent threat of climate change, has led to the re-introduction of a host of new legislative and fiscal measures. The presence of these has empowered the polity, encroaching particularly on the space previously occupied by the economic sphere. Vietnam, viewed through the Boulding lens, has undergone rapid change in its governance structure since the post-colonial period. During the period of collectivization that immediately preceded French rule in the 1950s, polity inhabited the major proportion of governance space. Since the introduction of market socialism (*doi moi*) at the beginning of the 1980s, the economic sphere has played an increasingly important role as a sphere for governance. Civil society as defined by western observers, on the other hand, is not formally

acknowledged by the state. Vietnam's qualification to join and subsequent entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) has led to a further reduction in the influence of polity. Moreover, the conditions that define participation in the WTO demand transparency in many aspects of the governance system, thereby exposing these to the scrutiny of the international community. Despite this, Vietnam's centrally planned legacy remains prominent, and it proudly calls its governance system a market socialist economy. Recent reports indicating how different countries in the region have adapted to the ongoing economic crisis suggest that Vietnam has been less affected than many of its regional neighbours, which had opted to liberalize their markets more dramatically. Although figures reported by the Institute of Policy and Strategy (IPSARD), under the Ministry of Agriculture, suggest that all exports have reduced, preliminary statistics suggest that Vietnam's neighbours have been much more affected by global price swings. For example, in Thailand in mid-2008, at the beginning of the food crisis, the price of rice increased by 100 per cent. During the same period the retail price of rice in Hanoi increased by only 30 per cent (FAO, 2009).

#### Governance and the role of agency

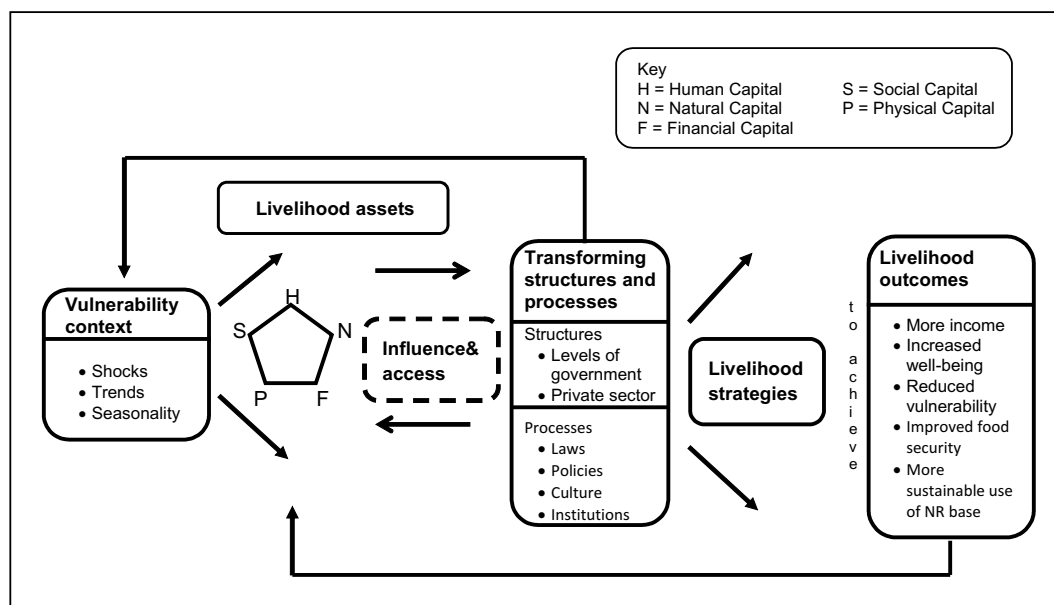
Different schools of thought emphasize different meta-theories to explain the drivers of change in rural contexts. One such meta-theory is structuralism. Retzlaff (1978) advocates a dramatic change in processes and institutions as a means to alter the way in which social institutions distribute rights and duties, and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. In similar ways to structuralism, general models connected to neo-Marxist theories and modernization theory have been fundamental in shaping the environment for governance. Modernization theory depicts rural development as an evolutionary progression from smallholding and subsistence through to technologically more advanced and more industrialized forms of agriculture. It is argued that this progression leads to economies of scale, a division of labour and more efficient production. In contrast, actor-orientated approaches highlight diversity or differentiated responses as indicative of development in rural contexts. This response, rather than being governed by a structurally defined operating environment imposed from the outside, is defined as adaptive actors who employ social capital, negotiation and social struggle to bring about change.

In the critical analysis in his book *The Battlefields of Knowledge* (Long, 1992), Norman Long explores why it is so difficult to reconcile structural and actor-orientated approaches to change. In so doing, he compares the diverging epistemological and theoretical assumptions of the two approaches. In terms of knowledge traditions, a rough assessment situates economics, sociology and political science in the structural framework. The natural sciences such as biology and agronomy, which informed so much of the technological innovation within rural development with their positivist foundations, also clearly fall well within the structural tradition. In contrast, anthropology and history are situated in the actor-orientated framework.

Along the same lines, Giddens' (1989) theory of structuration takes the analysis beyond the social structures defined by the different domains of governance and explores how human agency is inextricably linked to change processes. Giddens argues that it is the acts of individuals that reproduce the social structures. Social structures are seen in this sense as

representing institutions, traditions and moral codes. It is suggested that human agents adapt, ignore, bypass and manipulate these, thereby ultimately driving their change and reproduction.

A number of authors in this book have drawn on the sustainable livelihoods framework as a means to both understand the role of human agency and structure rural development processes. The sustainable livelihoods framework emerged as a counter response to structurally inspired approaches for bringing about development change and addressing issues connected to poverty. In close to connection to the positions of Long (1992) and Giddens (1989), the sustainable livelihoods framework is a hybrid theory, made up of both structures and agency engaged in an interconnected process of reproduction.



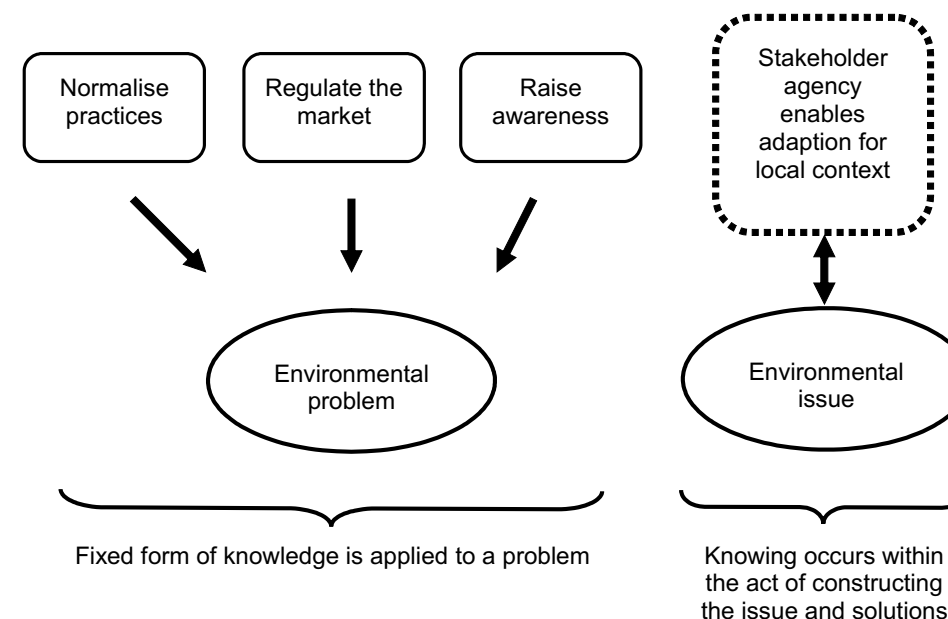
**Figure 1.2.** The DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Framework  
Source: DFID, 1996

Figure 1.2 depicts how structure and agency in the contexts of the vulnerability that characterizes rural lives lead to differentiated livelihood outcomes. Livelihood assets, as defined by different types of capital (e.g. human, social, natural, financial and physical), are employed by human agents as a means to respond and develop in the face of vulnerability. These assets are in turn nested in terms of structures and transforming processes, which either enable or obstruct the asset-inspired agency. The sustainable livelihoods framework is now commonly used as a systemic framework for interpreting stakeholder agency as demonstrated by livelihood assets employed and negotiated with transforming structures and processes.

### Governance and the instruments of change

In the quest to change situations and livelihoods, polity actively pursues a predefined purpose through the employment of various interventions. Rural development processes have conventionally been governed by two underlying approaches. First, where the context is

understood primarily as just hard systems and hence problems are addressed through *instrumental* interventions, such as agricultural engineering or bio-monitoring, in isolation from their social context; and, second, through a *strategic* interventionist approach, which is applied when a change is required in the (selfish) behaviour of stakeholders. This intervention is typically manifested as fiscal policies, regulatory measures and awareness-raising. These approaches draw heavily on fixed forms of knowledge and are prescriptive in terms of the actions they promote (see Figure 1.3).



**Figure 1.3.** Mechanisms to perpetuate change  
Source: Social Learning for Integrated Water Management (SLIM, 2004a)

Institutions charged with implementing policy measures in the rural development sector tend to be staffed by technicians, such as agronomists, foresters, economists, and so on. Thus, the indicators used to operationalize the regulatory framework to *normalize practices*, or *coerce collective action*, reflect this technical orientation. In Vietnam, for example, food safety is prioritized as an intervention and, in particular, how this affects exports. In this regard, a new set of laws has been introduced in the agricultural sector which are enforced as a means to normalize the application of chemical inputs into agricultural systems. *Awareness-raising* is also used so that both consumers and producers better understand the relationships between chemical inputs and human and/or environmental health. Thus, the mandate of these normative approaches, and indeed the policy climate in general, tends to be strictly governed by the "state of rural contexts" and how optimal rational behaviour can be fostered, rather than the messy situations characterized by conflicts of interest.

In Vietnam, some observers suggest that the potency of locally organized collective action diminished during the gradual transition from a centralized planned economy to a market socialist economy (Adger, 2000). This development mirrors the point made above, in that this

transition has led to a reconfiguration of the governance space, as depicted by the Boulding triangle, by which the economic sphere and civil society have taken a greater share. The form of collective action inherent within the economic and civil society domains is often referred to as *self-organized collective action*, whereby self implies organization undertaken independently of polity's *moral authority*. In this regard the ensuing actions are not inspired by coercion that is formally condoned by polity but, instead, it is coercion, communication and/or voluntary action that are part of the economy or civil society.

In reference to Figure 1.3, coerced self-organization still draws on a fixed form of knowledge or norms as represented by formal or informal institutions. In contrast, non-coerced self-organization is not prescribed but rather is an emerging property of knowing, mediated through the construction of issues and solutions. In this regard, shared problem definitions as well as monitoring, negotiation, conflict resolution, learning and agreement, are employed to mediate collective actions between multiple, inter-dependent stakeholders. This mediation in turn is supported by communication that recurs in multiple feedback loops to produce a shared system of beliefs, explanations and values. This common context of meaning (platform) is fostered by ongoing dialogue and learning (Capra, 2002). This process has been called social learning and appears as an instrument of change in the far right-hand corner of Figure 1.3. There are an increasing number of examples of polity drawing on social learning as a response to the frequent failure of instrumental and strategic reasoning to deal with intractable change.

#### **A crisis in governance: dealing with intractability**

The biophysical capital available for rural development generates many surprises. It is vulnerable to misuse and the consequences connected to the misuse affect the well-being of people at different levels. Soil erosion leads to land degradation, and the silting of reservoirs, lakes and estuaries. Run-off and reduced infiltration and retention lead to extreme events and an overall reduction in the quality of life through flooding, desiccation, scarcity of drinking water and droughts. Pollution and water extraction have downstream multiplier effects, which can lead to conflict.

In concert with these surprises, the contexts in which these resources are nested are generally characterized as complex owing to the high degree of uncertainty as to cause and effect. This generally leads to widely differing ideas on what can or should be done to improve the situation. These situations, in which multiple stakeholders with different interests make competing claims over the same resources, are often referred to as *resource dilemmas*. Resource dilemmas, in turn, often lead to the form of selfish behaviour attributed to open access resources and thereby inevitably result in the overexploitation of water, land and associated natural resources.

### **Problem or Issue?**



**Figure 1.4.** Elements characterizing messy problems or issues  
Source: SLIM, 2002

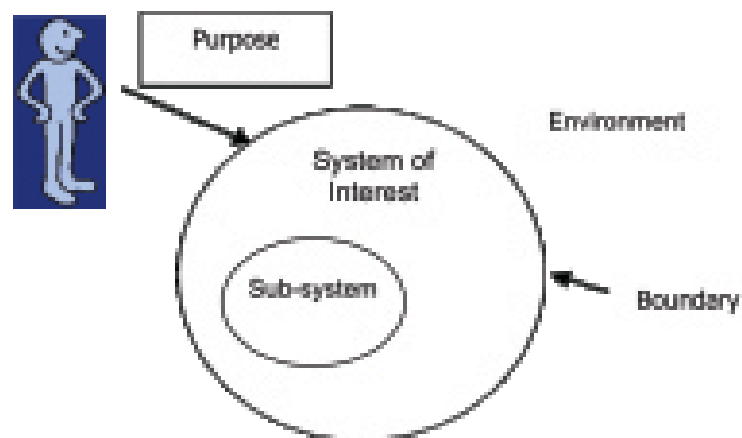
An integrated approach can be seen as the movement away from trying to understand and subsequently manage complex problems by adopting a reductionist approach. In contrast to the reductionist approach, where iterations are made between the act of reduction, classification and analysis to make sense of the system, the systemic point of departure is the organizational relations of the larger whole. Capra (1996) suggests that systems thinking does not concentrate on the building blocks, but on the principles of organization.

In terms of evaluating the impact of a change process, it is useful to reflect on the following key concepts: boundary, environment, system of interest, transformation, emergence and purpose. In situations which are perceived as complex, the key practice (either by experts or stakeholders) is to distinguish or formulate a system of interest (see Figure 1.5). This is done by making boundary judgements that distinguish a system from an environment. For the purposes of this book, a system is defined as *an assembly of components interconnected as if they had a purpose* (Open University, 2002).

Within the rural development sector the typical boundaries that circumscribe systems of interest are basins, provinces, and so on. Naturally, other sectors will operationalize their action based on different conceptual units. In order to operationalize an outreach and action component it may be relevant to explore efficacy using policy defined by systems of interest, but also an alternative approach in which the operational units are defined by *stakeholder systems of interest* (see Figure 1.5).

It is a common assumption that systemic relations, be they socio-economic or biophysical, are essentially linear. Connected with this are equilibrium-based models used to represent both natural and human systems. Central to resource economics, for example, is the way sustainability is expressed through models depicting ideals such as maximum sustainable yield, Pareto Optimality and "market equilibrium". The dominance of the Clementsian model as a platform for analysing sustainability in the ecological sciences is another indication of the





**Figure 1.5.** Key elements which result in systems thinking  
 Source: SLIM, 2002

importance of equilibrium-centred models in shaping our thinking in terms of natural resource management. Even in human-centred disciplines such as anthropology, equilibrium-centred theory, such as “structuralism”, has dominated the debates. Linked to this framework, rural development practices can be assessed in engineering resilience terms as their “capacity to resist change” or maintain equilibrium (Holling, 1996). A growing body of case studies suggests that equilibrium-centred models generate a misinterpretation of complex systems (Berkes and Folke, 1998; Benke and Scoones, 1993). Holling’s (1973) figure of eight model, also referred to as the renewal cycle, of ecosystem dynamics has been important in shifting the interpretation of impact in natural and social systems away from equilibriums to a non-equilibrium focus. The model suggests that a system moves between four domains: *conservation, release, exploitation* and *reorganization*. As the system shifts between the different domains, conventional notions of sustainability are challenged on two fronts. First, the degree of coupling, connectedness or linearity between impacts and the system is shown to be domain dependent. At the second level, the previous framework for assessing engineering resilience, which speaks, of “maintaining capital constant and undiminished” is contested. In the figure of eight model, the degree of stored capital is once again domain dependent. In fact, the model suggests that if the release of capital from the system is suppressed by remaining in *conservation* for an extended period, its release will have catastrophic consequences.

Processes connected to rural development are inherently non-linear and unstable. Extreme fluctuations in water flow are the norm in large basin systems such as the Mekong, as are floods or drought precipitated by the variations inherent in such systems. Furthermore, the market, governing institutions, and the enabling/disabling policy environment are often also inherently unstable. Hence, in terms of this non-equilibrium framework rural development practices can be assessed in terms of robustness. They become “unstable” or dysfunctional, when a so-called tipping point is transgressed. A tipping point<sup>1</sup> can be equated with a

<sup>1</sup> In the resilience literature, tipping points are the commonly measurable properties defining the resilience of systems. A notable recent publication (Rockström et al., 2009) presents a set of meta-level tipping points which, if transgressed, will result in disastrous consequences for humanity.

threshold, and once exceeded the function of the practice is interrupted owing to changes in the feedback it receives. It is thus the feedback that defines its prescribed structure. This form of resilience is referred to as “ecological resilience” (Holling, 1973). In the governance literature ecological resilience is generally associated with the notion of *adaptive governance*. The above discussion connected to resource dilemmas highlights a limitation in the ecological resilience framework: that it can only view the functionality of a particular practice from a single or “expert” system of interest. In order to acknowledge the intractability, and more specifically the presence, of resource dilemmas in rural development contexts, a third resilience framework is considered. In this framework, rural development actions are assessed on the basis of their capacity to deliver *options* and *scenarios* in the face diverging interpretations and ongoing changes in their preferred function (Powell, 2000; Powell and Jiggins, 2003). This form of resilience is defined as *epistemic resilience*. It is within the context of epistemic resilience that the notion of *co-governance* is examined in this book.

A fundamental precondition for co-governance is broadly based participation by stakeholders. The theoretical sections below review the rationales and perspectives of participation in this regard.

### 1.2. Rationales for participation

In recent years there has been growing recognition worldwide of the benefits of involving stakeholders in policy development processes. Calls for more sustainable and participatory development were endorsed to an unprecedented degree by governments, scientists, international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro (UNCED, 1992). The history of stakeholder participation, however, is much longer and has evolved from a colonial approach to community development, from calls for the (re)production of stable communities and opposition to non-radical/leftist movements in the 1940s to more recent appeals for participatory governance aimed at social and liberal democracy, a strong civil society and a responsive state (Hickey and Mohan, 2005).

In broad terms, participation means 'a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them' (World Bank, 1996:3). Stakeholders are typically defined as any group or individual that can affect or are affected by policies or programmes. Rhetorically, participation is often portrayed as the non-electoral face of democracy, and many modern democracies have included in their constitutions the legal and institutional tools for stakeholder involvement in decision-making as well as in the enforcement of public policy. However, the implications of the concept of participation may vary widely in terms of the range of approaches and the extent to which stakeholder groups are involved, ranging from conventional surveys, questionnaires and participatory rural appraisals (PRA) to more recently used techniques such as round table policy dialogues, participatory scenario building and planning-for-real exercises.

In the literature on risk and environment, widely quoted in western academic literature, stakeholder participation is often advocated for substantive, normative and instrumental reasons (Fiorino, 1990). It should be noted that, in contrast to the definition used above,



Fiorino's interpretation or conceptualization of instrumentality has a clearly positive meaning, referring to participation as an instrument for empowering actors. According to Fiorino, the *normative* argument refers to the democratic right of interested and affected parties to be involved in decision-making that concerns their lives. Over decades a number of scholars have highlighted the democratic rationale for participation in development (e.g., Pateman, 1970; Habermas, 1971; Sclove, 1995) and the argument was also common in the early days of community participation (Hickey and Mohan, 2005).

Participation is also *substantive* in that it draws on the diverse knowledge of participating groups, which improves the quality of decision-making and produces socially robust science and policy. For instance, local people bring knowledge and experience relevant to the decisions that scientists and policymakers do not typically have access to (Irwin and Wynne, 1996; Irwin, 1995; Forrester et al., 2008; Yearley et al., 2003). Local knowledge is also important for sustainable ecosystem management (Olsson and Folke, 2001; Berkes and Folke, 2001). There is also substantial evidence that local community groups are themselves capable of managing common resources, such as forests, rivers, pastures and wildlife, in an effective and sustainable manner (Ostrom, 1990; Moran and Ostrom, 2005).

Stakeholder involvement in policymaking is also *instrumental* because it is likely to foster trust, learning, engagement and compliance. By involving stakeholders in policy-relevant research, they are more likely to have a sense of ownership and be prepared to collaborate to achieve collective ends. Furthermore, stakeholder engagement in processes can reduce conflict and build trust between stakeholders by providing an opportunity to learn about other perspectives, values and knowledge (Haste, 2005). Moreover, other studies have shown that implementing unpopular policies is likely to cause widespread public protest and distrust in governing institutions (Kasperson et al., 1992). In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the role of participatory approaches in fostering social learning (Blackstock et al., 2007; Chambers, 1986; Pahl-Wostl, 2007; Blackmore et al., 2007; the Social Learning Group, 2001; Tabara et al., 2009). Processes of social learning enable engaged actors to learn from each other by sharing knowledge and perspectives, and are likely to promote the transformation of relationships, changed perceptions, the building of trust and partnerships, and resource sharing, enabling participants to identify creative solutions to problems and new ways of working together.

A substantial body of evidence suggests that participation in terms of both process and outcome can be beneficial to policymaking. In this regard, multi-stakeholder deliberations promote democracy and fairness (Renn and Webler, 1995), are likely to improve the quality of decisions by drawing on diverse knowledge, allow the representation of diverse social values and perspectives in decisions and, potentially, through the process itself, foster trust, ownership, learning and mobilization among participating actors.

### **1.3. The challenges of undertaking participation**

Although participation in policymaking is an appropriate and realistic aim, it may not be an easy route to explore. Empirical research shows that there are practical barriers to effective stakeholder engagement, such as the adoption of inappropriate participatory approaches,

the lack of managerial skills or capacity, inadequate policy and legislation, and flawed institutional practices (Owens, 2000; Steyaert and Jiggins, 2007; Gerger Swartling, 2002; van de Kerkhof, 2006). Indeed, there are risks and challenges associated with more inclusive approaches to knowledge construction and decision-making (e.g. Cooke and Kothari, 2001) and external factors, sometimes unforeseen, may have both positive and negative effects. It is important that those intending to pursue stakeholder engagement are aware of the difficulties that are likely to occur if the initiative has not been preceded by careful planning, the provision of sufficient resources, and capacity building in implementing and evaluating the participatory process.

Reed (2008) offers a theoretical overview of the main challenges that may be encountered when pursuing participation. For example, it has been found that participatory initiatives can reinforce existing privileges and that group dynamics may discourage minority perspectives from being expressed. 'Consultation fatigue' may result if the participatory processes are not undertaken, properly or there is either poor personal reward or little capacity to influence decisions. The process may also result in the establishment of "talking shops", which can create ambiguities and delay decisive action, or it could be affected by the non-negotiable positions of actors with a power of veto, which limits the extent to which the process can empower participants to influence decisions. The resulting cynicism may lead to declining levels of engagement and put the credibility of participation at risk.

However, despite these apparent risks, there is considerable evidence that, if run well and with sufficient resources, skills and sincere intentions, allowing stakeholders to be involved in assessments and decision-making can contribute positively to both the policy process and its outcomes, as well as to the stakeholders themselves in terms of empowerment, capacity-building, trust and engagement. For example, drawing on findings from over 200 cases around the world, in their seminal work, Beierle and Cayson (2002) demonstrate that public engagement has not only improved environmental policy, but also played an important educational role and helped to resolve the conflict and mistrust that often characterize environmental issues.

These and many other studies indicate that, rather than dismissing participatory and collaborative approaches to policy and management because of the apparent challenges in the short term, it is wise to consider how such obstacles to the participatory process can be avoided or minimized from the outset.

### **1.4. Putting participation into practice**

In the developing world, community involvement has been undertaken since the 1980s through processes such as Rapid Rural Appraisal and PRA (Pretty and Vodouhê, 1998; Chambers 1994). Participation is usually advocated for democratic and pragmatic reasons. People have a basic human right to take part in decisions that affect their lives and development is viewed as a process of enhancing people's capacity to determine their future. Participation by citizens and communities is linked to poverty and social exclusion by promoting self-help, which contributes to eradicating poverty and encouraging the growth of democratic institutions. Involving people creates political space for the powerless and

disadvantaged groups, and thus a more democratic redistribution of power (Ayee, 2000). Project-based participation is also meant to capture local knowledge at all project stages (World Bank, 1996; Chambers, 1994). From a donor perspective, citizen participation and democratic development are viewed as fundamental to developing a strong world market and a stable social order (Rovere, 2002).

Until recently, community involvement initiatives in the developed world were much more limited than those in developing country contexts. It was not until new legislation, such as the EU's 2000 Water Framework Directive which articulated "active public participation" as part of the statute, that the issue of involving communities began to be taken seriously in the scientific community. It remains a slow and difficult process (Taylor and O'Riordan, 2000).

In recent years, there has been growing emphasis in the developed world on assessing the quality of participatory initiatives and understanding the impact of participation, rather than simply promoting participation. In addition, there is a move away from involvement in projects to stakeholder engagement in policy processes and institutionalization (IIED, 2008).

In practice, democratic appeals to the principles of participation have been most influential in international policy processes. One notable example is the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) 1998 Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, (commonly referred to as the Aarhus Convention, see <[www.unece.org](http://www.unece.org)>). Since entering into force in 2001, the Convention has been signed by 40 primarily European and Central Asian countries. It is the most extensive elaboration of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and serves as an important step towards an international law on environmental democracy, that is, access to information, public participation and access to justice, in governmental decision-making processes on local, national and transboundary matters concerning the environment.

Among scholars and practitioners, there has been a focus on advancing the participatory tools and methods for enabling dialogue and engagement with the public and other stakeholders in the science and policy spheres (e.g., Davies et al., 2003). In part this is an attempt to overcome some of the procedural obstacles to participation that are outlined above, in part it is a response to the decline in electoral turnouts in, for example, the United States and the United Kingdom, and the increasing attention paid to non-expert assessments in decision-making (Rayner, 2003).

In addition to the 'toolkit approach' to stakeholder engagement, much recent literature emphasizes the wider process of participation (Reed, 2008; Forrester et al., 2008; Kanji and Greenwood, 2001). A process-oriented approach stresses stakeholder involvement from inception, including ideally the various stages of issue/problem framing, planning, implementation, monitoring and the evaluation of outcomes and feedback, and is characterized by the building of trust, learning, empowerment and equity as well as collective assessments and identification of problems, solutions and measures.

Over the years, a number of useful handbooks and guidelines have been produced that deal with the 'whys and hows' of participation in the science, policy and development spheres. Most

of these are concerned with public participation rather than the involvement of stakeholder groups in general, but methods can often be used for multiple purposes and in multiple contexts involving different groups of actors. It is, however, critical to adopt an approach that is applicable to the particular context, meaning that the planning of a participatory initiative should involve a thorough stakeholder analysis and a mapping exercise. Below we provide some examples of useful literature on the principles and practices of participation that may act as sources of inspiration, support and capacity building when planning participatory processes in the sustainable development field.

The *World Bank Participation Sourcebook* (World Bank, 1996) offers useful insights into how to work with people and communities in development activities.

*Public Participation in Sustainability Science: A Handbook* (Kasemir et al., 2003) shares experiences from participatory initiatives involving ordinary citizens in the context of sustainability research in Europe.

The *HarmoniCop Handbook, Learning Together and Manage Together*, focuses on the learning dimension of participation for sustainable water resource management. The webbook is available in several languages including English and French at <<http://www.harmonicop.uos.de/handbook.php>>

*Democracy in Practice: Public Participation in Environmental Decisions* (Beierle and Cayford, 2002) synthesizes the collected experience of 30 years of and 239 case studies on public engagement in environmental decision-making, and evaluates the successes of public participation and the contextual and procedural factors behind them. Among other things, the handbook contains a systematic guide for use by government agencies in their efforts to design successful public participation initiatives.

The free online book on *Advanced Tools for Sustainability Assessment* evaluates a number of tools and methods in various sustainability assessment contexts, on the basis of research in Europe. The webbook, available at <<http://www.sustainabilitya-test.net>>, includes a section outlining the strengths and weaknesses of nine novel participatory tools.

The *International IDEA Handbook on Participation, Representation, Conflict Management and Governance* includes, among other things, practical suggestions for designing systems of local governance and options for expanding public participation efforts. An overview of the book is provided free of charge in several languages. The English version is available at <[http://www.idea.int/publications/dll/upload/overview\\_English.pdf](http://www.idea.int/publications/dll/upload/overview_English.pdf)>.

*Standards of Public Participation: Recommendations for Good Practice* is one of many outcome documents from the Aarhus Convention. The document can be downloaded at <[http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ppeg/Austria\\_pp\\_standards.pdf](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ppeg/Austria_pp_standards.pdf)>.

Participatory processes play an important role in assessments of the impacts of government programmes or decisions at the local level. In this context, the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) has developed useful guiding principles for international best

practice in public participation in social impact assessments, which can be found on their website at <http://www.iaia.org/publications/>. It suggests that social impact assessments should be

- *Adapted to the context* – Understanding, appreciating and respecting the social institutions, values, and culture of the communities.
- *Informative and proactive* – Recognizing that the public has a right to be informed early and in a meaningful way.
- *Adaptive and communicative* – Recognizing that the public is heterogeneous according to their demographics, knowledge, power, values and interests.
- *Inclusive and equitable* – Ensuring that all interests are respected regarding the distribution of impacts, compensation and benefits. Equity between present and future generations in a perspective of sustainability should be promoted.
- *Educative* – Contributing to a mutual respect and understanding.
- *Cooperative* – Promoting cooperation, convergence and consensus-building rather than confrontation.
- *Imputable* – Improving the proposal and taking into account the results of the public participation process.

While recognizing the value of these and other important practical guides to participation, it is the view of the authors that the literature on participation is only one stepping stone towards achieving effective multi-stakeholder involvement in policy, management and development initiatives. The skills to run or facilitate participatory exercises cannot be obtained simply through literature review. They must be built up through a 'learning by doing' approach.



## SECTION 2: GOVERNANCE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM



## Chapter 2. The national policy landscape: The legacy and the present situation

Tran Ngoc Ca<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1. The historical context

It is necessary to view the development of Vietnam together with specific factors relating to its nation, people and culture, and especially its political life as elements that help Vietnam to maintain its position as independent from external interferences while still achieving its development objectives. Particularities in the planning of national development strategies, especially those relating to agriculture and rural development for poverty reduction, can be understood in the light of certain particularities of the political ideology that has been pursued by the nation for many years, and the way these are linked to the historical and cultural circumstances of the country.

Since the establishment of the ancient Vietnamese State in the seventh century BC., Vietnam has been faced with difficulties in socio-economic development and stabilization due to continual foreign involvement and the harshness of the natural environment. Feudal leaders had to maintain hard- and soft-power diplomatic policies towards China's royal dynasties and contrive through various actions, including agriculture development and poverty reduction, to satisfy their people. History has demonstrated that the inability to meet the people's demand for food is a grave threat to the throne. After gaining independence from French rule and Japanese occupation in 1945, President Ho Chi Minh declared that, as well as outside aggression and illiteracy, poverty should be fundamentally and quickly defeated by the government and the people of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

It is quite surprising that the policies widely applied across the whole country to encourage farmers were similar to those promulgated by feudal dynasties, including measures on flood control, reclaiming virgin soil, encouraging agricultural funds and reducing the gap between

<sup>2</sup>This Chapter adapts material previously published in Norlund, Tran Ngoc Ca and Nguyen Dinh Tuyen (2003).



the rich and the poor. These could be considered the primary content of agricultural development in Vietnam today.

A history of turmoil and a culture influenced by Confucianism, which attaches importance to honour and human values, have formed the character of the Vietnamese people. Vietnamese people tend to be self-reliant in terms of national defence and the course of development. External support and assistance, big or small, are usually considered to be only complementary. Even under extremely difficult circumstances, the Vietnamese find it difficult to accept help or assistance which might affect their honour or drive them in different directions. An attitude of keeping foreigners at arms length, without antagonizing them and while still collaborating, seems to be a distinct feature of the Vietnamese mentality. Sometimes, in particularly difficult situations, Vietnamese pathways to development may change direction as a means to becoming more closely aligned to foreign influences, but this cannot last for long and the path eventually returns to its normal course. Without deepening this philosophical discussion, the claim can be made that this state of mind has had a strong impact on the way contemporary Vietnamese policies are formulated.

Another important feature is the nature of the Vietnamese nation state: whether it is centralized or decentralized. From an outside perspective, in recent decades Vietnam has been a centralized planned economy with ongoing processes of decentralization. In fact, Vietnam has traditionally had a problem of over centralization at the top levels and decentralization at the level of the provinces, districts and communes. The saying that “the rule of King stopped at the gate of the village” captures this phenomenon, reflecting the conflict between these two poles of power in Vietnamese politics. The situation is similar in contemporary Vietnam and remains a challenge for Vietnamese analysts (Conway, 2003; McCarty, 2002). This kind of de facto division between governance at the centre (central organizations, authorities and ministries) and governance at the subnational levels (and its respective departments, people's committees, etc.) certainly leaves its imprint on the way policies are made and implemented.

## **2.2. The policymaking landscape and structure**

Overall, the structure of power play and policymaking in Vietnam is centred on three main groups of actors: the party, the state and the people. For a long period, the motto for the management of society in Vietnam has been “the party to lead, the state to manage and the people to own” (*Dang lanh dao, Nha nuoc quan ly, Nhan dan lam chu*). Although certain specific characteristics of society may have changed from time to time, these three components of the social structure are still the cornerstone of contemporary Vietnamese society.

### **The Communist Party**

Vietnam follows Marxist-Leninist ideology in its socio-economic development. Political particularities do not allow the country to have a multiparty system or political pluralism. The Communist Party of Vietnam maintains its decisive role in policymaking. Article 4 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam states that “the Communist Party of Vietnam, the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, the faithful representative of the interests of the working class, the people and the nation, following Marxism-Leninism and President Ho Chi Minh's ideology, is the leader of the State and the society. All party organizations operate

within the framework of the Constitution and law of Vietnam” (Vietnam Constitution, 1992). Party cells operate in parallel with state bodies at all levels. These units practice their leadership by passing resolutions related to the basic activities of local authorities and appointing their people to key positions in the leadership apparatus. The key feature in this context is that Vietnam continues to develop a socialist-oriented market economy. The economy is relatively liberalized while the party's leadership serves to define the guiding principles and priorities.

The relationship between the Communist Party and other governing organizations in Vietnam requires a thorough analysis. Some scholars (Dang Phong and Bereford, 1998) suggest that the relationship between the party, the government and the National Assembly (parliament) in Vietnam can be represented in three distinct periods: the party adopts a relatively limited and distinct role, accepting non-party members into government structures (1945–1954); the party increasingly dominates the machinery of government and emphasizes central planning and state ownership of the means of production (1955–1986); and the most recent period (from 1987) characterized by a gradual change in the party's role from direct control over state affairs and the rule of law, to increased autonomy and power for the government and National Assembly, including greater separation of legislative and executive functions. Although this division does not accurately depict reality, experience shows that the relationship between the organizations in the power structure depends very much on the specific features and contexts of each period – both domestic and international. Despite the above, the Communist Party retains its central and decisive role in the most important changes and events in Vietnamese society and the economy.

The reform (*doi moi*) has created turning points in economic development, and material changes bring about political change. The pre-*doi moi* period witnessed political dogmatism and a serious lack of democracy at many levels. At that time, there was confusion between the role of the state and that of the Communist Party in managing activities. For a long period, management was carried out through direct resolutions by Party committees, from the central to local levels, the content of which was often highly general and doctrinaire, instead of legal documents issued by the state. This paralysed state administrative bodies, causing internal inertia among leaders at all levels. A typical example is that the relationship between the party cell and the Board of Directors in factories and enterprises was often very tense because of the confusion between them about their roles.

However, the situation has changed considerably since the policy of *doi moi* was initiated. In its official documents, the Communist Party affirmed its role as orientation and policymaking rather than participation in management activities, which state bodies are in charge of. Vietnam is trying to take its social management in the direction of building up a Jurisdictional State (the rule of law), by which the law will apply comprehensively to basic aspects of life and the basic rights of citizens shall be ensured. There is no doubt that this goal will be achieved, but Vietnamese society still experiences many problems, including the violation of rights and regulations from time to time. Nonetheless, the current political climate is moving slowly but firmly towards a landscape of less doctrinaire politics and more participation and open interaction by a much wider set of players.

## **The National Assembly**

The position of the National Assembly, and that of representative bodies from the central to the local level, had been unclear for a long time before the policy of *doi moi*. The duties of the National Assembly had been formalistic and it was often presented with *fait accompli* by either the party or the executive bodies of government. Positive changes in economic and social stability, however, mean that the National Assembly now fulfils the role of a representative authority and has become more powerful. The Vietnamese people typically show an interest in National Assembly meetings, which are often broadcast live on the radio or television. The questions received by parliamentarians and the leaders of the government and other state authorities receive special attention. A number of meetings, including frank dialogue about events and issues, are organized regularly between local people and members of the National Assembly. Specialist committees of the National Assembly have been operating effectively, advising the National Assembly and making decisions on basic issues of the day.

There are many explanations for the increased authority vested in the National Assembly. First, is the further enhancement in the role played by the Fatherland Front as organizer of political consultations for National Assembly candidates. Although the Fatherland Front is considered the solidarity organization of social, religious, intellectual and overseas Vietnamese associations, it is also used to formalize the Communist Party's selection of candidates for the National Assembly. The "open door policy" is open to non-state sectors and takes advantage of the support of Vietnamese people overseas, which has made the position of the Fatherland Front gradually more independent. Thus, the selection of candidates for the National Assembly has become more objective. As in the politics of any country, the extent of this objectivity and of the independence of the Fatherland Front from political bias remain open to debate.

Another reason is the improved performance of the National Assembly. The right to run for election has been relaxed and there are now many more National Assembly members who are not Communist Party members. The National Assembly has also been rejuvenated owing to a decrease in the average age of its members from 60 to 50. Women's participation in the National Assembly has increased to 26.2 per cent, and more of its members now work full time on their duties in the National Assembly rather than concurrently carrying out other responsibilities.

## **The government**

The government represents the state as the executive body dealing with day-to-day policymaking. As is mentioned above, the relationship between the government and the Communist Party has gone through a dynamic period of change. The monolithic period where the party was the government and the state is over. The government has become more independent in exercising its power according to the law. While retaining its nature as a government closely linked to the Communist Party (all the important positions in government organizations are held by members of the Communist Party), with the reform, the government's role has also undergone a radical change to become relatively more independent. The party now exercises its power more through party members and less by the direct route of reporting.

Before *doi-moi*, irrational factors existed in the planning of industrial and economic development strategies, such as an overemphasis on heavy industry. Agriculture was underperforming, and plantation agriculture and husbandry were over concentrated on a few basic crops (monocultures) and animals. Industrial production was at a standstill and seriously unbalanced. Faced with a critical situation, various economic reforms were initiated and implemented in the early 1980s. However, these step-by-step efforts reached a dead end due to the limited understanding of and haste in policymaking. The price-salary-money reform that took place in 1985 not only failed to improve the economy but also left Vietnam at risk of serious socio-economic instability.

At this time, reformist leaders in the Communist Party recognized that if no fundamental changes in the existing economic management model were made, Vietnam would face great challenges in terms of its socio-economic stability. The core of the reform was measures to free internal resources. This policy inherited numerous approaches from the legacy of national construction and defence. In that spirit, the economic reform policy was officially announced by the Fourth National Party Congress of Vietnam in Hanoi in December 1986. The main aspects of the policy were: to open the economy to foreign investment and encourage economic cooperation with foreign countries, by the promulgation of the Law on Foreign Investment in Vietnam; and to change the economic structure by acknowledging the existence of many economic components, including the private sector, as well as foreign-owned ones, giving enterprises an active role in and responsibility for their own business efficiency.

The reform in agricultural and rural areas was of prime importance. The reform began with agriculture owing to its importance as a sector. By the mid-1980s, Vietnamese farmers accounted for 85 per cent of the national labour force. The evolutionary process in the cooperatives was a notable factor. Originally, these were organizations for farmers who voluntarily took part in production and shared all that they produced. Later on, all the farmers in the north of Vietnam were forced by local authorities to join cooperatives. About 85 per cent of northern peasants were mobilized to join cooperatives in late 1959 and 1960, and the volume of agricultural production in that period reduced by about one million tonnes. Nonetheless, the cooperatives partly answered the demand for concentrated production when the war in Vietnam was at its most severe (1966–1972). When the war ended in 1975, the model of cooperatives was widely introduced to the south of Vietnam. In 1988 there were 53,374 agricultural cooperatives. The operational mechanism and mode of management in cooperatives had gradually developed critical weaknesses, which led to a dramatic reduction in productivity. Agriculture fell into an extended crisis. Poverty and the supply of rice became the most critical issues of all. Vietnamese people across the whole country had to eat other grains instead of rice. Most importantly, the country had to import rice to meet its people's needs.

The way out of the crisis was defined step by step in the 1980s. The start was the introduction of the Contract-based System for Groups and Households (Khoan 100) in 1981, by which households were appointed to take responsibility for certain parts of the production process and cooperatives played a minor and supporting role. Annual production of rice increased by 4 million tonnes between 1981 and 1985 to reach 17 million tonnes. However, limitations in the



economic reform at the macro level as well as the negative reactions of the leaders of the cooperatives meant that the liberation of agriculture gradually came to a standstill. The doi moi process started in late 1986, and the leaders of the Communist Party passed resolution 10 in April 1988. This measure was known as the household contract, or contract 10-khoan muoi. Resolution 10 contained stipulations on "the firm" and the equal status of all economic components. Farming households were legally recognized as "self-controlled economic units". Cooperatives, in their new formats, became independently financed organizations. Farmers now joined new cooperatives, or joint labour groups, voluntarily in a spirit of equality and mutual benefit. A majority of cooperatives had to close because they could not meet these new requirements.

In addition to increasing the self-reliance of farmers by granting them the right to handle all parts of the production process, the Government of Vietnam also carried out other measures, such as the promulgation of the 1993 Land Law. The Land Law quickly had an effect because it provided legal assurance to and state protection for farmers as well as legal rights to transfer land when necessary. At the same time, the state removed unnecessary taxes and charges on peasants, and reinforced the preferences and advantages given to enterprises investing in waste land or virgin soil. Another measure was the state's credit support policy to poor households, which provided loans as capital for production without requiring a mortgage. In addition to lending money for the development of production, the Bank for the Poor, which later became the Policy Bank, supported poor families to improve their business acumen in order to make the best use of their loans.

As a result of these policy reforms, annual rice production increased by a further 2 million tonnes from 1988 to 1989. The following years experienced increases of 500,000 to 1 million tonnes. Paddy production rose by around 26 per cent in 1987–1989, average rice output per capita was 360kg in 1994 compared to 330kg in 1989–1992 (accounting for a population growth rate of 2.2% per annum). Vietnam exported about 2 million tonnes of rice in 1992, and today ranks among the largest rice exporters in the world. This is one of many examples of how different actors in the policy structure work to achieve outcomes.

In addition to this policy transformation, in the past 20 years the Vietnamese policy structure and landscape have witnessed the entry of foreign players, such as international donors and international NGOs which work alongside donors using funds and providing technical assistance to various Vietnamese partners. These groups, despite their differences in mode of operation and procedures, all seem to have a joint vision to contribute to making Vietnam more developed, economically healthy and socially just, and less burdened by poverty. Relations between these international donors and their Vietnamese counterparts (mainly governmental) have been institutionalized in different forms, such as Vietnam Business Forum (where donors also participate) and, more importantly, Consultative Group meetings, where donors sit with the government to discuss general development issues. It seems that in no other country have international donors been working so closely and on such a regular basis with the government as in Vietnam. Donors and international NGO actors, in one way or another, have become contributors to the power play and to policy formation in Vietnam. In the policymaking arena, there are two distinct groups of actors that warrant examination: *non-*

### 2.3. Non-governmental actors

Analysts describe the relationship between policymakers in Vietnam at the conceptual level using three models of state-society relations (Kerkvliet, 2001; Conway, 2003). The first is the dominant state model, whereby debates may arise within the state and it may be influenced by external events, but society at large is subservient to bureaucratic polity, major decisions are made within the bureaucracy and power is linked to a small group of bureaucrats. The second model tends to see the state's penetration of and control over society from the viewpoint of mass organizations. These were used to mobilize various social and economic groups to support state policies. This is known as "mobilizational authoritarianism" or a "state corporatist perspective", whereby channels for society to influence the state exist, but only within the limits (Conway, 2003). In Vietnam, most major NGOs are supported, approved and endorsed by the state to some extent. On the one hand, as mainstream organizations (the Women's Union, Trade Unions, the Youth Federation, etc.) they must act as the right hand of the party and the state, and support official policy. On the other hand, they should at least not be seen as "disliked by the state" and should play by the rules set by the state. As long as they observe these rules, they are free to do what they feel they need to in their own interests. In this context, the process could be regarded as a form of "organized democracy", which can work in the context of a society such as Vietnam. The third perspective analyses beyond the usual level of formal, organizational and national politics. It claims that the powers of the state are quite weak for reasons such as de facto decentralization (central versus local tension) and the constant attempts by the state to respond to pressures from below through policy revisions. This flexible responses approach has become more relevant given the current state of politics in Vietnamese society.

No matter what option or perspective is used to analyse the policymaking structure in Vietnam, the party and the government no longer appear as the only players involved in the policymaking process, despite the fact that they retain their powerful influence. The economic reform initiated in late 1980s created a new face for the economy in Vietnam in the 1990s and pulled it in the direction of a more democratic society. The clearest manifestation of this is the increased and more active participation of the people in social management at all levels. Civil society is a new concept in Vietnam, totally different from that generally perceived in the West. NGOs in Vietnam are not genuinely non-governmental bodies in the sense that almost all of them have a close relationship with the government. These organizations were either set up by the government as mainstream organizations or formed by retired government officials. In the case of the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), dozens if not hundreds of specific associations of scientists, such as chemists, mathematicians and economists, were gathered together for semi-business purposes. In some cases, even working government officials act as consultants or advisers to the NGO-cum-private sector consulting organizations. For a variety of reasons, there are few signs of any opposition movements or organizations capable of forming the structure of a civil society per se (Conway, 2003). In this context, NGOs and other forms of civil society organization (CSO) are either quasi-NGOs or very close to government, and have no interest in opposing the government in any way. This context demands that the concept of civil society in Vietnam is seen from a different perspective. This phenomenon could provide an explanation for the constant revision of

policies at the top in response to pressures from below<sup>3</sup>, and for the “follow the leader” attitude at the lower levels.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning relationships between actors at the same or similar levels, consensus has long been the dominant factor in setting patterns of interaction, which makes the process of policymaking slower and more careful. The phenomenon is called by some consensus governance (Wolff, 2002), and leads to incremental change without any radical shake-ups or collapses.

#### **2.4. Democracy at the grassroots level**

The grass roots level, that is, the level of the commune and the ward, is always the weakest and most sensitive link in the political system in Vietnam. The socio-political disorders that occurred some years ago in a number of provinces were exacerbated by the shortcomings at the level of the local authorities. These cases have increased the awareness of the government of concerns about people's political rights, especially in rural areas, and of the risks of spontaneous resistance by those not in favour of the socio-political stabilization of the country. After these events, on 11 May 1998 the government issued Decree No.29/1998/ND-CP (often called the Grass roots Democracy regulation), which set out regulations on democratic practices in the communes. The Prime Minister issued an instruction to speed up the implementation of the regulations across the whole country. This was a positive breakthrough in the setting up of a democratic system in Vietnam. People can now participate in and make decisions about a majority of the important socio-economic activities in their localities, according to the principle of “people know, people discuss, people do and people check”, in addition to the indirect democratic system through the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels. Many localities have set up steering committees to exercise democratic rights with the participation of Communist Party members, state officials and inspection committees, as well as social organizations such as the Fatherland Front, the Veterans' Association and the Women's Association.

Despite a number of difficulties in putting democracy into practice, it is clear that local authorities and social organizations can reach their objectives in a more or less cooperative manner, especially in rural areas. In official documents, the main principles of grass roots democracy are:

##### **People know (dan biet)**

Local authorities have to provide timely information to the people on important plans and activities that will be carried out in their localities, such as state policies, new laws, the long-term and annual development plans of local authorities, budget predictions and actual expenditure by communes, as well as resolutions and plans relating to loans for the development of production, the results of inspections and checks on negative actions by state cadres, and so on.

<sup>3</sup>This behaviour in policymaking efforts can in certain contexts lead to ineffective governance where the government's power is weakened and policy measures are inconsistent and sometimes contradictory.

<sup>4</sup>In the extreme, this behaviour would provide a fertile environment for a non-democratic society with few initiatives and little reaction to whatever the centre is doing.

##### **People discuss and give their opinions before the local authorities decide (dan ban)**

For important tasks within the domain of local authorities, the people are entitled to discuss and give their opinions before the local authorities make a decision. These might include planning, socio-economic development plans in localities, plans to use land, compensation and site clearance.

##### **People discuss and directly make decisions (dan lam)**

The people directly discuss and make decisions on issues relating to their direct interests as individuals and the community, such as infrastructure development, revenues, the expenditure of funds, business and maintenance of production capacity.

##### **People supervise/check (dan kiem tra)**

Local authorities have to designate a place to receive the people and have a concrete timetable for answering the people's questions and any claims related to the performance of the local People's Council and Committee, land use and land management, fees and charges, expenditure of funds, business and maintenance of production capacity.

##### **People supervise/check (dan kiem tra)**

Local authorities have to designate a place to receive the people and have a concrete timetable for answering the people's questions and any claims related to the performance of the local People's Council and Committee, land use and land management, fees and charges.

#### **2.5. Participation by socio-political organizations in the policy process**

As is mentioned above, to maintain the political nature of the state according to Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Communist Party of Vietnam always plays the role of orienting and directing the development of the country. The state, with its specific management mechanism, concretizes these resolutions into legal documents and ensures that they are implemented efficiently. The people can implement their right of ownership over the land in their relevant areas, either indirectly through their representative organizations from the central to the local level or directly through social organizations. Thus, in addition to certain management institutions such as the state and the Communist Party, a special character of the political structure in Vietnam is the legal acceptance of participation in management activities by certain socio-political organizations. Below are some notable examples of the socio-political organizations that make up the structure of political power and influence in the policymaking landscape to varying degrees in Vietnam.

##### **The Fatherland Front of Vietnam (Mat tran To quoc Viet Nam)**

The Fatherland Front is a long-established socio-political organization that has great influence on the political life of Vietnam. It is considered an extended arm of the Communist Party. The organization brings together socio-political organizations, religious organizations and patriotic personalities, as well as the intelligentsia and Vietnamese overseas to unite for national construction under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

The Fatherland Front of Vietnam organizes negotiations to select and recommend candidates to the National Assembly and the People's Councils, and holds meetings and discussions

between candidates and people's representatives. At the same time, it supervises and consults on the operation of state bodies. The Front contributes to the exercise of democracy in rural and mountainous areas, and is seen as representative of non-state stakeholders. The activities of the Fatherland Front are not limited to the political sphere. In economic development, especially in the rural economy, the Front plays an important role through its regular mobilization of socio-economic development movements at the central and grass roots levels. Agricultural encouragement groups and farmers' support funds, including credit and extension loans, have been effectively organized by the Front, helping rural and mountainous areas to successfully meet consumer demand for rice and other foods.

#### **The Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (Doan Thanh nien Cong san Ho Chi Minh)**

Established in 1932, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union is considered the right arm of the Communist Party of Vietnam. From its vanguard position, it gathers, propagandizes among and ideologically educates young people along communist lines across the whole country. There are currently about 4 million youths in the Union. Its main role is to undertake the political and ideological education of young people by informing them about the policies of the Communist Party and state laws, and by mobilizing young people to build a new way of life. The Union also actively participates in promoting and dealing with the complaints of young people in relation to democracy exercised at the grass roots level by setting up groups to work with young people.

#### **The Vietnam Women's Association (Lien hiep Phu nu Viet Nam)**

The Vietnam Women's Association has over 10 million members and cells at all levels. It plays an active role in stabilizing production and development and in reducing community poverty. The Association collaborates with the Fatherland Front over the nomination of candidates to people's representative organizations such as the People's Councils and the National Assembly. The Association also interacts with other organizations to investigate and deal with violations of the basic rights of women at the local level, such as on issues around household violence and basic healthcare campaigns.

Other organizations such as The Vietnam Veterans' Association (*Hoi Cuu Chien binh Viet Nam*) and the Vietnam Peasants' Association (*Hoi Nong dan Viet Nam*) also play a role in influencing certain policies related to agriculture and rural development. Similarly, there are several mainstream mass organizations, such as the Confederation of Vietnamese Labourers, *Tong lien doan Lao dong Viet Nam*, and other types of NGO such as the business and professional associations set up either within VUSTA or outside it. In general, the role of the mainstream organizations tends to be to support the official line of government policy. Professional associations and other semi-private business units sometimes function like an NGO and can work as consultants. There are also a small number of emergent organizations that operate as genuine NGOs, with few economic interests but to further certain specific causes such as child protection, environmental preservation or rural development

### **2.6. The role of public policy research organization**

Based on their degree of involvement in policy formulation, public policy research organizations can be categorized as: (i) policy-oriented research institutes, which are normally

part of a ministry; (ii) basic social research institutes, mainly those under the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS); (iii) basic natural sciences research institutes, mainly those under the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST); and (iv) applied research institutes, which conduct technological research and therefore contribute the technological content of policies. According to their legal mandates, the key functions of public policy research organizations are to:

- Prepare documents on sectoral development strategies, master plans and policies;
- Prepare regulatory documents;
- Conduct research schemes and projects;
- Review proposed projects;
- Establish sectoral standards and technical procedures;
- Collect, process and provide information;
- Train staff or postgraduates;
- Provide consultancy services;
- Engage directly in international cooperation;
- Manage the research activities of ministries.

Consequently, their activities can be classified into two groups: those that provide a scientific basis for public policy formulation, such as state- and ministry-level research projects, policy advocacy documents, books and articles; and those that design policies, such as development strategies, development master plans, policy proposal projects and regulatory documents. The number of people working in public policy research organizations in 2002 was around 16,000, which accounted for 0.15 per cent of total employment in the economy. These organizations employ a significant proportion of the workforce that has a higher degree. More than 13 per cent of the individuals who hold a PhD and 4.1 per cent of those with a masters degree work in public policy research organizations (ADB, 2005).

The policymaking structures and processes also determine the demand for public policy research. The 1996 Law on Regulatory Document Procedures regulates the essential steps of the lawmaking process. The preparation of laws, ordinances and decrees includes the following activities: (i) review of the implementation of laws, acting on obsolete regulatory documents relating to the legislation, and surveying and assessing the current situation of social relations concerning the main content of the project; (ii) studying information and material concerning the project; (iii) preparing in outline, editing and correcting the proposals on the project; (iv) consulting relevant organizations, institutions and individuals through the appropriate forums, depending on the characteristics of the project; (v) preparing documentation to be submitted to the competent bodies; and (vi) preparing, in cooperation with the relevant organizations, institutions, and individuals, the implementation and guidance documents.

In their activities, public policy research organizations have to face several challenges linked to the unique features of a transitional economy and a society that contains many still unclear and conflicting views and concepts. Aspects of the overall international context and the macro-environment are also unpredictable. There is imperfect information for research and policymaking, in terms of its availability and reliability, and the organizations must work in the

context of divergent and conflicting interests. In some particular cases, public policy research organizations also face the issue of sensitivity in drawing conclusions and making recommendations (Nguyen Dinh Cung et al., 2005). The connections between research and training, between research and the policymaking process and among research institutions are all quite weak. Their analysis lacks an independent view and the necessary quality, partly because of their sources of funding. In common with other research organizations, public policy research organizations can suffer from the problem of a brain drain weakening research capacity. From this perspective, there is a need to improve the communication between public policy research institutions and the policymaking arena and a need to improve the dissemination of research results.

## 2.7. Conclusions

The policymaking scenery in Vietnam is a result of its long historical and cultural traditions. The national policymaking process should therefore be seen and analysed in the context of these traditions and the other particularities of the country. Apart from the key players in policymaking, such as the Communist Party, the National Assembly, the government and other mainstream socio-political organizations, a range of new players has appeared on the scene since the advent of the policy of *doi moi* and the integration of the country into the global economy. Public policy research organizations are one specific group that plays an important role in developing and supporting policies. However, like many other research organizations, they have problems and weaknesses that need to be addressed.

Policy issues related to agriculture and rural development in Vietnam, like other policy process in the socio-economic development of the country, seem to be a mix of the responses and interactions of many actors, governmental and non-governmental, in shaping the pathway to consensus and achieving common goals of co-existence and co-development. These features, which may not be too remote from other contexts, need to be taken into account in all policy



## Chapter 3. A perspective on agriculture, farmers and rural development in Vietnam: The current situation and challenges

Dang Kim Son and Le Duc Ngoan

### 3.1. The situation and challenges for agriculture, farmers and rural development in Vietnam

#### Agriculture

In the past 20 years, the success of Vietnam's economic development has created the conditions for the country to change from an agricultural to an industrialized society. Production has significantly increased in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture. Between 2000 and 2007, despite fluctuations in market prices, disasters and epidemics, gross domestic product GDP still increased by an average of 3.7 per cent annually, and the total value of annual industrial production increased by 5.2 per cent. In 2007 cereal production increased by 5.5 million tonnes compared to 2000 and average food production per capita increased from 420 kg in 2001 to 470 kg in 2007. Vietnam not only guaranteed its food security but also exported more than 4 million tonnes of rice each year. The production of perennial crops important to the international market, such as coffee, pepper, rubber and cashew, continues to increase.

Although animal husbandry has faced widespread problems with epidemics, it is still more developed than before. The annual increase in production was 7–8 per cent between 2000 and 2006<sup>5</sup>. Aquaculture has developed in both fish farming and catch capacity, and productivity doubled between 2000 and 2007. A restructuring of agricultural production meant that the GDP of cropping cultivation decreased by 8 per cent between 2000 and 2007, but the GDP of animal husbandry and aquaculture increased by 3 per cent in the same period. The area of forestry plantation increased from 11.3 million ha in 2000 to 12.8 million in 2007. Deforestation

<sup>5</sup>Nguyen Dang Vang (2007). Livestock Production 2000-2006 and Strategies for 2010. Paper Presented at the National Workshop on Livestock Production 2000-2006 and Strategies for Livestock Development 2007-2010; Hanoi, June 2007.



has been reduced and according to official statistics, the actual forest area in Vietnam has increased to 13.564 million ha in 2009 (which equates to 39% of the land area) from 9.2 million ha in 1992<sup>6</sup>. Timber production increased to 3.6 million cubic metres in 2007.

The wide application of new technology means that the production of crops and the productivity of animal husbandry have increased and the quality of forestry has improved. Investment in processing agricultural and forestry products has also increased. In 2001–2006, the processing of agricultural products increased by 14.8 per cent per year, and the value of exported agricultural products also rose. In 2001–2007, exported agricultural products earned USD 49.6 billion and grew by 16.8 per cent per year. In 2007 alone the figure was USD 12.5 billion.

Despite the above-mentioned growth in the agricultural economy, Vietnam's agricultural industry still faces many difficulties. Crop production still dominates, occupying 57 per cent of total agricultural production, and, despite their great potential, animal husbandry, aquaculture and forestry are developing only slowly. The quality of many products and the efficiency of their production remain low despite high transaction costs. Forest land, which is under the control of state-owned forest enterprises, occupies a large area and is not managed effectively. The development of agricultural production in general is unstable because producers lack market information and infrastructure systems. It is still a challenge for managers and producers to understand price fluctuations, and to manage and monitor the quality of production inputs and outputs. An imbalance between production and environmental management leads to environmental pollution, and the exploitation of natural resources in a manner which threatens development. Furthermore, climate change, epidemics and natural disasters also have significant effects on agricultural production as well as rural development more generally.

These difficulties constitute the challenges for agricultural production in Vietnam. In recent years, agricultural growth has slowed significantly. The average annual growth of GDP reduced from 4.1 per cent in 1990–1995 to 3.5 per cent in 2006–2007. Vietnam's agricultural sector will face even more difficult challenges in the future. The total area of agricultural land will be reduced, the rural labour force continues to reduce and the price of agricultural inputs continues to increase. These trends are being compounded by the impacts of global climate change, climate variability and disasters. From 1990 to 2008, Vietnam belongs to the top ten countries most affected by climatic extreme events worldwide (Germanwatch Climate Risk Index, 2009).

### **Rural development**

Between 2001 and 2006, approximately 10 per cent of agricultural households in rural areas (approximately 2 per cent of agricultural labour) shifted to non-agriculture activities. Many industrial zones, businesses and urbanized centres were established in rural areas. The share of industrial production by value in rural areas increased from 17 per cent in 2001 to 19 per cent in 2007.

Investment in infrastructure in rural areas continues. Between 2001 and 2005, irrigation capacity increased by more than 575 million ha and drainage capacity increased by 235 million ha. This resulted in good conditions for agricultural production, while also preventing natural disasters and contributing to improvements in the livelihoods of the people living in rural areas. Irrigation systems throughout the country are operated by 100 irrigation companies and 1000 cooperatives. There has also been investment in transport systems in rural areas. There are roads leading to the commune's centres in 97 per cent of the communes. National electric grids provide electricity for almost all communes and 97 per cent of total households in the country. In the rural areas, nearly 100 per cent of communes have primary schools, 91 per cent have high schools and 88 per cent have kindergartens. The local market in rural areas accounts for 75 per cent of the total market in the country, 99 per cent of all communes have a medical clinic and 55.6 per cent of communes have a pharmacy. With respect to communications, 100 per cent of communes have telephone lines, and 85 per cent have a postal service. Finally, 70 per cent of rural households have clean water for domestic uses. Overall, rural conditions have been completely changed in the country.

Despite these many changes, Vietnam's rural areas still face many development challenges. Converting land from agricultural use to other uses has become a major concern in society. The slow development of infrastructure, weak labour skills and inappropriate policies mean that private sector investment in agriculture and rural areas accounts for only 15 per cent of new investment, while foreign direct investment accounted for under 5 per cent. The industrial and service sectors are also developing only slowly. Industrial production by value made up less than 20 per cent of the rural economic in 2007. Overall, 68 per cent of rural households still consider agriculture, forestry or aquaculture to be their main source of income.

Low incomes and slow economic development mean that the livelihoods of rural people, especially in remote areas, are much more difficult than those of people living in urban areas. The quality of services such as health care and education and of culture in rural areas is still low. As a result, rural people lack access to markets, information, education and health care. The development of rural areas is not yet built into a strategic planning process, which leads to environmental pollution that directly affects people's lives. In addition, traditional culture is not being preserved in some developing areas.

### **Rural livelihoods**

Today, rural people account for 73 per cent of the population in Vietnam. Over half (54 per cent) of the rural population is employed in either agriculture, forestry or aquaculture. The speed at which labour is migrating from agriculture to more urban sectors is increasing rapidly. As a result, the average age of the rural labour force has increased, although its level of education and professional skills are also improving.

Small farm households, which are the most important force in rural areas, are being shifted to the production of manufactured goods. In 2006, more than 10 million households throughout the country worked in agriculture, forestry or aquaculture. More than 100 000 large farms had an average size of seven to eight times larger than that of small farm households. Most of the large farms hire labour, and more than 7000 agricultural-forestry-aquaculture cooperatives provide services to farmers in terms of irrigation, plant protection and the supply of electricity.

<sup>6</sup> Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) to World Bank's FCPF. 2010.

There are more than 2000 agriculture, forestry and aquaculture enterprises in rural areas. State enterprises have been restructured to become joint stock companies and have reduced as a proportion of production to 41 per cent. State agricultural and forestry enterprises are also restructuring.

The incomes and livelihoods of rural people continue to improve. In the past 10 years, the average income of rural people has increased almost threefold. The average savings of each household more than doubled between 2001 and 2006. The number of poor households continues to decrease. According to the World Bank, the proportion of households in poverty reduced from 35.6 per cent in 2002 to 18 per cent in 2007. Rural people have gained more entitlements. For example, 38 per cent of rural people sought medical treatment in 2006 – double the figure in 2002. In early 2008, more than 30 per cent of poor students were able to borrow money at reduced rates of interest for their higher education.

The principles of democracy continue to be applied in activities such as planning and infrastructure development, organizing production, supporting people in the face of natural disasters, developing cultural life and managing rural development. Mass organizations such as the Farmers' Union and the Women's Union participate actively in social activities and social mobilization.

The lives of rural people in Vietnam have changed considerably but farmers still face huge challenges. Household production is fragmented. The average size of the agricultural land held by each household, for example, is 0.6 hectares. Although many local organizations operate in rural areas, it is not their role to support rural people. Despite the numerous risks they face due to disasters and fluctuations in market prices, farmers do not yet have access to social insurance. A large number of farmers risk falling back below the poverty line. Gender equity is also an issue that needs to be addressed.

There is a wide gap between rural and urban living standards and there is no evidence this is decreasing. Migration from rural to urban areas increases but the quality of labour has not improved. Labour productivity and the underemployment of farmers remain live issues. Only 8 per cent of labour in rural areas has a vocational training certificate.

The successes and failures in agricultural development, farming and rural development in Vietnam in recent years reflect the prevailing rural development ideology and the perspectives of the people and government officers, as well as the policies of the state and local authorities. In the past 20 years, the efforts of the state and the Communist Party and those of the people have led to some remarkable outcomes and successes, such as land reallocation, trade liberalization and integration, and the enabling policy environment. However, many issues need to be investigated further and adjustments need to be made, for example, in the investment levels for agriculture, industrial development with no links to agriculture, the unreasonable aspects of current land allocation policies, the slow pace of administrative reform and the limited restructuring of state enterprises. Problems have arisen in part because of the conservative thinking and lack of action of government officers and the people. Further reform is required in both policy and policy implementation in the coming years in order to overcome these difficulties.

### **3.2. Future opportunities and challenges**

The challenges for agriculture, farmers and rural development in the new period are likely to include the speed of industrialization and urbanization, the creation of new jobs, opening new markets, and supplying goods and services to agriculture. In meeting these challenges, more natural resources such as land, water and labour will be used, leading to environmental problems such as pollution, ecosystem imbalances and social conflicts.

International integration is occurring at great speed at the global level, which opens up large markets for agricultural products from Vietnam, drawing in more investment as well as new technology and new styles of management. On the other hand, Vietnamese producers are faced with intense competition from nations that produce better quality agricultural products using more technically advanced production techniques. Globalization also poses challenges for Vietnam, such as barriers to technology, price fluctuations and the threat of diseases and epidemics, as well as trade conflicts.

Science and technology will in the future be the main driver of the creation of new products, improved quality and the price of agricultural products, as well as a direct force for change in agricultural structures and management. This is a great opportunity that Vietnam's farmers should not miss. However, the fragmentation in production, the undeveloped infrastructure in rural areas, the unskilled labour force and the low incomes of rural people are likely to prevent the widespread application of science and technology. In addition, the overuse of chemicals and mechanization, and the careless application of biotechnology, for example, by importing seedlings and seeds, could also lead to ecological imbalances, environmental pollution and a loss of biodiversity.

The global energy crisis is likely to increase the price of agricultural products in the short run, but in the long run it will force human beings to alter their technologies and open up new horizons for productive capacity and organization. The food crisis in the short term will create a wider divide between rich and poor, as well as more social and political conflicts. In the long run, it should create new opportunities for poor countries to expand their agricultural production and restructure their economic framework. The increase in epidemics threatens the incomes of producers and traders and the livelihoods of consumers, but could also motivate the reorganization of production, service networks and food safety management in all nations, especially in developing countries, to make them more sustainable and efficient.

In the future, global climate change is expected to alter the organization of production and patterns of resettlement on a large scale in Vietnam. This is especially likely in the Mekong River Delta, where the largest rice-growing area of the country will radically change. Given all the opportunities and challenges mentioned above, Vietnam will need new strategies and policies more appropriate to the new, dynamic national and global contexts.

### **3.3. Some new attitudes and objectives**

Vietnam has had to go through many changes in the past 20 years, which in the past took other nations hundreds of years to achieve. It will continue to go through change in the coming 10 years. The challenges are the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy, and to move from agricultural production to industrialization, from a rural society to an urban one



and from a closed market to a liberalized global market. Such fast-paced change has meant that the state's financial and other resources are not sufficient to fill the knowledge gaps in order to balance economic growth and sustainable social and environmental development, or the gap between the rapid growth of urban areas and the slow development of rural ones.

From a development perspective, agriculture, farmers and rural development remain the principal drivers of economic growth and political stabilization in Vietnam. Remarkable efforts have been made to ensure the country's industrial development and modernization as well as its socialism. The agricultural sector creates employment and income for many rural people, ensures national food security, creates markets for the country, and is an important source of foreign earnings for economic growth and a basis for poverty reduction as well as equity and a stable society. It also conserves and develops the environment and helps to create a healthy cultural environment for the country.

In this context, rural people are the actors who actively organize, manage and carry out the development process. Agriculture and rural development should be developed together and all the economic sectors, including industry and the urban sectors, need to support the rural sector. The Government of Vietnam's aim for agriculture and rural development is to improve living standards in rural areas by developing sustainable agricultural production on a large scale, high levels of competitiveness, a civilized society, economic growth, a modernized infrastructure that is ecologically sustainable, and a rich and unique national culture.

#### **3.4. Recommendations for policy innovations to support rural development**

Enhanced investment in agriculture is needed in rural areas. This will require a renewed investment framework and priority to be given to important fields such as infrastructure, socio-economics, and science and technology as well as attracting enterprises to rural areas and providing training for labour. Budgets and financial conditions at the communal level need to be improved in order to formalize informal credit markets in rural areas, enable local entrepreneurship, encourage local governance and help farmers to develop enterprises.

Advanced technology needs to be acquired from abroad. In so doing, the focus must be on enhancing research and reforming research management, supporting the private sector to participate in research and technology transfers, renewing extension systems to meet the needs of rural people, encouraging educated labour to work in rural areas and promoting mechanization to increase yields in agriculture.

Paddy fields need to be protected to ensure national food security in the long-term for the 130 to 140 million people in the country, and to ensure that there is enough land to safeguard environmental services and security needs. This will also help to create the conditions for a market economy to operate, regulate land use efficiently by prolonging land use, end the price premium for converting agricultural land to other purposes and create the conditions for a consolidation of fields into larger scale agricultural production.

Greater investment needs to be made in infrastructure. More specifically, multifunctional systems need to be prioritized which combine hydropower, transportation, tourism, aquaculture and disaster protection. Measures also need to be implemented that mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The capacity to process agricultural products needs to be improved in order to create specialized cultivation zones with improved processing and trade services. More specifically, livestock husbandry, especially cattle, should be promoted, and aquaculture, on land, on the coast and off-shore, should be expanded. Inefficient state enterprises need to be reformed, and leases for land and forest areas that are currently not being used in an efficient manner should be terminated as a means to re-organize forest production, and protect and enhance forest designated as a special use conservation status. The handicraft sector provides employment and income for people in rural areas, and is a catalyst for small and medium-sized enterprises. It should be supported and promoted. Better coordination between urban and rural planning is needed to support the decentralization of industry to rural areas. The ecological environment in rural areas must be harmonized with the need for economic growth in the whole country, harmonizing modernization with tradition.

The socialization of services should equally be supported. The empowerment of communities to manage rural development and increase the quality of services should be promoted, and an insurance programme developed to help the rural population cope with risks linked with epidemics and diseases.

Poverty reduction programmes should be continued, especially for minority groups. Access to markets, information, science and technology should be enhanced, and education for rural people, gender equity and grass roots democracy should be promoted. Rural development programmes should be established that are appropriate to the socio-economic and natural conditions of each region in order to develop comparative advantages among all the people, especially those living in remote areas and ethnic minority groups.

Opportunities should be created for the best farmers to expand their scale of production to large-scale farming and cooperatives, and develop production specializations and intensification. Vocational training should be provided as well as information and support, and capital to give farmers opportunities to transfer from agricultural to non-agricultural activities. It is also important to transform the Farmers Union so that it becomes a genuinely representative forum for farmers' voices, organizing rural communities and acting as an institution through which farmers can participate in rural development. In parallel with this process, the Farmers' Union should actively participate in the tasks of rural development, extension and training as well as other programmes to empower farmers.

**SECTION 3. STAKEHOLDER AGENCY AND NEGOTIATING  
THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT**





## Chapter 4. Collective and household management of floods and disaster: A case study from the 1999 floods in central Vietnam

Malin Beckman

### 4.1. Introduction

On 2 November 1999, a tropical storm over central Vietnam unleashed 2300 millimetres of rain in four days. In the mountains, the force of the rivers uprooted trees, and swept away sections of riverbanks, bridges and any houses built close to the river. Sand and stones were deposited in the fields and crops were destroyed. When the river water reached the lowlands, its force was still strong enough to sweep away houses and bridges. Belongings and food stores were swept away, 592 people died and animals drowned. The 1999 flood was a major shock to the people in the seven provinces affected. It has been called 'the flood of the century' and received great attention in Vietnam. Massive support was mobilized for relief and recovery. One man from Van Tri village, Hai Lang district described his experiences:

The water rose very fast. At midnight our house collapsed. We managed to hold on to the stack of rice straw by the fence until morning when my brother rescued us. The water was very cold, and there was wind and high waves. We lost our four pigs, 50 chickens and our buffalo; and 3.5 tonnes of rice got wet and could not be used. Two beds broke and other things floated away.

South East Asia is an area prone to natural disasters. Every year Vietnam is hit by a number of tropical storms, which cause damage of varying severity. Central Vietnam is particularly exposed. Every year there is some loss of life and property due to storms, and this has always been the case historically. Vietnamese society has always given high priority to protection against floods (Luttrell, 2001). Storms are perceived by people in Vietnam to have become more frequent and more serious in the past decade, and increasing policy attention is being paid to disaster mitigation.

This chapter builds on fieldwork data collected for the author's PhD thesis (Beckman, 2006). Three villages were studied in Hai Lang district, Quang Tri province (lowland and hilly areas) and two villages in A Luoi district, Thua Thien Hue province (mountainous areas). The villages studied have different geographical, socio-economic and institutional conditions, which influence their levels of vulnerability and resilience. The experiences of households in these villages were examined during the time period 2000–2004. Sixty households and staff members from local organizations and local government were interviewed about their experiences of the floods and the recovery process.

#### **4.2. The concepts of vulnerability and resilience**

Wisner et al. (2004) defines vulnerability as “the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that negatively influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impacts of a hazard”. This definition is used in this study. The focus is on the vulnerability of households in the context of their geographical, socio-economic and institutional environment at the local level.

Carl Folke et al. (2002) defines the concept of resilience as the capacity to “maintain the functionality of a system, when it is disturbed. To maintain the elements needed to renew or reorganize the system in order to maintain its main functions”. It is used in the sense of the capacity of households and communities to “bounce back” and recover after shock or disaster. The term also includes an aspect of adaptation, that is, the capacity to reorganize in order to reduce vulnerability to future hazards. This definition is used for this study.

#### **4.3. What does the capacity to manage crises say about a society?**

The anthropologist Eric Wolf alerts us to how “the arrangements of a society become most visible when challenged by a crisis” (cited in Donahue and Johnston, 1998: 339). By studying how people in Vietnamese society cope with and handle a disaster, we gain insights into its organization, strengths and weaknesses. This study sheds light on social cohesion and the balance between household and collective responsibility for managing hardship.

The response to the 1999 disaster was massive. The entire Vietnamese society, including schools, industries and all kinds of organizations and individuals, contributed relief to the people in the affected areas. Local level government played an active role in coordinating the response to the disaster.

The Red Cross, the Farmers' Association, the Women's Union and other local organizations are well anchored in the villages, and many village volunteers worked through these organizations on the distribution of relief and the reconstruction of houses. In Hai Lang district the cooperatives organized village repairs to damaged infrastructure with the help of the army sections from the province, district and commune levels. The district government provided guarantees, which enabled the cooperatives to arrange for drainage pumps, draught power and production inputs on bank credit. The national government provided resources for bank credit to households to restore production capacity.

A large proportion of the population was reached by the support, which gradually enabled them to recover. Important factors that enabled the communities and households to bounce

back and recover from the shock were that local organizations had the authority and credibility to organize collective action, the existence of an active local government and the relatively equitable distribution of resources. The capacities of and responses by society, however, differ in relation to different groups of people. It is argued that, although the response by the government and communities worked well for the majority, there were groups of households that, for various reasons, fell outside the institutional recovery structures. Government approaches focusing on the recovery of paddy rice production coincided with the fact that community organization for paddy production was strong. Action to secure paddy production for the coming season was well organized and prioritized. Households that did not receive their main income from paddy rice production, however, were placed at a disadvantage.

In line with Adger and Kelly (1999), it is argued that vulnerability to shocks is related not only to individually controlled resources, but also to the resilience of the community as a whole. The homogeneity of the community is thus an important factor for resilience. In the lowland community the homogeneity of interests for paddy production led to strong and joint action, but left households with other sources of their main income at a disadvantage.

From the perspective of homogeneity and joint action, the mountain communities had an advantage. Their interests in recovery were similar across the community, where the shortage of food was urgent. This facilitated cooperation and action by the leaders for both short-term food aid and long-term political rights to more land.

In the lowlands, collective action was strongest mainly in the immediate disaster response, while the networks linked to the individual household became more important to the long-term recovery.

#### **4.4. Differences in government support between the lowlands, the hills and the mountain areas**

Initially, the state disaster response in Hong Ha commune in the mountains was not as efficient as in the case of Hai Lang district. This was partly due to the greater distances and the less well worked out routines for flood response. The government's preparedness for dealing with disasters was mainly focused on lowland conditions, as can be seen from documents from the Centre for Flood and Storm Control (Government of Vietnam, 2001). The interviews show, however, that at the commune level authorities and organizations in Hong Ha played an even greater role in mobilizing support and relief compared to those in Hai Lang.

State credit support for flood recovery was provided to households in the mountains to only a limited degree. The justification for this was that production and livelihoods in the mountains were less market-oriented. The main household losses consisted of land, food crops and wood for construction. There were, however, losses of pigs and cattle reared for sale, and the destruction of fish ponds, all of which failed to receive credit support. There was no support to recover the inundated fields, which constituted major flood damage for the households who spent months manually recovering their land. The government did, however, provide support seed and fertilizer for the re-establishment of crops. In the years following the floods the government financed major investments in repairing and expanding infrastructure in Hong Ha and A Luoi.



The impact of the 1999 floods on production in the mountain areas was greater than during previous floods, partly because of changes in the production system. Cultivation in Hong Ha commune had been transferred from the hill slopes to the river valleys in the previous 10 to 20 years, which meant that it was more exposed to flash floods. There seems to have been a delay in the realization by the government of the need for support and recovery in these areas, but attention to the impact of flash floods has increased in more recent policy documents.

Government support for the rehabilitation of production also differed between the lowland and hill villages in Hai Lang district. Government credit provided for this purpose was distributed to households according to acreage of allocated paddy land. This led to a bias towards the lowland villages. The majority of people in Vietnam are lowland paddy rice producers, and historically the state has prioritized securing paddy rice production (Kerkvliet, 2006). This perspective appears to have dominated the disaster response. Hill production has recently developed strongly in terms of perennial crops, including fruit trees and pepper, which constituted a major part of the losses in these areas. Support for the rehabilitation of production, however, did not address these losses. The hill populations did have some allocated paddy land, which entitled them to at least some of the flood recovery credit. The fishermen had no paddy land at all and were therefore unable to access this source of credit.

For the poor in the lowlands, the distribution of credit based on household tenure and paddy land meant greater access compared to their normal difficulties in receiving credit. This was because the land allocated in 1993 was divided relatively equally.

In sum, although policies focused on the support needs of the majority, the part of the population that did not have paddy rice as its basic means of livelihood received less attention and support. This underlines the importance of adapting policies for disaster response to the varying conditions in and between villages.

#### **4.5. Differences in coping capacities between the lowlands and the mountains**

Government relief and credit support were not enough to prevent the poor households in the lowland villages from taking informal loans at high interest rates to meet their basic food needs. The food relief organized by the state lasted for three to four months after the floods. In Hong Ha, in the mountains, the commune leaders continued to mobilize food relief for the whole commune until the rice harvest in June. In Hai Lang the households depended on individual resources and social networks to meet their food needs between March and June. This period of food shortage was critical to the way in which the households managed to continue the recovery process. This seems to have been more difficult for lowland households than for people in the hill villages. The latter had access to more income from minor forest products, day labour and small-scale trading. In the lowland economy there are fewer alternative sources of income during the months before the rice harvest. Poor households took informal food loans under conditions in which the loan should be paid back after the harvest at 150 per cent of the loan value. In many cases this caused debts that continued to burden the household economy for many years. This highlights the vulnerability of households that depend mainly on a single source of income for their livelihood. It also highlights a problem connected with formal credit systems for production purposes only. Loans to bridge

consumption gaps must be sought from the informal market at extremely high interest rates.

In the mountain commune, the months after the floods were dominated by efforts to recover the fields for food production, which required very hard work. This involved the manual clearing of deep layers of sand and stones from the paddy fields and dry land areas, uprooting sugarcane to make way for food crops, and clearing old swidden fields and grassland. Replanted cassava, which is the main food crop, takes seven to nine months to mature, which resulted in a long period of 'coping' before food production was stabilized.

The above underlines the importance of paying attention to 'non-economic losses', that is, losses that 'only' affect consumption and not income generation.

#### **4.6. The response of the credit institutions**

In Hai Lang the role of credit was vital to recovery. Apart from the credit for rehabilitating production, an extension of the period in which households were obliged to pay back old debts provided them with space to recover. These extensions were granted on an individual basis, and could be for several years in the case of some households. From 2002, the state allocation of credit increased significantly and the households interviewed reported an improvement in access to credit. The establishment of the Bank for Social Policy in 2004, which replaced the Bank for the Poor, reinforced the state policy of subsidized credit as a tool for poverty reduction. In 2004, the manager of the Hai Lang branch of the Bank for Social Policy reported that 20 per cent of households which had had existing loans from before the floods had not yet been able to repay them, but had still been allowed to take new loans for income generation. By providing additional funding for the banking system, the state avoided a bank crisis such as the one which occurred after flooding in Bangladesh in 1998, in which micro-finance institutions suffered a severe shortage of funds when their clients failed to repay their loans (del Ninno et al. 2001).

#### **4.7. The role of institutionalized and collectively organized access to resources**

In Hai Lang a number of services are institutionalized through the cooperatives. Evidence suggests that the cooperative organization of resources makes paddy production more accessible to the poor, compared to resources for other lines of production which are dependent on individual market contacts. Other authors have seen similar patterns in other contexts. For example, the experience of Bebbington (1999) in the Andes suggests that institutionalized access to knowledge, credit, irrigation, and so on, is an advantage for poor farmers compared to access through the market or kin networks.

Adger (2001), who has studied areas in the north of Vietnam, is concerned about what he sees as an erosion of organizational culture, which in turn leads to an erosion of community capacity for disaster preparedness and response. Adger and Kelly (1999) argues that there is a risk that increasing disparities in wealth and increasing levels of indebtedness and landlessness may weaken kin and community support mechanisms and put pressure on local institutions and cooperative structures. In Hai Lang and A Luoi districts, economic reform has not led to an erosion of collective organization, but the cooperatives in Hai Lang are likely to face challenges when the economy becomes more diversified. Their central role is in the management of irrigation and drainage, which seems certain to remain important. In the interviews, households emphasized the importance of a functioning collective organization for water

management in order to reduce stress. The cooperatives also focus on strengthening village level capacity for self-reliance, with increased seed production, storage facilities, and savings and credit schemes. These services, as well as supply inputs and marketing, are likely to face more competition from private actors in the future. The cooperatives in Hai Lang are being encouraged by the government to change from broad community organizations to more specialized membership organizations focused on village level business development. If the cooperatives become more business-oriented, there may be an increasing need for other forms of village organization capable of attending to the needs of all households.

On the other hand, if the cooperatives remain intimately bound to rice production, they may have difficulties in establishing a role in facilitating diversification. While the cooperatives facilitate community resilience to shocks under the existing patterns of production, household resilience may be dependent on the extent to which these can be changed.

#### **4.8. The relationship between collective and individual responsibilities**

Long-term recovery is influenced by the growing differences in the capacities and conditions of different households. Vietnamese society is changing from a situation in which the state has a high degree of responsibility for production and livelihoods, to a market economy in which risk is increasingly borne by the household rather than the collective.

The sustainable livelihoods framework and the 'access model' of Wisner et al. (2004) are both useful for analysing the role of different types of assets in coping and recovery. In this context, the relationship between the agency of the household and the environment of policies, institutions, and social and economic relations is discussed. Household access and livelihood decisions in the study area are strongly influenced by this environment.

Coping requires short-term, immediate outputs. For example, the collection of minor forest products was of great importance for coping in the hill and mountain villages, although it is considered as demanding too much labour to be relevant in non-disaster situations. The present development trend whereby forest land is individually allocated to households may have a negative impact on the coping capacity of those households which lose common access to this resource.

In practice, the allocation of forest land in Hai Lang tends to favour better-off households with resources to invest. The ongoing formalization of tenure rights to the forest may thus lead to reduced access for the poor. This also means increased differentiation in exposure to floods, as the forest land is higher and less risk prone. Devereux (1996) highlights the tendency to formalize the control and management of natural resources in a way that can reduce access for already marginalized groups. He argues that the individualization of common property rights may destroy social cohesion and be economically stratifying.

Government support for recovery was oriented towards long-term agricultural production rather than short-term labour opportunities. On the one hand, one could argue that support for paid labour opportunities in reconstruction works may have enabled poor households to manage without taking informal loans. On the other hand, the interviews suggest a correlation between being poor and a lack of labour capacity in the household, which means that not all

poor households can be supported by increasing the opportunities for labour income.

Labour capacity was a vital resource in the mountains in order to recover the land that was inundated with sand and stones, and for clearing new land. It was required for the collection of minor forest products and for day labour for other farmers, both of which were important coping strategies in the hill villages. Households with surplus labour had family members who migrated to other areas in Vietnam in order to supplement household incomes. The interviews show that households with only a small workforce, for example, due to health problems, had greater difficulties in coping with shocks.

The above means of coping required not just labour but also social and institutional capital. In Hai Lang, access to minor forest products and day labour was mainly available to the hill village households. They had previous contacts for such access, as it is part of their 'normal' way of making a living to supplement their farm income in this way. Lowland households also supplement their income through day labour for other farmers during the rice harvest, but such opportunities were obviously not available during the critical coping period before the harvest. Young people in the mountains did day labour for other households in the commune, but such opportunities were limited as few households had the resources to pay for labour. Only a few people from Hong Ha migrated to other areas for work. They belong to an ethnic minority, and as such perceived more difficulties in making a living in the 'majority' areas of Vietnam.

#### **4.9. Coping with disasters and coping with everyday livelihood stresses**

Coping and recovery after the 1999 floods cannot be seen in isolation from the frequent seasonal production risks that are ever present in the lives of people in the study area. Floods and drought frequently lead to crop losses, which are important constraining factors for disaster recovery. Vietnamese policy focuses to a high degree on efforts to reduce 'normal' production risks and stimulate diversification and income generation. Dykes and drainage structures are vital to reducing the impact of floods during crop season. Investments in infrastructure and crop protection, however, involve the risk of high costs of repair when such structures are damaged. Heavy storms damaged collective infrastructure in the autumns of 2004 to 2007.

According to the assessments of the households interviewed, it took three years before most of them had recovered to a standard of livelihood similar to that which they enjoyed before the floods. Some households, however, had not yet recovered in 2004. Constraints on recovery included production difficulties due to continued heavy rains, diseases affecting livestock and limited access to land as well as the limitations of the social security system. Since 2004, however, there have been a number of occasions of seasonal stress. The most recent were autumn flooding in 2007, a cold spell in January to February 2008, heavy rains in the crop season in April 2008 and August 2009 and severe flooding in September 2009, which caused production losses and damaged both private and collective infrastructure.

The study suggests that there is a linkage between poverty and vulnerability in that the factors which are impediments to recovery for the chronically poor are frequently the same as those causing poverty under normal conditions. These factors need to be addressed simultaneously



with disaster response in order for the latter to be effective. An improvement in the health insurance system and a micro-finance system that can limit the practice of money lending at high rates of interest are also important factors.

The mountain population has particular difficulties as it is remote from markets and services and is struggling with the process of adapting from traditional shifting cultivation practices to fixed cultivation, which is more input intensive and exposes households to new types of risk.

The commune and district authorities in Hong Ha and A Luoi argue for the development of land and forest resources in a way that combines food security, income generation and environmental protection objectives, while at the same time spreading risks. This would be possible, they argue, through the allocation of forest land to households and groups of households to develop forest gardens and enrich the forest with fruit trees, high value species and food crops.

#### **4.10. Conclusions**

The experiences of coping with and recovering from the 1999 flood disaster in central Vietnam raise a number of issues and provide a number of lessons. Vietnamese society has a well developed system for disaster response, and it provides an example of a high level of social resilience, in the sense of the capacity of households and communities to bounce back after a shock. The strong relationships between local government, local organizations and households in the disaster response provided conditions for collective action to address the acute needs of the population. In the longer term perspective, there were significant differences in the capacity to recover for different groups of households. Levels of resilience and vulnerability to natural disaster differed for different groups of people, which underlines the importance of adapting responses to the type of vulnerability of various groups.

Vietnamese society is changing from a situation in which the state and community have a high degree of responsibility for production and livelihoods, to a market economy in which risk is increasingly borne by the household. The increasing privatization of common resources such as forest land may affect both the individual capacity of households without access to forests and the resilience of the collective. Further research is needed into how vulnerability to disasters and seasonal stresses interact with increased liberalization and the market orientation of a society.



## **Chapter 5. Market and resource access for the poor in the upland zones of northern Vietnam: A case study of tea growers in Dai Tu district, Thai Nguyen province**

Hoang Minh Ha, Pham Thu Thuy, Nguyen Le Hoa, Ylva Nyberg

### **5.1. Introduction**

In recent years, Vietnam has entered a new phase of reform aimed at integrating into the world economy, increasing the country's economic development and reducing poverty, enhancing the quality of life of the people and laying the foundations for achieving large scale industrialization by 2020. With this vision in mind, Vietnam applied for membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) early in 1995 and became a member at the end of 2006. Becoming a WTO member exposes the country, and its agriculture in particular, to social, economic and political advantages and disadvantages (Do, 2004; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009). According to Kwa (1999), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) (2001), Nguyen Thang (2004) and Oxfam (2004, 2005) it was envisaged that by joining the WTO, Vietnam would be able to expand the markets for its agricultural produce, achieve foreign direct investment and increase pressure for the expansion and thus increased competitiveness of domestic enterprises. It was also assumed that Vietnam's agriculture would have more opportunities to access new sources of technology, which in turn would contribute to improving productivity, and the quality and competitiveness of Vietnam's agricultural products, such as rice, coffee, tea and cashew nuts.

However, WTO membership also poses certain challenges for Vietnam. In liberalizing its market, the country has had to eliminate trade barriers and lower tariffs. Vietnamese firms and households will therefore face fiercer competition from foreign competitors. In addition,

Vietnamese agricultural products may face strict regulations in export markets such as quality standards, hygiene standards and food safety standards, and so on. A number of households that depend on the production of agricultural products such as tea are likely to be negatively affected. Vietnam may thus face shocks in its product and labour markets during the transition period (Do, 2004).

Vietnam is a leading exporter of tea to traditional and new markets, including such key ones as China, Russia, Thailand the United States and the European Union. China is expected to continue to dominate the tea trade with a projected volume of 242 000 tonnes in 2014, followed by Vietnam with 28 000 tonnes (FAO, 2005), making it the world's second largest tea producer. The Vietnamese tea sector provides employment for 400,000 households, and is made up of 10,000 small processing households and 600 tea manufacturing companies (Dasgupta, 2005). Taking as its case study the tea growers in Dai Tu district, Thai Nguyen province, this chapter highlights the opportunities for and constraints on poor households in gaining access to markets and natural resources on the eve of the country joining the WTO. It is important for decision makers to take these factors into consideration in future planning in order to ensure that these disadvantaged groups are not further marginalized.

## 5.2. Research approach

To examine the opportunities for and constraints on the poor linked to joining the WTO, this study used a case study approach within the constructivist paradigm. Gaba and Lincoln (1994) and Patton (1990) show that the strengths of this are that it: (i) spells out a multiplicity of realities; (ii) gains an in-depth understanding of a particular people and context; and (iii) is able to capture lessons from a case or comparisons between different cases that can be generalized to other cases.

### The location studied

Hoang Nong commune, Dai Tu district, in the Thai Nguyen province was selected as a case study because the province is well known as the home of exported tea. The commune consists of 18 villages. In 2007 it was made up of 1145 households with a total population of 4968 people. About 55 per cent of the population belonged to the average wealth group, while 20 per cent were well-off and 25.6 per cent poor. The level of net income varied between less than VND 200,000 per person per month in the poor group to up to VND 6 million per person per year for the well-off group (Commune Report, 2007).

The population of Hoang Nong commune belongs to six ethnic groups: Dao, Kinh, Tay, Muong, Hoa and San Diu, of which Dao and Kinh are the biggest. In response to the national programme for the 'Development of New Economic Zones', the Kinh group migrated to Hoang Nong from the Red River Delta (Thai Binh and Ha Nam provinces) and the neighbouring upland provinces in the north (Tuyen Quang and Lang Son provinces) before 1960.

Diversification in the rural economy of Vietnam is reflected in the Hoang Nong commune. Currently, most households obtain the majority of their income from agricultural activities such as paddy farming, livestock rearing and tea cultivation. Among them, livestock rearing and especially cattle rearing yield the highest economic returns for farmers. Additionally, local farmers, especially poor households, earn their living through illegal forestry-related

activities, including hunting, wildlife trafficking, exploiting medicinal trees, growing orchids, breeding cattle and, to a large extent, acquiring firewood. The research adopted a wide range of methods to analyse access to markets and resources, and the impact on poor tea growers.

### The survey

To understand the driving forces and impacts of access to natural resources markets, a questionnaire was designed based on a livelihood and farming system framework. One hundred randomly selected households in Hoang Nong commune were interviewed using this questionnaire in 2005.

### The semi-structured survey using Participatory Rural Appraisal tools

Detailed information relating to tea production, the local tea market, price changes and strategies was obtained through the use of focus group discussions, observation, and semi-structured and in-depth interviews in the villages of Doan Thang and Dinh Cuong in Hoang Nong commune in 2007. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools, such as village mapping, seasonal calendars, Venn diagrams, ranking exercises and timelines, were used to elicit views and information from a range of stakeholders such as farmers, private traders, local authorities, the Farmer's Union, the Women's Union, retailers, village representatives and extension workers. The state of progress method (Krishna, 2007) was also used to study the land use strategies of the upland rural households for dealing with changes in commercialization processes. All of the above-mentioned PRA tools helped to gain an understanding of local perceptions of poverty, to identify the stages of progress that village households might go through as they obtain more investment funds, and to characterize each household in the village according to its current and past situation as well as its livelihood strategies. The selected participants in this qualitative PRA survey reflected the characteristics of the commune population in terms of wealth, age, gender and ethnicity, and the number of participants accounted for 30 per cent of the total population of the commune.

## 5.3. The policy and institutional contexts and their impact on the study areas

### Land policy and conflicts of interest between Tam Dao National Park and local people

The history of Doan Thang village (Figure 5.1.) reflects the rural change in Vietnam over the past 30 years.

1963	1964	1975-1977	1978	1982	1986	1991	1992	2001	2005	2006
8 HHs moved to this area	9 HHs moved to this area 1 cooperative named Doan Thang	Cooperatives Tan Tien, Thong Nhat and Binh Dinh merged together into 1 cooperative named Tan Tien	4 more HHs moved to this area	Product contract 60-70%	The 3 cooperatives separated and there was only 1 cooperative named Doan Thang	Cooperative mechanism	Allocate land among village and issue land certificate	Electricity	GTZ launched	Established 1 safe tea cooperative

Figure 5.1. Timeline for Doan Thang village

Source: PRA survey, 2007

Since the 1960s, the villagers of Doan Thang and Dinh Cuong have experienced various forms of land ownership, from village-scale cooperatives (1973–1982), to commune-scale land use (1986) and private holdings from 1991. Following these changes in land ownership, there were major shifts in the composition of crops, and tea production became the dominant livelihood activity in both villages. However, the establishment of Tam Dao National Park in 1986 restricted the local use of natural assets because a large area of what was previously agricultural land was put under the management of the national park for conservation purposes, and local people were prohibited from cultivating the area. These changes, together with the increasing pressure linked to the high population density in the buffer zone areas (218 people per km<sup>2</sup>), and the need for and importance to the local people of intensive farming and forest-related activities, created tensions between local people and the national park.

Since 1992, when agricultural land was allocated to households, the commune has boomed with the privatization of agriculture and tea as the dominant crop. However, in recent years changes in the export market have led to a decline in prices. In order to earn a living, farmers in the Tam Dao National Park and its buffer zone are intensifying their tea plantations, using high levels of chemical inputs in the form of fertilizers and pesticides.

A survey conducted in 2004-2005 by the Northern Mountain Agro-forestry Science Institute (NOMAFSI) showed that the Thai Nguyen tea growers used about 20 different types of chemical, of which 14 were pesticides. This high input of chemical pesticides, together with poor spray management, reportedly leaves toxic residues in the tea. The high inputs of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in comparison to harvested crop yields also demonstrate inefficiency and possible leakages of fertilizers. This has had several negative consequences, including high soil acidity (its pH is less than four) and low soil fertility (Soil Organic Matter content is around 1.4 per cent) in the area, a reduction in the number of natural pest predators, a low price for the tea and low incomes for the tea growers. As a consequence, tea growers have become poorer and there are more pressures on biodiversity in the national park.

MARD (2007) emphasizes that clean tea should be promoted in Vietnam so that it can generate environmental benefits and increase the profits of the local people. However, the findings from the qualitative and quantitative surveys clearly indicate limited awareness among local farmers of the possibility of obtaining a better price for tea in both local and national markets by reducing the use of chemicals in tea farming. This was reflected by the fact that there was only one cooperative in the area growing tea with safe levels of pesticides and other chemicals in 2006.

#### **Institutional arrangements and social assets**

Social assets are well developed in the uplands in general and in Hoang Nong commune in particular. Five political organizations, five local authorities and three projects were listed and ranked by local stakeholders on the basis of their influence on farmers' livelihoods. It was found that farmers' and women's associations were the most active in supporting the livelihood activities of local stakeholders (Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1.** The importance of institutions in Hoang Nong commune

Source: PRA survey, 2007

Notes: x denotes the least important and xxx the most important factor influencing farmers' livelihood conditions

Institutions	Livelihood activities				
	Loan	Training	Land issues	Poverty reduction and ethnic support	Environmental monitoring
<b>1. Political organization</b>					
Farmers	xxx	xx	xx	xxx	
Women	xxx	xx	xx	xx	
Veteran	xx			x	
Youth	xx		xx		
Father front			xxx		
<b>2. Social organization</b>					
Aging			xx		
<b>3. Local authorities</b>					
Commune People's Committee			xxx		xxx
Justice					
Land administration			xxx		xxx
Banks					
Government extension services		xxx			
<b>4. Project, programs</b>					
134				xxx	
135				xxx	
GTZ		xxx <sup>1</sup>			
Japanese tea companies	xxx	xxx			xxx

<sup>1</sup>Support money for training, improved facilities or tea processing, and raising rabbits and bees or planting Acacia as shading trees for tea.

It is clear from Table 5.1. that government extension services have been important sources of information, training, access to subsidized inputs and other forms of assistance which help households, various types of farmers' groups and communities to develop their livelihood strategies and asset options, as well as their production processes. Dissemination of market information and opportunities could also be updated and delivered to local people through this channel. However, in-depth interviews with the extension officers showed that they did not have any knowledge or information related to markets or marketing strategies that could support the farmers in making decisions on their business strategies. Regular training on market analysis should be provided to these actors so they can make helpful recommendations to local people.

Various types of project conducted by other institutions can also influence the choice and viability of livelihood strategies and various component activities. A Deutsche Gesellschaft für

Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) project, for instance, not only supported local people in producing clean tea but also facilitated learning about the tea production process among and between farmers. Local farmers have received support from the livelihood programme since September 2003, which is one of two programmes in Tam Dao National Park. The interest of Japanese private sector companies not only motivates the local people to implement advanced technology in order to produce clean tea for a better price, but also shows the potential for the involvement of the private sector in the co-management of natural resources. Having a stable market for the product, and clear requirements of the technology used for production, plays an important role in maintaining the commitment of local people to delivering clean products. Moreover, in-depth interviews with all the stakeholders highlight the need for policies that are supportive of private sector and public-private partnership models to develop rural business in Vietnam. However, capacity building to enable local people to take ownership of these is also essential for a successful partnership.

#### 5.4. Access to markets and resources by poor tea growers

##### Strategies to get out of poverty

The indicators for poverty, measured by the villagers interviewed using the Stage of Progress method, were based on the following parameters: house, land areas, labour, income, price tea sold at, loans and furniture. The poor, as defined by the local farmers interviewed, usually have a shortage of labour, poor health and do not have enough money to purchase fertilizer for tea. Increases in well-being were defined by villagers as owning a motorcycle or a television, having access to better food for better health, saving or expanding her or his agricultural activities by using more fertilizer or more land.

According to the local community, strategies to move from average wealth to wealthy by tea growers in both villages included sending their children away to pursue higher education, saving, better food, applying new technologies and other investments, obtaining any or better market information, gaining marketing skills, access to loans, expanding the farm, having direct connections with traders and producing 'clean tea'. Two out of the 12 tea growers studied in Doan Thang village explained that they had shifted from the poor group to the medium level of well-being group in 1997, and to the better-off group in 2007. Their main strategies over time were saving, hard work and good management of diversified agricultural activities. Access to electricity from the national grid in 2005 was also considered a key factor leading to better living conditions. On the other hand, there is an obvious risk that tea growing families that are just above the poverty line today could fall back into poverty. Their farming largely depends on their own labour, and if any family member becomes sick they can easily fall into debt. In these circumstances, borrowing money at low interest is critical for local people so they can maintain or even strengthen their tea production.

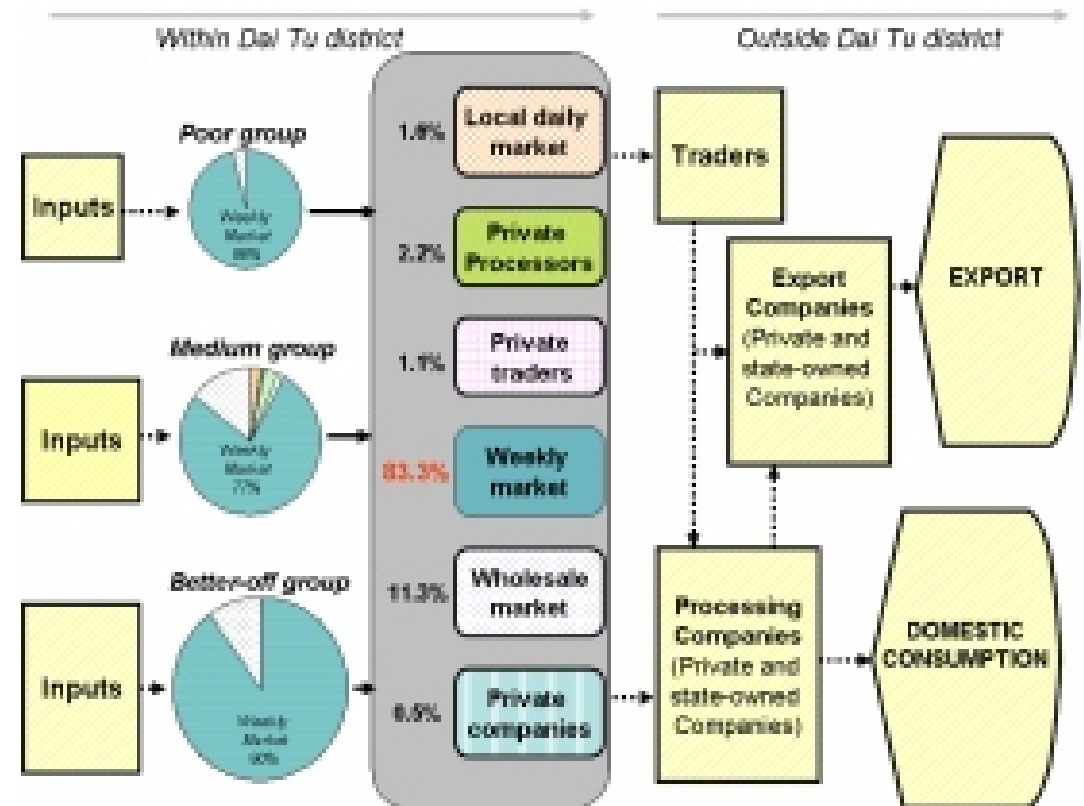
It is interesting to note that when a mixed couple, with one from an ethnic group and one from a Kinh group, is getting married, their children usually register as ethnic. This is in order to gain access to the specialist benefits for ethnic groups, such as education, and to get support for better housing, clean water and sanitation, and so on, that is provided by Programme 134.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Program No.134 is the government programme aimed at improving the living standards of ethnic groups in Vietnam by supporting land productivity, access to clean water and housing.

There are no apparent tensions between the different ethnic groups. However, the higher percentage of communal leaders belonging to Kinh (70 per cent) compared to the 30 per cent belonging to the Dao and Nung ethnic groups could demonstrate the advantages available to the Kinh group through their management work. This may be one reason why the Kinh group has better access to government information.

##### Access to markets

The findings from both the qualitative and the quantitative survey show that tea markets within the Dai Tu district in which Hoang Nong is located are influenced by the private sector, while the market outside Dai Tu is influenced by both private sector and state-owned companies. Furthermore, the local weekly market emerges as the most important source of income generation for all wealth groups of tea growers. The second most prominent market is



**Figure 5.2.** Market chains inside and outside Dai Tu district

Source: Questionnaire, 2005

Some outside companies, such as Japanese firms, have provided orders for farmers to produce tea at a particular time, but contract farming with some tea companies did not work well due to the low price they offered to local farmers. Thus, while remaining fairly optimistic in general terms, they are somewhat sceptical about the new government-supported tea project.

During the study, it became evident that national policies, including membership of the WTO, have begun to shift the context of tea production. This is changing product price structures and quality standards, which in turn is providing strong incentives to improve the quality of tea, productivity and competitiveness among villagers in the region. While this is presenting



adjustment difficulties for many, and especially the poorer tea producing households, it is also leading to experimentation with the production of “safe” tea and a better brand identity. Currently, a new kind of cooperative model is being developed in the area which includes private land ownership but also joint cooperation in finding markets, developing a brand name and improving cultivation.

#### **Access to land**

The lives of the villagers have been improved by the land allocation and redistribution of 1991–1992 (see Table 5.1.). Each household was allocated 11 or 12 plots of land, with a total cultivation area for tea and paddy of between 500 m<sup>2</sup> and more than one hectare. Due to the wide variation in land quality, it has been difficult to consolidate the plots using land exchanges. Land allocation has led to households receiving land allocations of equal farm size. On the other hand, younger households formed after the land allocation now have limited access to land, and thus most of them are among the poorer households.

#### **Access to credit**

Government programmes also seek to develop human capital and improve access to financial capital for highlanders. Hoang Nong commune has been receiving support since 2005 from Programme 135, which is used to provide health insurance for all people in the commune, and has established three schools (a kindergarten, a primary school and a secondary school) and support to poor farmers to develop their livestock, with a focus on raising cattle and improving tea processing by purchasing processing equipment. It also pays school fees for their children. The support provides about 80 per cent of the total cost, and the farmers pay the remaining 20 per cent. Local people use their red book land use rights for collateral in mortgaging their land to obtain loans from the Agri-Bank. Poor households can also borrow smaller amounts of money from the Social Policy Bank at reduced rates of interest.

In addition to the poverty reduction programmes, many farmers try to obtain credit from institutional sources in order to invest in their farm-related production activities. The most common uses of credit for tea production are to buy pesticides, to process tea or to buy a new machine for processing. However, the biggest loans are taken out in order to buy seeds and fertilizer for tea. This accounts for nearly 50 per cent of the total credit for tea. Sources of credit are usually banks, but friends and relatives may also help if the amounts needed are moderate.

#### **5.5. Empirical findings and recommendations**

From the case study of tea growers in Dai Tu, Thai Nguyen, it appears that the middle income groups were the 'winners' in the face of the new national reform while those on lower incomes have far fewer market opportunities. This is explained by the fact that the poor people have less access to land, and by the poor quality of the tea they grow, which leads to low prices and lower rewards. The young generation, which did not participate in the land allocation in 1992, appears to have been negatively affected by the limited access to land both now and in the future. The lack of existing and potential capital for investment is explained by the inability of the poor to borrow money from banks for investment. This leads to low tea quality and low tea prices as well as a lack of opportunities to expand cultivation. In order to address poverty in these areas, a number of actions should be carefully considered.

#### **An integrated approach for better buffer zone management**

If national policies are to pursue further the development of upland areas as conservation zones, then many policies and programmes need to become much more transparent and accountable to local populations. More serious attention needs to be paid to coordination of the various relevant policies, including public investment and support service policies, to help achieve conservation objectives while also improving livelihood opportunities in upland areas.

The marginalization of people in protected areas is an important problem, especially for the poorest sector. The pressures on protected areas can be reduced by providing income generating opportunities for the most disadvantaged groups to use the surrounding area sustainably. Based on the empirical findings, we believe that the conservation goals of the national park can be achieved while also enhancing the livelihoods of tea growers, particularly for the poorest group in the buffer zone.

#### **Land reallocation**

The livelihood boom in Hoang Nong commune linked to the 1991–1992 land allocation demonstrates the positive impacts of land allocations and land-use change as well as how such government initiatives have acted as the main drivers for improving community livelihoods in the area. It therefore appears that government interventions on land allocation can create incentives for tea producing farmers, motivating them to secure their livelihoods.

#### **Improved access to credit**

Limited access to land and credit are probably the main constraints on poor farmers attempting to increase their income. The sources of income from off-farm and non-farm activities are limited as the villages are remote and the distance to larger cities or towns is quite big. In addition to the shortage of land, the capital available for farming inputs and labour, which are important to improving the quantity and quality of produce, are also limited. Improved access to financial capital in upland areas is critical.

It is obvious that market links play the most important role in income generation for tea growers in the study area. However, no direct market links exist between producers. Farmers are aware of different solutions to improve market links but they lack the capacity, institutional arrangements, and financial and natural assets to implement these solutions. Infrastructure is considered the most important factor for improving the effectiveness of market links, but it is still lacking in Hoang Nong. Current policy does not support the poorest villages enough. At the moment, the government provides 60 per cent of the total cost of road construction but requires the remaining 40 per cent of funding to come from the commune. For a poor commune such as Hoang Nong, this amount is not available. In addition, even when plans for roads are approved, there is no way of knowing when they will be constructed. Basic infrastructure and physical connectivity are needed to support poverty reduction.

#### **Establishment and improvement of Public-private Partnerships**

Public-private Partnerships are proposed in order to overcome the two major obstacles of limited access to land and limited finances. Such partnerships are based on benefit sharing

mechanisms between those who have capital to invest and those who have either land or labour. The external investors will promote market access, and the poor tea growers can overcome issues of limited resources for younger generations by starting value addition and extracting more income from tea processing and packing.

The role of the state is commonly seen by the tea farmers as that of the provider of infrastructure, the basic institutional framework, support services and policies that facilitate entrepreneurial initiatives in the private sector. The private sector in turn is seen as the main engine for economic growth, and is increasingly seen as an actor in infrastructure development through mechanisms such as build-operate-transfer arrangements.

### **The application of new technology and biotechnology**

Virtually all the changes in market opportunities are associated with technological change. The case study of tea production in Vietnam shows the importance of technological adaptation and change, even in crops that have been commercially produced for some time. Moreover, there are always aspects of adaptation and the localization of technologies that require innovation by local producers.

Clean tea is mentioned above as a good option for income generation. In this system, farmers use more shading trees and their own fuel wood for tea processing. Most farmers, however, believe that the first condition for improving the value of their tea crop is an increase in the use of chemical fertilizer. Therefore most farmers prioritize the purchase of fertilizer if they have money. On the other hand, some of the villagers were aware of negative impacts on children's health of using high doses of fertilizer. This shows the importance of further research into how to optimize fertilizer efficiency and on the potential impacts of fertilizer use on health.

Technological knowledge can be sourced from various channels. The case study clearly demonstrates that government extension agencies and promotion campaigns are the primary sources of new technological skills. Although they play an important role, they are far from the only sources of knowledge, and often not the most effective ones. There are many examples of contract farming worldwide in which private sector companies provide technological knowledge, as well as examples of knowledge that stems from non-governmental or international projects, or from friends or relatives through social networks (Bauman, 2000). As engagement in commercial production activities continues to evolve over time, the impetus for continual technical change and innovation is more likely to come from local farmers and farmers' groups themselves.

### **Moving towards globalization**

Globalization also stimulates demand for more environmentally friendly products (EU, 2003; Graham, 2000), such as safer tea, which may result in important new opportunities if policies, practices and livelihoods are adapted appropriately. Membership of the WTO could create better conditions for tea growers in Thai Nguyen, allowing access to new markets for green, certified and organic tea. However, this would require significant support from the government. Campaigns are increasingly used to promote greener, safer or more environmentally friendly types of technology and production approaches for higher value

markets. There are also policies and campaigns to promote the transformation of livelihoods to focus more on services such as ecotourism or other related support services.



## Chapter 6. Rural change and decentralization: The case of Cat Tien national park

Tran Duc Luan

### 6.1. Introduction

National parks have been established as a particular form of conservation status in Vietnam in areas where natural resources have not been not significantly depleted (Vo Quy, 2002). The objectives of national parks are to conserve valuable and rare genera of flora and fauna; to protect the ecosystem representative of tropical forest; to maintain protective forests; to provide a platform for environmental education and scientific research; and to develop ecotourism and historical tourism in order to attract national and international visitors, thereby creating many jobs for people living around the parks.

Cat Tien National Park is part of one of the last remaining lowland rainforest complexes in southern Vietnam. The Park has a rich biological diversity and is one of the last refuges of a number of important species. The outstanding biodiversity of the Park has been recognized by WWF as of global significance (Cat Tien National Park, 2002:8). However, poverty and rapid population growth in the buffer zones bounding the park threaten the objectives of the conservation zones (Vo Quy, 2002:45). Conservationists believe that investment in the buffer zones enhances livelihoods and raises awareness, reduces the pressure on protected areas and helps conservation activities become more effective (Nguyen Ba Thu, 2002:51). Vietnam has integrated projects and conservation with support for people in the buffer zones, but results suggest that the complexity of the buffer zones requires a flexible approach that can be adapted to specific contexts (Vo Quy, 2002:46). Conservation management is a major problem for all the national parks in Vietnam, and Cat Tien National Park is no exception. Moreover, it is important for conservationists and the policymakers responsible for conservation to understand the needs and perceptions of the people in the buffer zones in order to achieve a sustainable conservation process (Vo Quy, 2002:48).

### **Conservation vs. economic development**

The importance of conserving biodiversity, and its linkage to global development issues, was recognized at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. In the period since, many developing countries have begun to recognize that increasing environmental degradation is a limiting factor on their economic growth. The outcomes of the Stockholm Conference underlined that natural resources are essential assets on which economic growth must be based, and that conservation and development are inseparable (Holdgate, 1999). The fifth International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Congress in 2003 affirmed that biological diversity should be conserved not only because of its national value but also because of its global value. Conservation has contributed to human well-being by maintaining ecosystems, but it can also contribute to local poverty by denying poor people control over and access to the natural resources that underpin their livelihoods (Fisher, 2005).

Cole and Neumayer (2005) argue in favour of “economic development first”, that is, that poverty alleviation should come before the environment, and conservation should be addressed later. While this approach appears rational in the short term, economic growth is inseparable from environmental stability and social development in the long term. The outcomes of the first regional workshop of Protected Areas and Development (PAD, 2002), which focused on Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, the four countries of the lower Mekong River region, emphasized that conservation of protected areas should be the first priority. In addition, the link must be made between conservation and economic benefits, as well as intangible benefits such as educational and cultural values, rather than only emphasizing monetary value. Based on the results of these studies and reports, this chapter suggests that, although the objectives of conservation and economic development are contested, the linkages between them require further examination in the context of Vietnam. In this regard, Fisher (2005) asserts the need for integrated approaches to conservation and development and that such approaches should be incorporated into the management of protected areas. In the Vietnamese context, this chapter supports the perspective of Fisher that poverty reduction and conservation should go hand in hand because, either ethically or practically, there really is no other choice.

### **An overview of protected area management approaches**

Natural resources management takes place in a complex human context. Decisions on natural resource management can affect a number of different stakeholders and may affect them differently, especially where resources are scarce or of high value. Therefore, to move from theory to practice, Ashby (2003) suggests that trade-offs between different groups or stakeholders have to be taken into account, and that conflict resolution or agreement about the use of natural resources must be democratized by involving a broad set of stakeholders. The views of Ashby contrast with the manner in which the first national park in the world, Yellowstone, was established in the United States. In particular, the Crow and Shoshone people were forced through coercion and violence to relocate away from their ancestral land. This pattern was repeated during the establishment of many national parks in Vietnam. Previous inhabitants are prohibited from re-entering the parks or accessing the natural resources inside. One consequence is the creation of a conflict of interest. Local communities in particular have their livelihoods undermined and biodiversity management is threatening (Vo

Quy, 1995). Other lessons were learned from the experiences of the population displacement strategy. Barreto et al. (2006) emphasize that human pressure in protected areas is less intense than in unprotected areas. Since the 1980s, conservation organizations have been implementing poverty reduction approaches in protected areas that aim to build support among local communities by sharing the social and economic benefits of the protected areas (Nguyen Ngoc Hoi, 2002; Sherl et al., 2004). These approaches are integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs), inclusive management approaches and Community Conservation Areas. The goals of these initiatives include compensating local people for their lack of access to protected areas and providing alternative income sources that allow people to benefit economically from conservation while refraining from environmentally destructive practices. Sherl et al. (2004) argue that experience has shown that the equitable distribution of financial and social benefits from protected areas can be problematic, for instance, it is often not enough to assume that community leaders will ensure that the benefits accrue to the neediest people. However, in Africa, ICDPs have generally been successful in that accountability is improved if whole communities, including women, are involved in decision-making (Sherl et al., 2004).

The main shortcomings of ICDPs are their failure to identify, negotiate, and implement trade-offs between the interests and claims of multiple stakeholders; their failure to focus on social programmes and income generation through alternative livelihoods rather than the impacts on biodiversity; and their tendency to either address local symptoms while ignoring underlying policy constraints or, conversely, deal with macro-level issues while ignoring local realities (McShane and Wells, 2004). Inclusive management approaches are a form of collaborative management between local communities and technical advisers that ensure that local communities have a major stake in decision-making and receive a major share of the benefits from protected areas (Tisen and Bennett, 2000, cited in Sherl et al., 2004). The increased empowerment, and improved skills and trust between local communities and technical advisers in Kwazulu Natal in South Africa provide evidence of the success of a community-based approach (Luckett et al., 2003, cited in Sherl et al., 2004). Community conservation areas are managed by indigenous and local communities through customary law (Sherl et al., 2004). In Kenya and Tanzania, local communities can gain benefits and participate at all levels of management in a range of conservation and ecotourism enterprises (Wishitemi, 2000; Okello et al., 2003, cited in Sherl et al., 2004). However, community conservation initiatives can only work when they are supported by a national policy and legislative environment that enables the devolution of meaningful authority and responsibility for natural resources (McShane and Wells, 2004, cited in Sherl et al., 2004). They may contribute to reducing poverty through social empowerment and by providing financial benefits to communities in and around protected areas, but they rarely achieve significant poverty reduction (Sherl et al., 2004).

### **The management approach in Cat Tien National Park**

Since it established Cat Tien National Park in 1992, the Vietnamese government has introduced a policy assigning the management of national parks to state-run organizations. Strict protection has resulted in limited access to forest products for local people and limited



opportunities for income generation. Thus, the National Park has led to a loss of income sources for local people, especially the poor (Ton Tu Anh, 2002: 253). Among its 175 members of staff, the park currently employs 120 forest guards. The major protection activity implemented by the forest protection department is patrolling and dealing with violations. Forest guards cooperate with some indigenous households to protect the park. Moreover, forest guards also maintain regular contact with the communities living in their area of protection through conservation and educational activities, and make monthly reports to the forest protection department on the trends for violations as well as cross-checking with each other.

## 6.2. The people in the buffer zone: A history of people groups

The gap between sustainable livelihoods theory and practice is explored in this chapter in order to gain a better understanding of the problems and constraints faced by the local community. The livelihoods of the people living in the buffer zone, their relationship with Cat Tien National Park and their views on the park and forest protection were examined by surveying 150 households living in Village 4 of Ta Lai Commune, Tan Phu District, Dong Nai Province. The households were interviewed about their history, the five livelihood assets and their livelihood activities.

The participatory rural appraisal (PRA) timeline tool and secondary data were used to examine the historical issues of each people group. The Chau Ma and Stieng are the *indigenous people* in Cat Tien National Park. They are located in Lam Dong, Binh Phuoc, Dong Nai and Dak Lak provinces. Before the 20th century, they lived in primeval forest with abundant flora and fauna. As a result of their intimate relationship with the forest and accumulated knowledge about it, Chau Ma and Stieng have created ways to sustainably adapt to their environment for life sustenance and human development. The culture and indigenous knowledge of the Chau Ma and Stieng reflect their experiences of adaptability (Nguyen Huynh Thuat, 2005). In 1976, Dong Nai Province People's Committee moved the Chau Ma and Stieng people from the forest to a residential area and area of settled agriculture in Village 4. In order to improve people's livelihoods, the local government invested in housing and reclaimed farmland. Today, agricultural activities are the main source of subsistence and income (Tan Phu District People's Committee, 2004).

Many other *minority groups* from different provinces have migrated to Cat Tien National Park to seek alternative opportunities for income generation. However, these groups of migrants rarely enter the buffer zone of village 4 and thus are not included in this study.

In 1976, the government brought the *Kinh people (lowland Vietnamese)* from Binh Thanh district, Ho Chi Minh City, to Ta Lai commune as part of a programme of new economic zones. This resettlement was carried out three times and 100 households were beneficiaries. Every person was allocated 0.2 ha of cultivated land. During this period, living conditions were poor. People faced many difficulties, including malaria and a lack of food. In 1978–1980, nearly half the households found the situation so difficult that they were forced to return to Ho Chi Minh City. At the same time, however, some households settled from Dinh Quan district, Dong Nai province, and, in 1982, some households from the north of Vietnam also migrated to the village. The complex and unstable population makes it difficult to maintain social and public order. It has been

suggested, for example, that these newcomers encourage resident minority peoples to break the law on their behalf by entering the park.

### The five household assets

The main characteristics of livelihood assets and how people employ them to sustain livelihood activities is examined using the sustainable livelihoods framework developed by the British Department for International Development (DFID). The integrated analysis explores the relationship between physical, natural, social, financial and cultural assets. Resource mapping and the transect walk method provide the data for a description of natural assets. Currently, people have enough cultivated land but the soil is infertile and there is a lack of water for production. The Chau Ma group's productive assets have the highest average value. This could be due to the fact that the Chau Ma group has been raising buffaloes for ploughing. Nonetheless, the inequality in the level of productive assets remains high inside the Chau Ma group. Such inequality is a general pattern also observed in the other groups. In this study, the Gini coefficient of productive assets of the Chau Ma group is about 0.8<sup>8</sup>, which means that only a few households own the majority of the assets. The Stieng population has access to a smaller area of cultivated land and fewer productive assets, and the value of their livelihood assets is lower than that of the Chau Ma and Kinh groups. It was observed that the houses of the Chau Ma and Stieng people contained relatively few items of household furniture. Few indigenous households had high value assets such as a television or a motorbike. The Kinh, on the other hand, in addition to owning televisions, cassette players, motorbikes and other electrical equipment, had many assets for living such as tables and chairs. Walking is the main mode of transport for indigenous people to go to the local market but some households have bicycles. It should be noted that although aspects such as the amount of cultivated land area varied among the surveyed households (Gini = 0.48), there was a higher variation in the value of living and productive assets across the total sample (Gini = 0.79 and 0.67).

In terms of human assets, the Kinh people's level of education is higher than that of the Chau Ma and Stieng people. Higher educational levels mean that knowledge can be employed more effectively and productively in the use of agricultural technology. Evidence for this was drawn from the group discussions. The Kinh people can participate in, discuss and easily learn about new technologies for cultivation. They can read instruction manuals and apply the knowledge without outside help. For the Chau Ma and Stieng people, this poses greater difficulties. According to key informants in Village 4, local government officials conduct the agricultural training courses intended for indigenous people in Vietnamese, a language which most indigenous peoples do not understand sufficiently well to benefit from the training. Outside the domain of government, the Chau Ma and Stieng groups have strong social assets. They tend to participate in village meetings and training courses, and to share their traditional culture more than the Kinh group. They are also considered highly skilled in handicrafts and to have sophisticated indigenous environmental knowledge systems that are employed in traditional forms of land use. In terms of financial assets, the Kinh people plan for the future by saving money and storing rice. They use their savings to deal with internal and external shocks such as diseases, drought and the loss of a harvest. This is

<sup>8</sup>The Gini coefficient was developed by the Italian statistician Corrado Gini as a measure of the inequality of distribution. It is often used to measure income inequality and also to measure wealth inequality. It is a number between 0 and 1, where 0 corresponds to perfect equality and 1 corresponds to total inequality.

different from the Chau Ma and Stieng people, who do not save money for the future and are willing to spend after selling their agricultural produce. For example, in the cashew harvesting season, most Chau Ma and Stieng people visit local wine houses to eat and drink. There is a high level of expenditure on entertainment and less investment in longer term livelihood buffering.

### **On vulnerability issues affecting livelihood assets**

The poor formal education of the Chau Ma and Stieng people means that they experience difficulties in using sophisticated agricultural technology. This constraint on human assets was observed in their dependence on government support and other external help. Infertile soil and limited irrigation are barriers to cultivation. In addition, when the government drew a new boundary for the buffer zone in Ta Lai commune, 75 ha of land for rice cultivation remained inside Cat Tien National Park and this can no longer be used by the Chau Ma people. This situation has created a conflict of interest between conservation managers and the Chau Ma people. Furthermore, the Kinh people buy land from indigenous people, which aggravates their already vulnerable situation. Indigenous people often spend all that was earned from the sale of land and therefore have no other choice but to enter the park to collect forest products or find new land for cultivation. The lack of savings among the Chau Ma and Stieng people often forces them into debt traps with private lenders.

The way in which forest protection and conservation management activities are carried out does not reflect an integrated effort between local communities and forest guards, and thus much of the indigenous knowledge of natural resource management is not fully utilized (Nguyen Huynh Thuat, 2005). Recently, the Chau Ma and Stieng people began to adopt a similar lifestyle to that of the Kinh people, but their forest-related traditions persist. The settled agriculture and residence programme supported the Chau Ma people by providing some assets such as beds and wardrobes, but these were either damaged or not used. The Stieng people do not like to live in the concrete houses which were built by the government, preferring to remain in their wooden houses on stilts.

### **People's livelihood activities**

The analysis below focuses on the main occupation of the households interviewed. Leones and Feldman (1998) divide income activities into three categories: on-farm, which means that income is generated from own-account farming; off-farm, from wage or exchange labour on other farms; and non-farm, referring to non-agricultural sources of income.

Nearly three-quarters (73.3 per cent) of the total agricultural sector works in on-farm activities - 43.4 per cent cultivation, 27.8 per cent cultivation and animal husbandry and 2.1 per cent fisheries. The types of crop cultivated are rice, fruit, cashew, cash crops and forestry. Rice is the main crop cultivated in the village. The types of animal husbandry include cattle, buffalo, pigs and poultry. Animal husbandry is not developed because draught buffalo are being replaced by tractors and poultry are used only for household consumption. The Kinh people have raised pigs and cattle with the support of development projects and banks. Almost one-fifth (18.7 per cent) of total employment is based on off-farm activities, for example, clearing wild grass for cultivation and pesticide application. Labourers and in particular the Stieng work on the

collection of cashew nuts in Binh Phuoc province. Non-farm activities constitute only 8 per cent of total work. These activities include small businesses at home and in neighbouring villages, office work, bricklaying and brocade weaving.

Discussion with key informants revealed that the Kinh people differ from the indigenous people in terms of their preferences for different livelihood activities. For instance, the Kinh people tend to concentrate on agricultural production to meet market demand. They know how to calculate the costs and benefits of their activities and have the knowledge to apply technology, while the Chau Ma and Stieng people are less well versed in this regard.

Group discussions indicate that the average productivity of rice production among the Kinh people is three tonnes per ha per crop. After the costs of production of VND 4.5 million/ha/crop, income per hectare per crop of rice is estimated to be VND 1.5 million. Most of the rice fields can only cultivate one crop per year because of the lack of water in the dry season. After harvests, people sell about one-third of the crop yield to cover expenditures while the remaining yield is stored for household consumption. Corn and bean yields are decreasing due to the lack of water and to pests. As a result, about 90 per cent of the households surveyed have stopped cultivating these cash crops. Nearly two-thirds of the cashew area had just been planted at the time of the survey. The remaining cashew area suffered from low yields unless people invested in fertilizer and pesticides. Yields would be one or two tonnes per ha, which is short of the required level. In terms of animal husbandry, people raise an average of two local white pigs per household. By-products from agriculture are used as feed for pigs. After six months, the average weight of a pig for sale is about 60 kg. Chicken and duck are raised for household consumption. Cattle production is strongly promoted through the support of the Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Forest Protection and Rural Development Project.

The Stieng people cultivate two rice crops per year using water from the Vam Ho dam. The average productivity of rice cultivation is about two tonnes per ha per crop. Only a few households achieve three tonnes per ha per crop with the application of new technology. Cashew are planted on the hills without fertilizer, with average productivity of 1.25 tonnes per ha per year. In terms of animal husbandry, cattle are raised more commonly than buffaloes, and chicken is raised for family or household consumption. Off-farm, people labour during the rice harvest (70 per cent of female labourers and 30 per cent of male labourers) for an average wage of VND 25000 per day plus lunch. The majority of male labourers spray pesticide and clear wild grass to prepare the land for cultivation. They are paid a wage of VND 30000 per day. The group discussion revealed that the Stieng people often enter the park to collect bamboo shoots, rattan, cuttings from medicinal trees and other forest products. Respondents said that the Stieng people sometimes enter the park to hunt Java mouse deer and tortoise or go to the Da Pan stream to fish. It usually takes 10 hours, from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., to enter the park and conduct the associated livelihood activity. According to key informants, Stieng people enter the park less than Chau Ma people. This finding was cross-checked and validated in the household survey and in-depth interviews with key informants.

**Table 6.1.** Income per capita per month of the households surveyed, 2005

Source: Household survey, Tran Duc Luan, 2006

Note: not including income from forest products.

Unit = 000 Vietnamese Dong

Items	Groups						Total sample (n=150)		
	Chau Ma (n=50)		Kinh (n=50)		Stieng (n=50)				
	Mean	Std. D	Mean	Std. D	Mean	Std. D	Mean	Std. D	per cent
1. On-farm	135	94	166	155	155	119	151	58	58
2. Off-farm	38	58	35	64	52	77	42	67	16
3. Non-farm	63	110	131	158	12	21	68	121	26
Total income	236	120	332	170	219	95	260	140	100

The Chau Ma people cultivate a single variety of rice in flat fields and plant cashew in gardens and in the hills. The rice yield averages two tonnes per ha per crop. After covering production costs, VND 500,000 per ha can be earned. Brocade weaving is a traditional handicraft carried out by Chau Ma women. However, employment opportunities linked to this activity are limited due to the lack of market demand. People obtain loans or enter the park to collect forest products for food and firewood. The group discussion revealed that in the past, Chau Ma people, especially women, had often entered the park to collect bamboo shoots from July to August. Table 6.1 shows that monthly income per capita is highest among the Kinh people, at VND 332,000, while the Chau Ma people earn an average of VND 236,000 and the Stieng people VND 219,000. Total income is the sum of all earnings from on-farm, off-farm and non-farm sources. On-farm activities are the main source of income for all groups, corresponding to 58 per cent of total income.

The average income of the Kinh group from on-farm sources is little different from that of the other two groups. The income generated by rice production is not high despite the relatively high level of productivity in comparison to the Chau Ma and Stieng people. In addition, the area of cashew cultivation of the Chau Ma and Stieng is 1.5 times that of the Kinh. Finally, most of the Kinh's fruit and cashew areas as well as their cattle rearing are in the initial phases of investment. Hence, at present income from on-farm sources is relatively equal among the three groups. However, in the next three years it is highly likely that a wide disparity in income will develop between the groups as a result of the increasing incomes that will be generated by the Kinh people. Compared with the other two groups, the Stieng people earn more money from off-farm activities due to the greater number of labourers working on these activities. On the other hand, the Kinh people receive high incomes from non-farm sources (see Table 6.1.) generated from small businesses, wage labour and remittances from relatives working abroad or outside the region.

### 6.3. Relationships between the households and the Cat Tien National Park

This section explores the relationships between people's livelihoods and the Cat Tien National Park. This relationship connects closely to the history and practices discussed above. The relationship between people's livelihood activities and Cat Tien National Park focuses on three main issues: the violations of the forest law recorded in Village 4 in recent years; the categories of

forest products which are collected and used by the local people; and the forest protection contract.

### Violations of forest law

Human pressure comes mainly from the increasing population in the buffer zone and overpopulation inside the park (Cat Tien National Park, 2005). According to the Cat Tien National Park management board, there has been a decrease in the number of violations in recent years, but remaining cases are complex. The main driver is the increasing demand for forest products. People enter the park all year round to collect forest products, such as food, firewood and construction materials, for their daily needs and sometimes to trade for cash income (see Table 6.2.).

**Table 6.2.** Violations of forest law in Cat Tien National Park, 2000 to 2005

Source: Calculations from data supplied by Cat Tien National Park Management Board,

Tran Duc Luan, 2006

Items	Years						Annual Average	Percentage
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005		
1. Cases of law violation	486	498	519	367	351	254	413	100
+ Hunting	48	69	80	51	71	40	60	16
+ Fishing	124	126	79	67	58	29	81	11
+ Wood	27	20	49	15	23	10	24	4
+ Other forest products	119	148	171	127	106	97	128	38
+ Other forms of violation	168	135	140	107	93	78	120	31
2. Number of violators	802	906	915	580	524	387	686	100
+ Hunting	65	111	127	68	72	46	82	12
+ Fishing	159	212	121	99	95	39	121	18
+ Logging	36	41	88	30	40	9	41	6
+ Other Forest Products	239	324	369	239	202	211	264	39
+ Other forms of violation	303	218	210	144	115	82	179	26

About 12 per cent of those arrested entered the park to hunt, and 18 per cent were arrested for fishing. The majority live around the park. Some were collecting forest products to generate income: many restaurants in Vietnam offer wild meat. Increasing incomes mean that there is a growing demand for wild meat as a luxury (Cat Tien National Park, 2003). Forest guards have been cooperating with the police and local authorities in the buffer zone on patrols and dealing with violations. However, many violators have previous convictions and are repeat offenders. This is explained by the fact that the violators are mostly marginalized minorities who need to enter the park to collect fish, bamboo shoots, mushrooms and other forest products in order to survive.

The number of violations between 1999 and 2004 is difficult to assess owing to the absence of accurate data. It is interesting to note, however, that data from interviews suggest that nearly 46 per cent of the people in Village 4 had collected forest products such as bamboo shoots, rattans and mushrooms, 22 per cent had traded, stored or transported forest products, 22 per cent had hunted or fished in the park and nine per cent had convictions for other offences such as forest land encroachment.



### Categories of forest products

The results of group discussions and in-depth interviews with key informants uncovered many key motivations for encroaching on the park, the majority being to obtain bamboo shoots, rattans, firewood and other forest products. Women and children also enter the park. The park is perceived to have an abundance of bamboo shoots by 30 per cent of the surveyed households. The need for forest food (25 per cent), the lack of food for household consumption (20 per cent) and the lack firewood (15 per cent) for fuel are also important. Moreover, the Chau Ma and Stieng people lived in the forest for a long time and are still used to the old ways and habits. Young people are still heavily influenced by their parents and their ancestors' ways of thinking and behaving towards the forest. This will take time to change even if they are aware that entering the park is a serious offence.

A person can collect 20 kg of bamboo shoots in a day, estimated to be worth VND 30,000. Because of its sensitivity as an issue, the research employed indirect questioning methods to explore the collection of forest products by local people. They did not reveal the quantity and value of forest products collected, but disclosed the price of some products they knew. It is interesting to note that local people knew the exact unit price for each product. For example: raw bamboo shoots cost VND 500/kg and processed bamboo shoots cost VND 1500/kg; special weasel costs VND 80,000 to 90,000/kg and normal weasel VND 50,000 to 60,000/kg; Java mouse-deer costs VND 40,000/kg; varan VND 45,000/kg and porcupine VND 60,000/kg. The prices of products such as wild boar, deer, monkeys and tortoises were also mentioned but local people did not know them. There is a suspicion that an unofficial or black market exists for forest products, and this could be an external threat to Cat Tien National Park.

**Box 6.1. Why do Stieng and Chau Ma people still enter the National Park?**

A Stieng respondent said: "The forest is the home of our ancestors. Hence, we often visit it if we need to". The researcher explained that this was a violation of Cat Tien National Park forest law, but the respondent asserted: "It is our right as indigenous people".

Source: In-depth interview, Tran Duc Luan, 2006

The desire for forest food is one of the main reasons for entering the park. This is a significant finding of the study. The Stieng people believe that "Lá nheíp" is delicious when cooked for soup while the Chau Ma people claimed that the fish inside the park are large and have sweet meat. In group discussions with Ta Lai forest station guards, it was said that the Stieng and Chau Ma people are familiar with the geographical situation of Cat Tien National Park, and thus some Kinh people take advantage of this geographical familiarity by sub-contracting Chau Ma and Stieng people to collect forest products and sell them to them. In turn, these products are sold in the unofficial economy to generate cash incomes.

**Box 6.2. Why don't the Kinh people enter the National Park?**

According to one Kinh respondent, "Most of the people in the Phuoc Sang area were given a loan to raise cattle in production groups. Each group is seven to 10 households. Every household was given VND 10 million at an interest rate of 0.45 per cent and with a payback period of three years. The interest was to be paid after three months to the leader of the production group and, in turn, the payment would be remitted to the bank. The cost of breeding a cow is about seven to eight million VND per head. Each cow is required to breed at least two cows or more. At present, the cows are healthy and strong. If this trend continues, in three years the income from two calves will cover the loan and the people will make a profit from the mother. This is one of the reasons why we all concentrate on agricultural activities rather than entering Cat Tien National Park as was the case in the past".

Source: In-depth interview, Tran Duc Luan, 2006

Why is it that the Kinh people rarely enter the park? The household survey revealed that the main reasons were that they were afraid of the forest guards (34 per cent) or they had no time to enter because they were focused on crop cultivation (27 per cent). The remaining reasons were related to health, the unfamiliar terrain of the forest, a fear of dangerous animals and not having any reason to enter the forest.

An interesting relationship between groups above the poverty line and the forest emerged when the sample size was divided by the new poverty line set by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs. The new poverty line of VND 200,000 per capita per month for rural areas has been applied in Vietnam since 2006. Households above this poverty line also entered the park to collect forest products. The four main categories of forest products mentioned in the above section were used for this analysis.

**Box 6.3. A simplified estimate of human pressure on Cat Tien National Park**

According to Tran Van Mui (2006), over 30 groups make up the population in and around Cat Tien National Park: Kinh (67.1 per cent); Tay (11.1 per cent); Nung (8.1 per cent); Chau Ma (6.2 per cent); Stieng (2.3 per cent); HMong (1.1 per cent); Dao (1.3 per cent); Hoa (1.1 per cent); Muong (0.7 per cent); and others (1.0 per cent).

The households surveyed were representative of Village 4, but future research on a larger scale to get a better picture of the entire Park would need to increase the sample size, particularly that of the Kinh households. A rough estimate of the human pressure on the park has been developed on the assumption that the proportion of surveyed households (Table 6.2.) entering the park to collect and use forest products is representative of the whole population in the buffer zone of Cat Tien National Park. As the Chau Ma and Stieng make up about 69 per cent and the Kinh about 4 per cent of the total 173,947 people in and around the Park, a simple estimate of human pressure on the park can be calculated as follows:

People groups	The proportion of people in and around the Park*	Estimation on the total human pressure to Cat Tien National Park
Kinh	67.1%	{67.1% * 173,947 people * 4%} = 4,662 people
Chau Ma & Stieng	8.5%	{8.5% * 173,947 people * 69%} = 10,202 people
Others	24.4%	Not estimated



Although the total population of Chau Ma and Stieng is less than the Kinh people, the percentage of households entering the park and the amount of human pressure exerted on the Park by the Chau Ma and Stieng people is twice that of the Kinh. It can therefore be concluded that the Chau Ma and Stieng people rely heavily on forest resources.

Source: Tran Van Mui, 2006; Data estimate, Tran Duc Luan, 2006

### The forest protection contract

The relationship between the people and the park is stressed in the contract on forest protection initiated by the Cat Tien National Park management board. Ta Lai village is one of the zones allocated an area for forest protection. The protected area covers 600 ha, in which 29 Chau Ma and Stieng households have signed a contract with the management board. After signing a contract to protect the forest, households have a responsibility to check for changes in the forest and report violations, and to prevent and fight fires. At present, the area is divided into six plots of 100 ha per plot, and each plot must be monitored and patrolled at least four times each month. The group of households set up a working schedule and divided themselves into four teams under the supervision of a group leader. Every team has a duty to patrol one plot per month. The following month, the four teams have to draw lots to select new plots for protection. It normally takes one day to patrol a plot, except in special cases. Before patrolling, the teams have to inform the Ta Lai forest station in order to feed back developments and changes within the park and receive instructions from staff in the National Park. To protect one hectare of forest, households receive VND 50,000 per year from the management board. Each household receives an average of VND 83,000 per month for protection activities, which is less than the income gained by one person collecting bamboo shoots for three days. Moreover, the contract benefits only 29 households.

### Household perspectives on forest protection activities in Cat Tien National Park

It is clear that poverty is one of the main reasons that motivate people to enter the park to collect forest products. Moreover, on closer inspection, the decision by people on whether to enter the park is largely dependant on the perspectives of individual households. In order to gain an understanding of their world view, 10 statements arising from the discussions with key informants<sup>9</sup> were used in a ranking exercise with households (see Table 6.3). Households were asked to rate their responses to the statements according to how they reflected their perceptions, opinions and sentiments.<sup>10</sup> A follow-up question was then asked about why they chose that statement over the other statements.

<sup>9</sup> Including the Cat Tien National Park Management Board, Ta Lai forest station, Ta Lai commune people's committee, the head of Village 4 and the staff who implemented the project in the village.

<sup>10</sup> While using the statements, the researcher avoided the use of leading questions that might make the respondent conclude that the current activities of forest protection and conservation are better than before. A yes response to this question may be the easiest and many of the respondents might simply take the path that requires the least amount of time to think critically. The following options were presented: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree. However, household opinion was concentrated on the responses agree, not sure and disagree. The response not sure was not significant as it received less than 5% of the responses.

**Table 6.3.** Perceptions of the households of Cat Tien National Park on forest protection activities

Source: Household survey, Tran Duc Luan, 2006

Statements and the percentage of the households surveyed that agreed with the statement	
<p>Statement 1. "It is necessary for Cat Tien National Park to protect the forest and preserve its biodiversity (flora and fauna)"</p>	<p>Statement 2. "We think that the current activities of Cat Tien National Park Management Board on forest protection and reservation are very good"</p>
<p>Statement 3. "We receive benefits from the Forest Protection and Rural Development Projects of Cat Tien National Park and other projects/programmes"</p>	<p>Statement 4. "Forest Protection means that people are absolutely not allowed to enter Cat Tien National Park for any purposes"</p>
<p>Statement 5. "Although we are poor, we usually do not go to the Park to get forest products"</p>	<p>Statement 6. "Even if the forest is not there, we can easily find other sources of income"</p>
<p>Statement 7. "Up to now, the people in Village 4 had the right to collect medicinal plants, edible plants and animals in the Park"</p>	<p>Statement 8. "Forests play an important role in our family"</p>
<p>Statement 9. "There are still some outsiders that abet local people in our village to get forest products"</p>	<p>Statement 10. "Poor people go to the park more frequently than better-off people"</p>

Most households agreed with the statement that it is necessary for Cat Tien National Park to protect the forest and preserve its biodiversity. Chau Ma and Stieng households explained that the existence of the national park helps to preserve the flora and fauna. Kinh households regarded the park as a source of fresh air, a reservoir for natural resources and a way to help

prevent the extinction of rare and exotic animals. The statement on current forest protection activities created various explanations for the answer “agree” between indigenous households and Kinh households. Over 70 per cent of the indigenous households believe that current forest protection activities are good because they realize that there is an abundance of fauna and flora, and that forest guards have been cooperating closely with the households surveyed. However, only 48 per cent of Kinh households agree with the current strategy on forest protection as they consider that there are too few forest guards, and that they are not yet well-versed in handling cases of violations of the law.

A great majority, 80 per cent, of Kinh households agree that people are not allowed to enter Cat Tien National Park for any purposes because they have to strictly follow the forest law. Furthermore, they assert that even if they are poor, they usually do not go to the forest to obtain any resources. On the other hand, over 65 per cent of Chau Ma and Stieng households are willing to enter the park if they lack food. When a distinct demarcation line is drawn between the forest and livelihoods, approximately 38 per cent of Stieng households and 44 per cent of Chau Ma households said that they find it difficult to find other sources of income not related to forest products. Discussion and interviews with key informants suggest that this is due to the fact that their level of education does not yield the qualifications required for non-farm activities such as working in industrial companies – unlike the Kinh people who have acquired a better education which places them in a better situation. Chau Ma and Stieng people have valuable knowledge of collecting medicinal plants in the forest (Nguyen Huynh Thuat, 2005). In the household survey, over 40 per cent of Chau Ma and Stieng households said that they have the right to enter the park to collect medicinal plants, forest food and wild animals for family consumption. Only 22 per cent of Kinh households agreed with this. Looking at the total population ratios between the three groups in Village 4, the total impact on resources seems to bias indigenous people. However, considering the total population of the park, this research lacks strong evidence for the claim that the total impact of indigenous people on these resources would be significant or reflected in the statistics, even ignoring the fact that the capacity for extraction between villages will differ because of the varying locations of each village in the buffer zone.

The views of Chau Ma and Stieng households indicate that the forest plays an important role in their lives, particularly during times of dwindling rice harvests or when they cannot find firewood around the village. For them, the forest helps overcome difficulties in the short run. Kinh households, on the other hand, have a higher level view on the role of the forest, seeing it as climate equalizer, a water source and a protector of bio-diversity.

#### **Box 6.4. How can forest guards manage the park well?**

According to one key informant in Village 4: “The ways of forest protection and conservation are unreasonable. In Cat Tien National Park, the forest law is very strict but not feasible. People’s houses are just a step away from the park so people can enter the Park. If the forest guards are patrolling, people need only one jump to get back to their houses. So how can the forest guards manage the park well?”

Source: In-depth interview, Tran Duc Luan, 2006

One sensitive issue that arises from this study is the case of indirect violations, that is, people who subcontract local people to enter the park to collect forest products. The results from the household survey reveal that some outsiders are indeed committing this act: 22 per cent of the surveyed households support this claim. More importantly, a more detailed examination of the realities at the local level reveals that the poor have a greater tendency to enter the forest than others in the community, which makes forest protection activities more complex and more difficult.

#### **6.4. Discussion**

According to DFID (1999), livelihoods are sustainable when they are resilient in the face of external shocks, are not dependent on external support, maintain the long-term productivity of natural resources and do not undermine the livelihoods of others. The research for this chapter examined how the people in Village 4 achieve sustainable livelihoods. It was found that the resettlement of people from forest to settled residences changed their livelihoods. The transfer aimed to help people find a stable location in which to live and cultivate, and to conserve the natural resources of the forest. The forest law for Cat Tien National Park has separated the people from the forest. People are not allowed to collect forest products inside the park, depriving them of that source of income. The revised boundary of the buffer zone resulted is a loss of land for cultivation to the park. In addition, the effects of drought, floods and wild animals have damaged crops and houses, leaving people to face external shocks. The heavy reliance of the local people on external help is considered the foremost constraint on their livelihoods, and the termination of programmes, projects and other aid extended to the village would make it difficult for local people to maintain their living conditions. The productivity of the main crops is low and people have yet to improve this situation.

Poverty is one of the reasons why people are driven to encroach on forest products, which threatens conservation efforts in Cat Tien National Park. Conflicts of interest over the use of natural resources occur frequently in the village. One particular issue is the use of the dam for cultivation. While one actor enjoys catching fish by damaging the dam to allow water to flow freely, others suffer as a result of the loss in rice yields due to a lack of water. Poverty is manifested not only in low incomes but also in the low levels of awareness and education among the local people. If conditions persist, the people in Village 4 will find it difficult to escape poverty and achieve sustainable livelihoods.

On the basis of the evidence presented above alone, the research found it difficult to assess whether the forest protection/conservation approaches in Cat Tien National Park have led to sustainable livelihoods for people in the buffer zone. However, there are undoubtedly conflicts between the National Park and local people regarding livelihoods. Like the study by Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau (undated), this study recognizes that the perspectives of the inhabitants in the protected areas of Cat Tien National Park are more inclined to prioritize the equitable sharing of the costs and benefits of conservation than sustainability and forest biodiversity. The people wonder why the benefits of Cat Tien National Park are enjoyed at the national and global levels while most of the opportunity costs are borne by the local people, mostly the poorest and most vulnerable groups. However, reducing biodiversity cannot be used as a strategy for poverty reduction while achieving sustainable livelihoods. Conversely, solutions to poverty conflict with

means for preserving biodiversity. This study suggests that the way to avoid lose-lose situations is to secure both the well-being of the people and the conservation of the park, which means that an objective of conservation practice should be to integrate the objectives of improving people's livelihoods.

Indigenous people have a high level of dependency on the forest resources of the Park. There is no motivation for the sustainable use of the forest while the activities of collecting forest products are considered illegal. Balancing local people's needs with conservation can only be achieved if a supportive policy is developed by the forest management board and the local authority. This will involve reorienting the management board to the sustainable use of forest products through preservation and conservation rather than the prohibition of all possible exploitation. The indigenous knowledge of local people is very useful for monitoring and forest protection activities, but this knowledge has to be harnessed. The regulations for conservation management need to be developed but they should include greater flexibility to explore collaborative management and sustainable approaches to land use – and Vietnam has limited experience with these approaches. Johnson (1997), Jones and Murphere (2001) and Child and Dalal Clayton (2004) found, in Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa and Pakistan, that some local communities obtain income from sport hunting around protected areas. These experiences are based on species that can be sustainably harvested, and exclude rare species such as the black rhino. However, this would not be acceptable in Cat Tien National Park because of the threats to both rare and non-rare wild animals. Other approaches to managing the park would therefore have to be found. The management of the park should, at the least, not worsen the living conditions of the rural poor and indigenous communities within it and in adjacent areas (Scherl, 2003).

### **6.5. Conclusions**

Based on the findings of this study, the management board of Cat Tien National Park has been applying an integrated conservation and development approach around the park. The projects support the local communities who live around the park to improve their living conditions. This approach has brought about some initial changes in behaviour, such as changes to attitudes towards park conservation activities. For example, local people now recognize the need for and value of the park in terms of maintaining biodiversity. However, this approach has to be strengthened in order to dramatically reduce violations. Even after the new projects have been implemented, the proportion of indigenous households in the study area entering the park to collect forest products remains high. Box 6.3 highlights the positive and negative aspects of conservation management. In the study site, local communities lack fuel wood and food to meet their needs because of the lack of natural resources in the buffer zone. The integrated conservation and development projects will not succeed if there is no cooperation between the staff in the park and indigenous people.

Forest protection and conservation in Cat Tien National Park are very difficult because of the pressure from local inhabitants. The indigenous population believes it has the right to enter the forest in order to exploit it. This is because they lived in the area before it was designated a national park, and thus “their resource” was taken away from them without sufficient compensation. The protection policy applied was not appropriate to the social assets of the

local people, which explains the high rate of violations. The resistance to new technology and training of indigenous groups can be explained by several factors: their existing skill in exploiting forests makes them more interested in continuing along that path, and training was not organized in the local language and therefore did not benefit them. In short, the approach applied does not seem to be suitable for indigenous groups, given their livelihood assets, which explains the lack of success of the current conservation policy.

Clearly, the limited cooperation between the state and local inhabitants in the protected areas has led to the failure of conservation goals. How to improve cooperation and better organize management activities will remain a challenge for researchers and policymakers in the future.



## Chapter 7. New arrangement for forest management in Vietnam: Implementation processes and impacts on rural livelihoods

Hoang Thi Sen

### 7.1. Introduction

At the reunification of the country in 1976, the forestry sector in Vietnam took a traditional approach which emphasized the technical aspects of forest management across the whole country. All the forests and land for forestry were managed and controlled by state forestry institutions using top-down plans. State management of large areas in a context of a lack of human and financial resources, however, meant that these plans could not be implemented. Despite the high levels of financial investment in operationalizing a scientific approach to forestry, illegal logging and deforestation have persisted. Concurrent with the major institutional reforms in Vietnam from 1986 (*doi moi*), there has been an institutional shift in forest land management away from purely state management to involving local people through policies for allocating forest land to household groups and villages.

Between the 1993 Land Law and 2003, 628,900 land use rights certificates were issued, of which 515,000 were to households for a total area of 3,546,500 ha, that is, 35 per cent of total forest land (Resources and Environment Ministry, 2003). The allocation of natural forests happened later than the allocation of forestry land but, since June 2001, 669,750 ha of natural forest has been allocated to communities or villages for management (Tuan, 2001).

However, household- or village-based forest management is still considered a model under development, with diverging interpretations by different actors. This chapter examines how the process of forest allocation has occurred in practice, how different actors have participated in the process, the rights they have gained, how these have translated into empowerment to manage the forest and how, in turn, this contributes to rural livelihoods.



Evidence for this chapter was sourced from fieldwork undertaken in two communes in Thua Thien Hue province – Loc Tien and Thuong Quang – through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and formal individual interviews. A policy analysis was also undertaken, which drew on critical anthropological and ethnological approaches.

## 7.2. Implementation processes and the involvement of entities or stakeholders

State level policy papers do not treat the allocation of natural forest and forestry land separately. The messages embodied in the policy papers related to the allocation of forest land are extremely general and do not provide guidelines for the allocation process. The evidence from the two study sites (see Figure 1) shows that the initiation and implementation of forest land allocation activity differed in term of its reasons and timelines, as well as the financial sources and methods of allocation.

### The forest land allocation implementation process

The forestry land allocation in Loc Tien, a coastal commune, was implemented separately from the natural forest allocation. The first forestry land allocation in Loc Tien was initiated in 1987 with the support of the World Food Programme. The Programme Alimentaire Mondial (PAM) project was conceived as a top-down project planned from the centre to the district level. PAM provided financial support to invest in seedlings and food to pay for labour to plant forests in 13 provinces on the central coast of Vietnam, including Thua Thien Hue province.

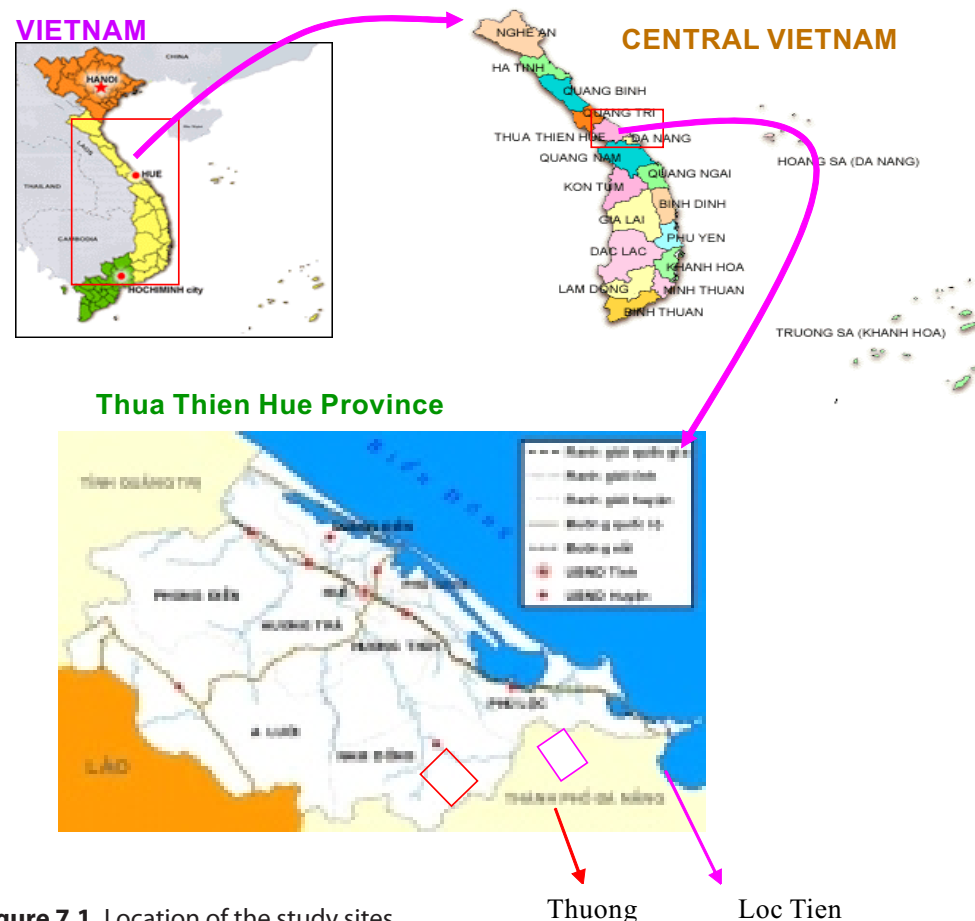


Figure 7.1. Location of the study sites

Thuong Loc Tien

In order to ensure long term benefits to forest planters, the sponsor required that the forests planted were allocated to households using a benefit sharing mechanism: 70 per cent of the total value would be paid to the planters and 30 per cent reserved for management fees. However, the first Vietnamese Land Law, and the forest protection and development law which directly regulated forest and forestry land allocation, had not been passed at the time, and the functions and responsibilities of the state organizations for forest land allocation were yet to be formalized. The implementation of forest planting and allocation was therefore coordinated by the PAM project management board. Although a report by the Thua Thien Hue Agricultural and Rural Development Department (DARD, 1998) notes that a board existed at commune level (grass roots level), in-depth interviews with some commune officers in Loc Tien commune and the head of Thuy Duong village suggest that the role of the board at this level was unclear.

In the period 1987–1991 (PAM 2780), the process of allocating forest land under the PAM project was not transparent and did not include project documentation. According to local people and the village and commune leaders who were directly involved in the activities of PAM in Loc Tien, the PAM project was coordinated in the commune and the village by the District Forest Protection Department (DFPD). The implementation of project activities took a top-down approach with targets assigned from the higher level to the lower level. Local people were interested in planting forests in exchange for rice because lack of food was a common issue in the locality. Despite this, an evaluation undertaken by CARE international in February 1994 suggests that there was no indication that the official land allocation was accompanied by forest planting.

In the period 1993–1997 (PAM 4304), the PAM project was implemented in parallel with Programme 327, the objective of which was to target planting on “barren green land”. This was supported by a state budget and planned from the centre using a characteristic top-down approach. Reports reflect that the area of planted forest associated with the PAM project was about twice as much as that achieved by Programme 327.

The forests planted by Programme 327 were mainly owned by the state forestry organizations. Local people were contracted to plant and tend the forest. In return, they were paid in cash by the state forest organizations. Only limited areas were allocated to the individual households which belonged to the resettlement component of the programme (Thua Thien Hue Provincial People's Committee, January and April 1994). Only a small number of households located within the resettlement area of Thuy Duong village were allocated forest land by Programme 327 – roughly one or two hectares each.

Certification of the forest land allocated in this period by both the PAM project and programme 327 was of an informal character (white and blue certification rather than the red book). However, these informal decisions could be used as a basis for claiming formal certification in the red book. In the period 1993–1997, the organizational management structures of both the PAM project and Programme 327 were similar to that of the PAM project in 1987–1991. According to a report by the DFPD, the allocation of forest land for both PAM 4304 and Programme 327 was implemented using the process set out below:

**Step 1:** Preparation stage (three activities): (a) establishing a coordination board at the district

level; (b): establishing the fieldwork group (FWG), which was mainly responsible for allocating forest land at the field level; and (c) provision of a short training period for the FWG.

**Step 2:** Informing people about the forest land allocation process. In practice this was mainly done by the heads of the commune and the village. It was not carried out formally by holding a village level meeting and it was referred to as a short cut to save costs in the process.

**Step 3:** Planning land use and sending the plan to the district authorities for approval. According to the government decree, before allocating forest land it was necessary to document where it was situated in the land use plan for the commune. This activity was costly, and was therefore done only very generally using geo-referenced data from the commune to allow for it to be mapped. The general planning papers of the forestry sector and statistical data from the commune were used to map the location of the allocated land area. The absence of a rigorous planning process led to many conflicts on account of overlaps in the allocated areas.

**Step 4:** Allocation at field level and completing an allocation document (three activities): (a) informing those individuals or households to be allocated land of the location and the period of the lease (b) measuring and identifying the boundary by the working group, witnessed by the village head and the land management officer of the commune; (Minutes were also prepared and the representatives signed the minutes.) (c) the working group described the land area including the coordinates of the plot on the general forestry land map of the DFPD.

**Step 5:** Completing the documents and sending them for approval and certification. After completing the allocation in the field, the Working Group drew a sketch map of the allocated land and made a land use plan. This was subsequently submitted together with the applications for approval and certification to the District People's Committee.

The process presented above was regulated by the coordination board. However, the local people in the coastal commune claim that none of these steps was implemented: they only heard about the existence of Programme 327 through information provided by the cooperative. Forest protection officers told them to go and plant forest and await a decision on the certification of their plot. Village and commune officers also claim that the steps outlined above for land allocation under the PAM project and Programme 327 were not fully implemented in their area. In-depth interviews with farmers, village and commune officials, and forestry officers suggest that forest land allocation was implemented after the planting of the forest, to a design by the officers of the DFPD. Moreover, implementation of the steps which were regulated by the management board was also dependent on the interpretation of the FWG. Limitations in terms of human and financial resources meant that short cuts were taken that resulted in inadequate provision of information about forest land allocation to the people.

Both cases show that the officers of the DFPD and the local authority representatives (commune officers and the head of the cooperative) implemented forest land allocation policy because it was a task required by the state. Although the process of implementing forest land allocation was interpreted and regulated by the district coordination board, in reality forest land allocation activities in Loc Tien commune were implemented through activity in the PAM project and Programme 327.

In the forest land allocation project carried out with the financial support of the Netherlands

Development Organization (SNV), by the end of 2003 general land use planning activity was carried out in the commune with the participation of local people. During the process, 66.5 ha of ineffectively managed planted forest (belonging to the Hai Van North watershed forest management board and Song Thuy cooperative, now Thuy Duong village) and 70.1 ha of barren hills were identified that could be used for forest planting.

The use by SNV of participatory approaches to planning and land use decision-making meant that the villagers (especially key informants) were actively involved in planning activities, such as building a sand table, field surveys, identifying the boundaries of the village and the type of land use in the village, and so on. SNV, as the sponsor, monitored the planning process carefully. The land use planning map was kept in the commune. In accordance with the planning activity, an allocation plan that targeted barren hills and ineffectively managed planted forest areas was made and submitted to the District People's Committee (DPC) for approval. Once approved, the remaining forest land area was allocated to individual households. However, the allocation of the barren hills was not presented to the villagers but decided by the Commune Land Allocation Council. One local leader explained that the land area was so small that they did not need to inform the villagers. Complementing this allocation, the provincial DARD provided VND 123 million (1.5 million VND per ha) to support the individual households who were allocated forest land to enable forest planting.

The allocation process in the SNV project emphasized participatory land use planning. Participatory Land Use Planning and Forest Land Allocation (LUPLA) was based on the approach applied by the Social Forestry Development Project of GTZ in Son La (Anh and Doest, 2004). According to a report by SNV Vietnam (2004), the process had seven main steps:

**Step 1:** Preparation (three activities): (a) institutional set-up – establish the district management board of LUPLA (DMB), an FWG and a commune Land Registration Council (LRC); (b): collection of baseline data and secondary data such as maps, statistics on land use, a forest resources inventory, a forecast of socio-economic development in the commune and legal papers; and (c) training on the LUPLA methodology for the FWG.

**Step 2:** Conducting a land survey and mapping current land use (three activities): (a) organizing village meetings to disseminate legal documents related to land use and land allocation and to provide information about LUPLA; (b) a household survey, carried out by the FWG of 100 per cent of the households to collect data on current and past land use structures, social and economic conditions, and land use needs; and (c) mapping and developing models of land use, joint mapping of locations, boundaries and land use types by the FWG and key informants. A visual model (sand-table) is made to show land use structures.

**Step 3:** Preparation of land use and land allocation plans (three activities): (a) organize a second village meeting to present the land use map and invite villagers to register land use; (b) organize a third village meeting to finalize the land use plan and inform households about who received land and allocation approval; (c) submit the LUPLA to the DMB for approval.

**Step 4:** Land allocation in the field: This step is similar to that in the PAM project and Programme 327. The only deviation is that the SNV project insists that a list of households who are allocated land must be posted on the noticeboard of the commune (Anh and Doest, 2004).

**Step 5:** Completion of the administrative procedure: documents (application by household for certification and approval of the village and CPC, map of the plot's location) submitted to the DPC for approval.

**Step 6:** Issuance of a land use certificate based on the document sent to the district cadastral unit. The red book is issued and signed by the chairman of the DPC

**Step 7:** Land development support: CPC developed a comprehensive land development plan and different stakeholders were invited to a workshop at the district level to discuss how to develop forest on the allocated land; and a call for support from stakeholders in developing the land.

The above process was designed by SNV based on the methodology of the Social Forestry development project of GTZ in Son La. Apart from the step involving land use planning with local people through a household survey and participatory mapping using a visual model, it was not that different from the allocation process of the PAM project and Programme 327. The LRC was established for the institutional set-up stage, which was also not found in the PAM project and Programme 327. The land registration activity was designed in a village meeting but this stage was bypassed in the PAM project and Programme 327. The land registration activity was not presented at a village meeting. The list of households that were approved for forestry land in a village was not made public at village level or put on the noticeboard of the commune, as stipulated by the SNV. Village leaders explained that the area of barren hills remaining for allocation to households was so small that they did not present it in a village meeting. The land development plan was presented to the whole village. The villagers did not know anything about the support provided from the provincial budget for planting forests on the allocated land, or the principle of joint contributions by the state and the people – provincial support was 60 per cent, an equivalent of VND 2.5 million for planting each hectare of forest.

Programme 327 was also implemented in Thuong Quang commune in order to plant forest. Findings suggest that the implementation process was quite different compared to that of the coastal commune. Even more short cuts were taken and there are no records of the forest land allocation to households. The planted forest allocated under Programme 327 was considered very poorly established, and was managed by the commune until 2003. It was then allocated to households under the SNV project.

Unlike Loc Tien commune, natural forest and forestry land were both allocated at the same time. The forest land was devolved to individual households while the natural forest was allocated to household groups. The process of allocation was similar to that in Loc Tien under the same sponsor, SNV. However, there were no shortcuts in terms of providing information about land registration in the village meeting. All the activities in the process were implemented in Thuong Quang commune, only the list of households was not posted on the commune's noticeboard. Another difference was that a land development plan was not produced and no support was provided by the province or the sponsor for planting forests on the allocated land. The commune and village leaders said that they could not find any funding source for planting trees even though forest land had been allocated. This is dependent on the

relationship formed with either the province or SNV.

It is clear that the implementation of forest allocations in practice relied heavily on the interpretations by and relationships between local actors, such as the commune authorities and forest protection officers. The process was carried out differently even when using the same policies and state management systems, and even though the same organization sponsored the activity.

### **7.3. The natural forest allocation implementation process**

According to the regulations contained in the 1993 Land Law, as revised and amended in 1998 and 2001, for both land law and forest protection and development law, natural forest and forest land should be allocated to either households or individuals. Communities and villages were not the intended recipients of allocations of natural forest or forestry land. In addition, the concept of community forestry is only rarely found in forest protection law (DZung, 2002).

In Loc Tien commune, 511.9 ha of natural forest was allocated to Thuy Duong village in 2001. This allocation activity was supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through project PROFOR, Vietnam, with the objective of supporting the national forestry programme for sustainable forest management as a means to promote sustainable livelihoods. The process of natural forest allocation was initiated by the DFPD based on the requirements of the local community and was agreed by PROFOR. In reality, the process was initiated by the DFPD thanks to the support of PROFOR. This was quite different from the situation with the natural forest allocation in Ea H'leo district, Dak Lak province, where the natural forest allocation was initiated by a plan of the Provincial People's Committee (PPC) and a budget from the provincial investment and planning department. In the case of Dak Lak, international sponsors came after the natural forest allocation had been started to support and facilitate it (Thanh et al., 2004; Nghi, 2002).

The steps or activities of the natural forest allocation in Thuy Duong can be summarized as follows:

**Step 1:** Agreement on the allocation (three activities): (a) organizing the first meeting between local leaders and representatives of the DFPD to inform them about and establish agreements on allocating the natural forest; (b) organizing a second meeting to establish agreement on the allocation by the whole village; and (c) collection of relevant data on the natural forest, and undertaking a household survey to understand the socio-economic conditions of the villagers as well as their attitude to the natural forest allocation policy.

**Step 2:** An inventory of the natural resources of the forest area was carried out by the Agro-Forestry Inventory and Planning Institute with the involvement of some representatives from DARD and the DFPD, the commune's cadastral officer, and the village head and other key villagers in order to identify the timber species and estimate their volume. This served as a basis for identifying the growth of the forest, and calculating timber volumes and the reward to the village in return for the protection provided.

**Step 3:** Drafting a village plan for forest management and village regulations (*huong uoc*) for forest management with the support of foresters from the DFPD, key staff of the commune and



villagers.

**Step 4:** A village meeting to seek approval of the drafts mentioned in Step 3. The head of the village presents the draft forest management plan and the village regulations. The villagers are asked to make comments and to reach agreement by the end of the meeting.

**Step 5:** Submission to the authority for approval and the issuance of legal documents. After presenting the plan and the village regulations and reaching agreement with all the villagers, the drafts were revised if necessary based on the comments made in the meeting. The documents were then signed by the head of the village and the chairman of the Commune People's Committee (CPC). An application was written by the head of the village and all the documents (the plan of management, the village regulations, the report of the natural forest inventory) were sent to the district for approval, after consultations with the DFPD, to secure the signature of the chairman of the DPC. At the provincial level, the Forest Inspection Branch of DARD consulted the PPC on issuing a decision on allocations to the village, covering large groups of households because allocations to villages were not yet regulated by the land law.

Unlike the LUPLA process, which was designed and supported by SNV, all the steps of the natural forest allocation process in Loc Tien were implemented in practice as reported by the DFPD. Although the allocation activity was carried out four years before the author visited, villagers clearly remembered how the meeting had been organized because they had been impressed by the presentations by foreigners and a camera had recorded the meeting.

Questions arise over why the communication process supported by natural forest allocation was so open and transparent, in contrast to the lack of transparency and short cuts that were characteristic of the forest land allocation by the PAM project, Programme 327 and the SNV project. Do these contrasts reflect differences in the claims made by the sponsors or a differentiation in available resources? The answer to this question was different in different cases. The shortcuts in the communication process associated with the forest land allocation in the PAM project and Programme 327 were to save time and money for the programmes, while for the SNV project short cuts were taken because of the very small parcels of land involved.

In Thuong Quang, as is indicated above, both forest land and natural forest were allocated at the same time with the support of SNV. The steps in the natural forest allocation of Thuong Quang were designed in a similar way to those in Loc Tien by SNV, with an emphasis on land use planning. The natural forest allocation process was different: allocations were made to the household groups identified by the DFPD and by commune leaders, not to the village certified by the chairman of the DPC. In Loc Tien the certification was done by the chairman of the PPC.

On reviewing the activities or steps taken in practice in both forestry land and natural forest allocation in the two study sites, it became apparent that the design processes for the projects supported by UNDP or SNV in cooperation with or with the participation of the state organizations at the provincial and district levels, that is, the Forestry Development Sub-department of the DFPD, were not so different. However, project implementation was interpreted differently at the district and commune levels. The differences in these interpretations were not dependent on self-interest or the perceptions of the actors, but emerged as a result of differences in decision-making authority and in the relationships

between the actors in the process.

#### 7.4. The actors and their roles in implementing forest land allocation and the natural forest allocation

Although the forest land and natural forest allocations in the two study sites were implemented at different times and were supported by different sponsors, some key actors were involved in the processes with different roles and levels of decision-making authority. The actors and their roles are synthesized in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1.** Organizations and actors involved in the forest land and natural forest allocation in Thua Thien Hue

Key organizations or actors	Roles
<b>At provincial level</b>	
Provincial People's Committee (PPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversees the different line departments and the lower level people's committees</li> <li>Approves and issues the decision to allocate forest land or natural forest to village or organization</li> </ul>
Forestry Development Division (belongs to DARD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consults provincial project or programme management board and sponsor about selecting the target district</li> <li>Assigns the task plan of the projects or programmes for the districts</li> <li>Training on the process of allocation for the working groups at district level</li> <li>Attends meetings at the district level to contribute ideas for the forest management plan</li> <li>Examines the profile of the allocation before consulting the PPC for approval and to issue the decision</li> </ul>
Forest Inventory Institution (belongs to DARD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes an inventory of natural forest resources and signs the report on the resource situation of the natural forest</li> </ul>
Sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide support through finance and methodological approaches</li> <li>Monitor finances and the techniques applied based on their own principles</li> </ul>
<b>At district level</b>	
District People's Committee (DPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversees the CPC and the line departments or divisions at the district level (DFPD, district agricultural and rural development division, land management division, or environment and resources division from 2005) and coordinates the process</li> <li>Approves the land use plan or natural forest management plan of individual households or the village or commune</li> <li>Approves and issues decisions or signs the certification on allocated forest land or natural forest areas under 500 ha</li> <li>Approves the village forest management rules or regulations</li> </ul>
District Forest Protection Department (DFPD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consulting specialists for DPC</li> <li>Coordinates the implementation of the PAM project and Programme 327</li> <li>Manages and assigns financial resources for the PAM project and Programme 327, which were distributed from the province to the target communes</li> <li>Attends during the whole allocation process, especially planning forest land use, both in the field and the indoor work; and maps the location of the land on computer</li> <li>Agrees the management plan and its application to households or the village</li> <li>Completes the profile or documents of the allocation process to consult and submit to DPC for approval</li> <li>Issues decisions to revoke allocated land which is not being used or is being used for the wrong purposes</li> </ul>



District Cadastral Department (DCD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joins with the DFPD in the allocation process</li> <li>• Reviews the documents of the allocation process and consults the chairman of the DPC for approval and issuance of the land use rights certification</li> </ul>
At the commune level	
Commune People's Committee (CPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joins with the DFPD in the allocation process, especially work in the field</li> <li>• Establishes a Land Registration Council (LRC) to approve applications for land use and decide who is allocated</li> <li>• Attests to the application and plan of land use by individual households or village for submission to the DPC and the PCP</li> <li>• Proposes that the DPC revoke allocated land which is not being used or is being used for the wrong purposes</li> </ul>
Village or cooperative heads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Join the approval process of the LRC</li> <li>• Join in field work on the allocation process with the CPC and the DFPD</li> <li>• Develop the forest management plan and regulations or rules for the village with support from the CPC and the DFPD</li> <li>• Inform the villagers to attend and organize allocation meetings at the village level</li> </ul>

### The District Forest Protection Department

The processes of natural forest and forest land allocation were designed with the involvement of different actors from the provincial to the grass root levels (commune). However, in reality, only the DFPD is present in all the steps of the process, even as an agency that witnesses the allocation documents before they are sent for approval. In both communes where the author undertook fieldwork, all the people consulted indicated that the DFPD carried out the projects or programmes related to forest and forest land allocation in their commune and villages. In their eyes, the DFPD was a bridge between the village and commune and the sponsors or the institutions at provincial level. This was also confirmed by commune officers and leaders, and by foresters: "DFPD proposed to the sponsor and provincial level to allocate forest land and natural forest in my commune" or "DFPD measured the forest land"; "we went to do an inventory of natural forest with DFPD"; and "We [the Forest Development Division, FDD] only gave training on the process of allocation and then DFPD implemented all the activities" (Mr B from FDD, 5 June 2006).

The permanent vice chairman of the forest and forestry land allocation management board at the district level came from the DFPD. He coordinated all the activities in the process. The head of the FWG was also the representative from the DFPD, and the DFPD had the highest number of members on the FWG (around three). It is clear that the key actor in the processes of forest land and natural forest allocation was the DFPD. This was quite different compared to the findings of Thanh et al., (2004) that in Dak Lak the forestry enterprise controlled and conducted all field activities of forest land and natural forest allocation because the PPC handed over the responsibilities and directed it to do so.

Why did the DFPD take on a coordination role in Thua Thien Hue even though the allocated natural forest area in Thuong Quang was revoked from Khe Tre forestry enterprise as in the case of Dak Lak? Was it the result of regulations embodied in the legislation or of the interpretations of the actors in the implementation process? Item 1 of article 37 of the 1993 Land Law stipulates that the cadastral sub-department is responsible for assisting the DPC in inspecting land allocation. However, an ambiguity appears in item 2 of article 14 of Government Decree 02: it is

stipulated that the preparation of documents for land allocation is the responsibility of both the forestry institution and the land management (cadastral) department. However, Government Decree 163 of 1999 does not stipulate a role for forestry institutions in preparing the documents for land allocation and providing certification. Only the cadastral department is assigned responsibility for this.

In practice, all forest land and natural forest allocation processes in both communes from 1987 to 2003 were mainly implemented and coordinated by DFPDs. DPCs handed over the right to coordinate the allocation process to the DFPDs. The leader of the DPC and foresters explained that the cadastral unit did not have sufficient human resources and professional skills to do the job.

Some officers from the District Cadastral Department (DCD) also commented that in the period 1994–1998, when DCDs had just been established, its human resources were so limited that they could not participate in the process. However, from 2000 onwards, especially when DCDs were renamed District Environmental and Resources Departments, their human resources situation improved, but their attendance at forest land and natural forest allocation was still limited. Although the revisions to the land law of 1998 and the decree guiding the implementation of the forest land and natural forest allocation in 1999 stipulated that the preparation of all the documents and issuing of land use rights certification were the responsibility of the DCD, the DPC still handed over these responsibilities to the DFPD because it believed that only the DFPD had sufficient professional knowledge to coordinate and implement the forest land and natural forest allocation. Commenting on this, an official from the FDD said "This is illegal assignment because allocation is the responsibility of the District Environmental and Resources Department".

In the PAM project and Programme 327, the DFPD not only coordinated all the activities of the programmes, including making decisions on the species selected for planting the forest, but also managed and assigned the financial resources from the sponsor and the government to the communes or cooperatives for planting trees. The DFPD was the project's owner, and the roles and powers of the DFPD in implementing these two programmes were strengthened because all the communes or cooperatives were interested in implementing the programmes by contributing the labour of the villagers in return for cash or payment in kind (rice). The DFPD was also devolved the right by the DPC to sign the management plan and the field minutes before submission to the DPC for approval. Only the DFPD signed to attest to the map or the sketch of the land location. To identify the land was an important right.

The DFPD was also the organization that wrote the financial proposal to SNV for the natural forest allocation in Thuy Duong supported by UNDP. The DFPD managed and spent the budget, including payment for the commune and village leaders and officers who did the fieldwork. It was included in the process, which was based on the principles of the sponsor.

This was different compared to the PAM project and Programme 327, and the budgets for the LUPLA projects which were funded by SNV in 2003 in both Loc Tien and Thuong Quang were applied by the commune authorities. The DFPDs played a supporting and facilitation role to

the local authorities. Therefore, for LUPLA, the CPC was designated the project's owner and the DFPD was a partner. Why was this different with the PAM project and Programme 327 and natural forest allocation? Was it a result of handing over the rights of the CPC or a result of stipulations in the legislation? It is the author's conclusion that this occurred because the objective of the sponsor in this case was to strengthen capacity at the commune level. According to the sponsor's principle, this financial resource is also managed by the commune to spend on activities in the LUPLA process. In reality, in Thuong Quang, the commune authority made a contract to transfer all of its budget to the DFPD to spend on costs in the process, including the costs of the commune and village representatives connected with the fieldwork with the DFPD, and for the meetings. When the author asked a leader of the commune about the reason for making this contract with the DFPD, he said: "we had to do that because the DFPD helped us to find the project and we need to keep a good relationship with them". In the coastal commune, the CPC just made a partial contract with the DFPD based on the activities that were carried out by the DFPD.

In sum, the roles of the DFPD in the allocation processes of the two communes studied changed depending on many different factors, such as stipulations in the legislation, the ideas and decision-making powers of the DPC, the objectives of the sponsors, and the historical legacy of interactions between the DFPD and the CPCs.

#### **District People's Committee**

The responsibilities of the DPC are regulated clearly in the land laws and decrees 02 and 163. In practice, however, the DPC does not implement the entire allocation process. The chairman of the DPC has a duty to sign the management plan and the certifications after they are agreed by the CPC and the DFPD.

#### **District Cadastral Department**

The DCD (renamed the District Environmental and Resources Department in 2000) is managed directly by the DPC. Its responsibility, which has been regulated in laws and decrees since 1993, is to help the DPC implement land allocation, especially in preparing the allocation documents (application, management plan) and reviewing their legal status, to consult the DPC, and approve the documents and issuance of the land use rights certification. In reality, the DPC rarely participates in allocation projects or programmes. However, the process is designed so that one person from the DCD is present as a member of the FWG. The DCD rarely participated in any of the activities of the projects and programmes of forest land and natural forest allocation in either of the communes studied.

However, the involvement of the DCD in the allocations processes differed between the coastal commune and the mountain area. In the natural forest allocation process supported by UNDP in Loc Tien, DCD attended the village meetings as a representative of the district to show its interest in and the support of the district for the allocation of the forest. In the LUPLA process of SNV in Loc Tien, the DCD played the role of representative of the land management institution at the district level. It attended the workshop between different stakeholders and made comments on the land development plan for the commune. In all the forest land and natural forest allocation projects in Loc Tien, the allocation documents were developed, prepared and

kept by DFPD (including the certifications or red books), while in Thuong Quang the DCD reviewed the documents and consulted the DPC on providing the red books. The allocation documents in Thuong Quang and the red books were kept at the office of the DCD before being given to the villagers. However, there was no participation by the DCD in the inception of the process or any of the steps up to the finalization of the documents prior to the allocation. This shows that there was a difference between the two study sites in terms of assigning the tasks in the process by the DPC to the district functional institutions, even though they were implementing the same policy with the same sponsor.

#### **Commune People's Committee**

According to the land laws and Decree 163, the CPC is responsible for monitoring and mapping in the commune. In the process of land allocation, the CPC is empowered to witness the application and land use plan of individual households after a decision is made by the land registration council on who should receive land. The decrees also stipulate that a copy of the documents of land allocation (application, plan of land use, a sketch of the location of the land, decision on allocation by the local authority, and a minute of allocated land in the field) must be kept at the CPC. The role of the CPC in the process of allocation is not clearly stipulated in the land laws and the decrees, but it is indicated in an inter-ministerial circular from MARD and the Central Cadastral Department that the CPC should cooperate with the DCD and the DFPD on the allocation of land.

What did role the CPC play in practice in the two study locations? In Loc Tien, for the PAM project and Programme 327 the CPC acted as a bridge between the DFPD and the cooperative or village by communicating the plan and activities of the programme. It mobilized local people to plant the forest in return for rice or cash from the programme. An open discussion with some commune leaders suggested that this was prompted because the DPC devolved all rights of implementation to the DFPD. Some officers from the DFPD suggested that this was attributed to the limited human resources of the CPC. However, the CPC was devolved an important power in witnessing the documents and sending them to the DPC for approval even if the certifications provided to the households in these programmes were of an informal type (a form of informal tenure designated a "white book" decision). If any document in the allocation profile lacked the signature of the chairman of the CPC, it was not accepted by the DPC. In the cases in Thuy Duong village in 2001 and LUPLA in 2004, the CPC was involved in almost all the steps of the forest allocation process.

#### **Village or cooperative**

Villages and cooperatives are not administrative units of the political system in Vietnam. Therefore, no legislation or decrees on the land laws assign responsibility to the village or cooperative in the process of land allocation. Only in two circulars of the Central Cadastral Department (circular TT 346 of 1998 and circular TT 2074 of 2001) is it stipulated that the village should be involved in cases of allocation in its own village.

In practice, the DPC granted villages or communes the right to attend the FWG during the allocation process. Its role in the PAM project and Programme 327 also took the form of implementing instructions from the DFPD to coordinate forest plantation at the village or

cooperative levels. In the case of natural forest allocation in Thuy Duong, the head of the village was the person who drafted the management plan and the village rules with support from the DFPD and the CPC. A copy of the allocation profile (the village rules, the village forest management plan, the decisions of the PCP and the map of the natural forest area) was retained by the head of the village. The head of the village took this role because he served as the representative of the forest users in the village. In allocating forest land to individual households within the SNV project in 2003, the head of the village attested to land use status and the capacity of the households in the village to make decisions on who should be allocated land. In the LUPLA process, which was supported by SNV, the head of the village was also involved in practice with the FWG.

In the mountain commune, during the period of collective production the cooperative played the role of coordinating people to plant forest under the PAM project and Programme 327. However, the cooperative was disbanded after de-collectivization. There was no profile of the forest land allocations of the PAM project and Programme 327. The village leaders in Loc Tien played a similar role in implementing LUPLA in the SNV project.

In sum, the roles of the actors in the process of natural forest and forest land allocation differed between projects or programmes, and between locations or districts – even with the same sponsor. These differences were not the result of different state policies but on account of diverging interpretations by different actors of the principles of sponsors and the powers of the DPC and the DFPD as well as the nature of their relationships. The process of implementing policy in practice is complex and influenced by the interpretations of different actors. This concurs with the conclusion of Mosse (2005) when he suggests said that project implementation needs a community of interpreters. The objectives of policy cannot be achieved by careful and rigorously crafted legislation alone, as is assumed by the instrumental perspective (Keeley and Scoones, 1999).

### **7.5. Involvement of local people and the nature of their participation**

Springate-Baginski and Blaikie (2007) identify four aspects of participation by local people in joint forest management. They argue that one of the key results of participation is its impacts on livelihoods. It is assumed that these will emerge from a participatory process because they reflect the needs of and opportunities for the poor. In practice, however, it is the view of the author that participatory processes tend to disregard existing inequalities. As is noted above, no village meetings were organized under the PAM project or Programme 327 to inform local people about the allocation policy, even though these were included as a step in the process. Nor were the villagers consulted about land use planning, which was carried out as an office-based paper exercise using secondary data. The involvement of local people in the PAM project or Programme 327 was passive – they were being asked to contribute labour in return for payment. According to the farmers who were allocated forest land, the selection of species for planting was determined by the DFPD.

Villagers were more engaged in the village meetings on natural forest allocation in Thuy Duong village, supported by UNDP, and LUPLA in both Loc Tien and Thuong Quang, supported by SNV. They commented on the process and were part of agreements on the management plan and

village rules. Attendance by villagers, including the poor, was high in both the coastal and the mountain communes (from 70 per cent to 96 per cent of the respondents to a household survey). Was this active participation by local people in the process of allocation? What roles were played by the villagers in the meetings?

In the natural forest allocation project in Loc Tien, people were informed about the allocation policy and asked to discuss their interest in receiving forest to protect and derive benefits from. They were also asked to comment on the forest management plan and village rules (*Huong Uoc*). Was this meaningful in the context of very short meetings (a maximum of two hours) and attendances of 100 to 150 people? When asked about their understanding of the village rules on the forest, most respondents said that the regulations were issued by the state in a law on forest protection and development. The regulations were distributed by DFPD many times with a lot of replication. Information about the regulations was provided to every household in the village in the form of a written document. This reflects the fact that participation in the allocation process was passive. They may have participated in the meetings by putting up their hands to signal agreement to a rule, but they did not understand their responsibilities or the benefits associated with the village rules.

In the mountain commune, the proportion of households that attended the meetings on forest land and natural forest allocation was also very high (more than 90 per cent) but, when asked, villagers also confused village rules with the state regulations on forest protection and development. In practice, no village rules were formally developed during the LUPLA process because the natural forest was allocated to household groups. The presence of villagers at the meetings was in a form in which they simply listened to and answered the questions posed by officers from DFPD and commune leaders — questions they did not understand clearly because of the inadequate levels of communication.

At neither study site did the villagers know for how long the natural forest had been allocated to their village or group. Nor did they understand the certification or the allocation process associated with the decision and the issuing of the red book. Their understanding that the value of the certification had been regulated in the land law and by decree was also limited.

It is clear that the presence of the villagers in the allocation process for forest land and natural forest did not reflect their level of engagement or participation. The nature of the participation remained passive, even though the sponsor's objective was to involve local people in the process and to strengthen the capacity of state officers and the local authorities to adopt a participatory approach to land use planning and land allocation.

### **7.6. The efficiency of forest management and the livelihoods of rural people**

#### **Efficiency of management**

There was an increase in planted forest area in both communities after the barren hills were allocated to households (from 17.5 ha in 1996 to 787.8 ha in 2005 in the coastal commune, and from 37.2 ha in 2003 to 108.5 in 2006 in the mountain commune). Plantations in which the dominant species was *Acacia* were considered most successful by local people, leaders and foresters. However, from a biodiversity and soil erosion perspective, this monoculture could pose problems. This question requires further research. A related issue is the limited



investment capacity of people in the mountain commune because no support was provided by external actors after allocation.

Illegal logging was reduced in the allocated natural forest area in the coastal commune due to monitoring by the forest protection group and informal monitoring by the villagers through community social networks. However, villagers have reduced their interest and investment in protecting the forest because they have still not received any direct benefits from it six years after allocation. In the mountain commune, illegal logging activities still occurred, especially in the first three years after allocation, because of the delay in issuing leases (red books) and a lack of cooperation by legislative institutions in dealing with illegal loggers. The situation improved after the issuance of red books. However, community relationships and fear of violence from illegal loggers are barriers to the protection of forest resources. Non-timber forest products are still considered open for access in both communes.

### **People's livelihoods**

Villagers, local leaders and foresters comment that forest planting continues to be a high profit activity. According to Ha and Tinh (2004), the annual net income (after deducting family labour) from 1 hectare of Acacia plantation in Thua Thien Hue is VND 2,100,000 (equivalent to USD 115 in 2009). The average land area of forestry allocated to the non-poor group was 1.2 ha, compared to only 0.2 ha for that of the poor group. Estimated net annual income from the allocated forest land is USD 138 for the middle income group and USD 23 USD for poor households. In reality, the size of each forestry land holding is highly variable between households in the area. Some households received between 5 and 10 ha or even 70 ha, while many received only from 0.1 to 1 ha. Incomes have been improved by forest land allocations along with supporting finance from the state and international organizations. Development of plantations on the allocated land has also created income for both poor and non-poor households from selling their labour to plant trees for the households who received the largest areas. However, opportunities to sell labour to plant forests depend on health, mobility (motorcycles) and relationships with the land owner.

In both communities, the allocated natural forest had not led to any income even after a significant period had elapsed since the allocation (five years in the mountain area and seven years in the coastal commune), despite the time people have invested in protecting and tending the forest.

The livelihood activity most clearly influenced by the expansion of planted forest is cattle raising. The transfer of public land to private land has encroached on cattle grazing areas. It has been estimated that this has led to a halving of cattle numbers. Some households raise more cattle but the quality of the herd was reduced because of the lack of food. Local people are forced to herd buffalos on the edge of paddy fields or even around their home gardens, and they have to cut wild weeds to feed the buffalos.

The households that did not receive forestry land focus mainly on agriculture (rice production and pig raising). However, rice production is considered the strategy for food security and pig raising only as a way of saving by-products for crop production. Both rice and pig production

have been evaluated as non-profit because of the low prices of the outputs and the high prices of the inputs.

Collecting firewood for sale has long been a popular livelihood activity for many poor households, especially those where the head is a widow. The productivity of this activity has reduced in terms of both amount per day and frequency of collection because of the proximity of wild plants and private user rights to allocated forestry land. However, according to information obtained from in-depth interviews and the questionnaire, many poor households continue this activity to earn cash to buy rice or other food.

Selling labour is now a common livelihood activity for the poor households in both communes. The better-off were allocated larger tracts of forestry land area and often hire villagers to plant and tend the trees and harvest timber. Some poor households also sell their labour for farming activities.

Almost all the young people in Thuy Duong village migrate to Ho Chi Minh city to work in the textile and clothing industry or to do housework (the girls) when they are around 15 to 17 years old. Only the children of better-off households can stay at home to study. In the mountain commune, some young people migrate to the cities (Hue or Ho Chi Minh city) to earn money to support themselves and their family. However, only the Kinh people regularly get this opportunity. Some young ethnic people in the commune had migrated but returned owing to difficulties in adjusting to an urban existence. They felt homesick and neither the factories nor individual households in the city want to employ ethnic people because their skills are limited. Exploiting sand and grit is another livelihood activity that poor households in the coastal community engage in. Although this resource has declined, it continues to be exploited because income from other livelihood activities cannot cover the living expenses of local people.

Servicing ecotourism in the Elephant Stream at the foot of the natural forest allocated to Thuy Duong village is a new livelihood activity in the village. This is a highly profitable activity but only a very small group has the economic capacity to invest in the services associated with it. Some households have members who have been employed by Chan May Port and who now have a monthly salary.

Exploiting non-timber forest products is still a popular livelihood activity for many ethnic households – especially poor households – in the mountain commune. Many natural forest areas in the commune have been allocated to household groups but they do not know what to do to generate more food. Only a few poor households in the coastal commune undertake this kind of activity because of the serious reduction in the number of non-timber forest products.

In sum, at present the households that do not have forest land focus on intensive farming and try to diversify their income sources. Collecting forest products, collecting firewood, selling labour and intensive farming are all options for poor households. Better-off households have a tendency to focus on cash generation (forest planting, raising cattle and services such as ecotourism) as well as salaried work.

A serious question remains in terms of the future sustainability of the livelihoods of the poorest group, which has not gained forestry land through the land allocation process.



Declining common forest and forestry land resources, the risks posed by intensified agricultural production by way of monocultures, such as droughts, pests and market fluctuations, the limited opportunities for ethnic minority groups for out-migration because of poor levels of skills and education, and patron-client relationships will collectively undermine the sustainability of the livelihoods of the poor.

Another pressing issue is how the rural area of the coastal commune can manage its human capital in response to the migration of the young generation to the cities.



## Chapter 8. Reconciling the multiple dimensions of rural livelihoods in mangrove systems in the Red River delta

Maria Osbeck, Neil Powell, Nguyen Hoang Tri and Quan Thi Quynh Dao

### 8.1. Introduction

Coastal areas play an important role in the economy, environment and social context of Vietnam. Twenty-eight of the 64 provinces and central towns are situated on the coast. This chapter explores the complex institutional relationships governing the management of the coastal areas using the rehabilitation of mangroves in the district of Tien Hai in the Red River Delta as a case study. The case study is part of the sixth European Union (EU) framework programme, Reconciling Multiple Demands on Mangrove Resources (MANGROVE)<sup>11</sup>. The objectives of MANGROVE are to facilitate an action planning process in case study contexts. The study exposes the multiple realities that characterize the different interests associated with the management of the coastal resources, and the role mangroves will play in the future management of coastal resources. More specifically, the role of the mangroves is explored in reducing the impact of natural hazards, in the context of local livelihoods and national economic development. It is imperative that the design of appropriate management regimes for mangrove reforestation and plantation projects acknowledges this diverse set of interests. This will require an integrated approach to the management of coastal resources and a review of the regulatory framework and policies relevant to the future sustainability of mangrove ecosystems.

<sup>11</sup> The MANGROVE project, funded through the European Union's Sixth Framework Programme, is a collaborative research effort among seven partner organizations in six countries, including SEI and MERC. The project aims to improve understanding of mangrove ecosystems, communities and conflicts in order to develop knowledge-based approaches to reconciling the multiple demands on mangroves and adjacent coastal zones in South East Asia.

## 8.2. A soft systems approach

In order to undertake an institutional analysis of Tien Hai, and in acknowledgment of our epistemological point of departure as researchers, we have used a soft systems methodology (SSM). SSM is an approach to solving complex unstructured human problem situations based on holistic analysis and systems thinking. SSM is a participatory methodology that helps different stakeholders understand each other's perspectives. It focuses on creating the human activity systems and human relationships needed for an organization or group to achieve a common purpose. The methodology is based on clarifying unstructured or messy problem situations by designing ideal or conceptual human activity systems that would help to improve the situation. These conceptual models are then compared with the problem situation in order to identify desirable and feasible change. The methodology integrates thinking about the logic of how to improve a situation with what is socially and politically feasible. SSM inspired the development of a learning framework used by the MANGROVE project to understand the nature of the problem situation and of system failure in Tien Hai district. The soft systems analysis critiques the *human activity system* in this case, that is, the actors, rules, power structures and norms that govern the use of and interaction within the

**T-Transformation** - refers to the nature of the transformation the mangrove rehabilitation activity is carrying out. In this regard the transformation is manifested as various inputs (activities) designed to produce various outputs (objectives).

**W-Worldview** - the particular view that makes change meaningful to the "owner" of the process (establishing mangrove plantations to protect coastal areas and mitigate the impact of natural hazards).

**O-Owner** - do those stakeholders who could stop the transformation have the authority to authorize the change?

**C-Client** - those stakeholders who are either the victims or the beneficiaries of mangrove rehabilitation.

**A-Actors** - those implementing the change (the government, shrimp farmers, the People's Committee)

**G-Guardians** - those who watch or monitor for unintended outcomes of the change (in this case the MANGROVE project plays this role).

**E-Environment** - the set of givens in the system that serves to either constrain or enable the mangrove rehabilitation activity.

## 8.3. Coastal dynamics

The significant natural resource base of coastal areas and their surroundings makes them an attractive area for development. The industrialization of coastal areas supported under the *doi moi* reform policy initiated in 1986 contributed to economic development, but rapid industrialization has also exhausted the natural resource base. Limited coordination between the actors and institutions engaged in a wide range of coastal activities has also resulted in an imbalance between development efforts and environmental and social protection (Asian Development Bank, 2005).

One factor leading to the depletion of the natural resource base in the coastal areas of Vietnam in recent years has been the expansion of commercial shrimp farming (Le, T.V.H, 2005). Aquaculture has been widely promoted in Vietnam<sup>12</sup>. Aquaculture has a high economic value

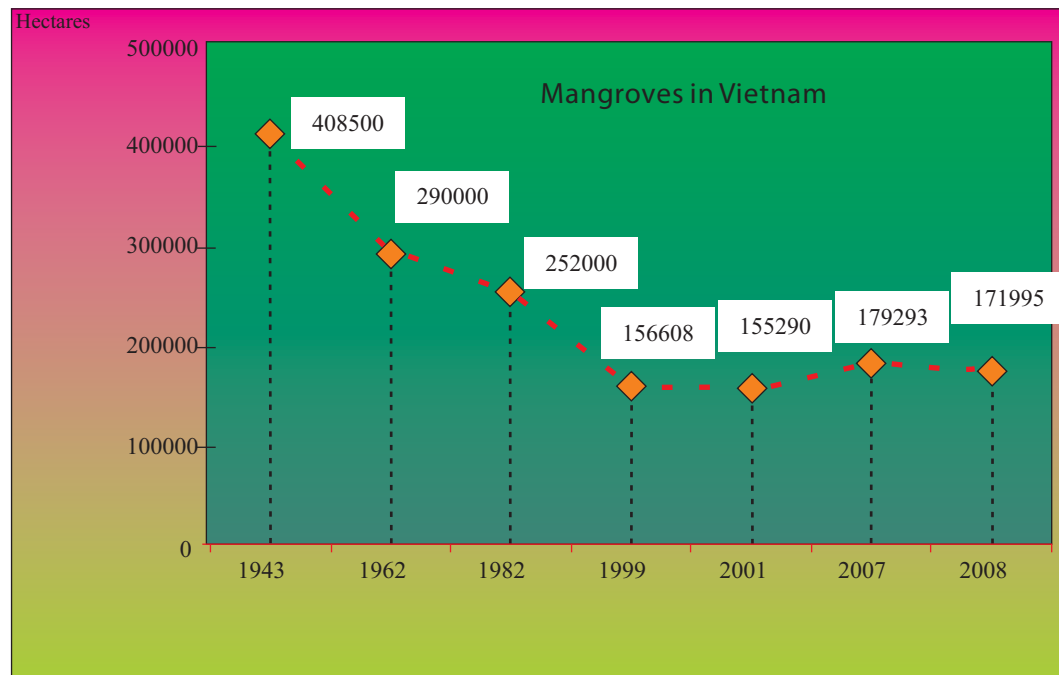
at the national scale, but coastal communities are confronted with the environmental, social and economic problems created by commercial shrimp farms. The adverse impact on the environment of development in coastal areas has been widely recognized in the light of the increased frequency of natural hazards in Asia. Since the devastating impact of the Asian tsunami, international organizations have widely promoted the protection and rehabilitation of coastal areas. Scenarios connected with climate change suggest an increase in natural hazards. Governments have been encouraged to take action to mitigate the impact of natural hazards, and the role of mangroves has been widely promoted as a measure that can help to achieve this aim. Asian countries experiencing an increased frequency and intensity of storms and typhoons have initiated large scale efforts to rehabilitate mangroves. In Vietnam and Bangladesh such efforts have been translated into a regulatory framework governing coastal areas. The Government of Vietnam has commissioned a national action plan for the management of mangroves to 2015 (Do Dinh Sam and Vu Tan Phuong, 2005). Since 1999, the promotion of mangrove plantations has led to an increase in coverage of more than 15,300 ha (see Figure 8.1.).

The challenge remains to develop sustainable solutions for mangrove plantations that ensure a long term impact and generate appropriate ecosystem and livelihoods benefits that take account of the context-specific characteristics of the rehabilitation area. This calls for a better understanding of the multiple realities that underpin the different interests and needs of coastal areas to enable a rehabilitation plan to provide ecosystem and livelihoods benefits. The role of mangroves is another example of the challenges posed by the need to reconcile economic development with a sustainable environment.

## 8.4. Mangroves under threat

Since the 1950s, Vietnam has lost more than 80 per cent of its mangrove forest. During the Vietnam War the mangrove habitats in the Mekong Delta were almost completely destroyed and the area has experienced a difficult rehabilitation period. Between 1987 and 1994, Vietnam lost more than half the remaining mangrove habitat (see Figure 8.1.). The main cause of mangrove loss in recent years has been the expansion of aquaculture. Conversion to agricultural, construction and fuel wood collection have compounded the problem. Government policies aimed at improving people's livelihoods in the Red River Delta often disregarded the role of mangroves.

<sup>12</sup> Decree 773-TTg, issued by the prime minister on 21 December 1994, stipulates that open coastal areas and waterfronts can be used for shrimp and crab farming. Other Government policies explicitly encouraged aquaculture and the export of aquatic products between 1998 and 2005.



**Figure 8.1.** Mangroves in Vietnam

Source: MERC, 2009

The trend characterized by the rapid conversion of mangroves to other land use systems is shown in Figure 8.1. Despite the aquaculture boom of the mid-1990s, Vietnam has managed to protect its mangroves and contributed to their rehabilitation, leading to an increase in mangrove habitats. According to estimates, the mangrove habitat was 38 per cent natural forests and 62 per cent plantations in 2001 (FIPI, 2001).

### 8.5. Clients as beneficiaries and victims of the system

Shrimp aquaculture usually uses common, pooled resources, such as mangroves and water, which have previously served as a buffer for resource-poor households. As a result, aquaculture has brought about the social displacement and marginalization of shrimp farmers and agriculturalists (Ronnback, 2001). The historically dense mangrove cover in deltas and coastal areas was badly damaged during the war. More recently, it has been affected by the expansion of shrimp farming. Studies by Le (2004; 2005) in Phuoc Son commune show how semi-intensive and intensive shrimp ponds have led to increased water pollution from the untreated effluent, causing pollution and increasing the susceptibility of shrimp to diseases. Diseases are especially common in ponds that are not properly drained. This leads to a loss of shrimps, and to pond effluent affecting the surrounding ecosystem. Many ponds which were once highly productive are now abandoned.

Efforts to introduce ecological shrimp farming have been made by the Ministry of Fisheries, which has developed criteria for sustainable mangrove/shrimp farming: an area should be made up of 25 to 30 per cent ponds and 70 to 75 per cent mangroves. Trials have been conducted in Binh Dinh province with mixed results. Previous examples of integrating mangroves and shrimp farming have been difficult to implement and often did not achieve the

anticipated results.

The conversion of mud flats and mangroves to aquaculture is particularly problematic because it alters the access to and use of coastal natural resources by poorer households. The conversion and control of the land is a constant issue, linked to the social system, that undermines the governance of mangroves. Experience from Vietnam shows that shrimp farming for export has adversely affected local livelihoods and degraded the environment. A study in Central Vietnam reveals that the group classified as wealthy earned more from the mangrove systems because of their greater control over capital, management skills and political power. The group classified as poor is the most dependent on mangrove systems in Vietnam, but has only limited access. During the shrimp farming boom, reduced access to and availability of mangrove resources increased the vulnerability of poor coastal communities. The study's findings also show that female-headed households, women and girls experienced adverse impacts from limiting access to mangrove systems. They have become victims of the environmental degradation and the process of privatization. Women also have less opportunity to engage in shrimp farming than men, mainly engaging as labourers for the pond owners (Hue Le, 2005).

Another important livelihood-related activity in coastal areas is collecting clams by hand. This activity has traditionally often been conducted by women. In 1994 the Prime Minister issued a decree allowing the exploitation of clams in open coastal areas and on water fronts (Decree 773-TTg). People received permits to set up individual nets and thereby claimed ownership of the mudflats. People would claim a larger area than they used, excluding others from collecting clams by hand. This resulted in widespread conflict between local people with user permits and local people who previously used the mudflats to collect aquatic resources. Unregulated activity became profitable because of the rise in demand in China, Japan and South Korea. The process of claiming land made it difficult for poorer people to find areas where they could collect (Le Thi Van Hue 2004).

Recent experience with decreased productivity, diseases, pollution and the vulnerability of ponds to typhoons has reversed the situation. The poor have gained greater access to mangrove resources and become the main beneficiary of the system. Shrimp farmers now benefit less from the system than before. The promotion of aquaculture has resulted in the degradation of mangrove ecosystems. It is an example of how contradictory policies for promoting economic development and protecting the environment have resulted in adverse impacts on coastal communities and the environment.

### 8.6. Responses to threats

Mangrove systems nest at the interface between the ocean, coastal areas and forests, making them a particular difficult system to manage. The government, through a process of policy development, had geared itself to address the complex management of coastal resources, including mangroves. It commissioned a National Action Plan on mangroves, which outlines concrete measures for mangrove rehabilitation. The rehabilitation efforts, supported by researchers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have mainly focused on large scale mangrove plantations. The main purpose of the plantations is to provide protection for the

national dyke and generally to mitigate the impact of natural hazards. In November 2007, an article appeared in the *Vietnam Times* which clearly articulated the position of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on Mangroves. Their policy developed from an international conference on Mangrove systems held in Ho Chi Minh City at that time. MARD recognized that mangrove forests have been destroyed in pursuit of economic interests, and that this exacerbates the impact of storms which are expected to increase in frequency and intensity with climate change. MARD is drafting a plan to restore mangrove forests in coastal areas. USD 119 million will be made available to support a process that will continue until 2015.

An attempt was made to reconcile the conflict between the expansion of aquaculture and the protection of mangroves in Minh Hai Province in the Mekong Delta. The provincial authority stipulated a policy based on the Forest Land Allocation policy. A policy was developed to ensure the sustainable management of forests while at the same time allocating land for forest production, through what is referred to as the Green Certificate (Green Book) which allows people to lease forest land for 20 years. In Minh Hai Province people have been issued with certificates on the condition that 70 per cent of the area should be replanted with mangroves and the remaining 30 per cent can be used for agriculture, aquaculture or livestock or as a residential area (Minh T.H. et al., 2001). The study concludes that the system led to improved management of mangrove systems with less impact on the biophysical environment. In addition, the study showed that aquaculture was a risky investment for individual households. This implies a need to further explore nonlinear approaches to reconciling multiple demands in coastal areas in Vietnam.

The response mainly focused on increasing mangrove habitats and planting mangroves as a buffer to protect the national dyke. The semi-privatization of coastal areas had provided open access and complicated the situation. The study indicates the need to understand the role of mangrove systems for different groups at the commune level as part of rehabilitation efforts. Experience shows that the division of power at the commune level has in some areas resulted in rehabilitation efforts not acknowledging the rights of villagers to access mangrove systems to collect food. This is an issue that will have to be addressed in order to avoid future conflicts.

### **8.7. Introducing Tien Hai in the Red River Delta**

Tien Hai is a district in the Red River Delta, Thai Binh Province, bordering the South China Sea. The area is traditionally known as the rice bowl of Vietnam. Like many other delta areas in Asia, the soil is highly fertile and therefore suitable for agricultural production. The majority of the people living in Tien Hai district depend mainly on rice production for income and consumption. Aquatic resources constitute the main protein intake for local people. According to Hanoi National University, 10 per cent of daily protein consumption is from aquatic resources and 0.7 per cent is from meat (Hanoi National University, 2007). In Tien Hai, local people are involved in extensive aquaculture raising tiger shrimps, crabs, clams and *Gracilaria*. The farming area in the Nam Thinh and Dong Minh communes is 800 ha. Statistical data from 2006 show that the seafood yield of the district was more than 13,000 tonnes (Hanoi National University, 2007). Farmers also catch jellyfish and sea eels.

Tien Hai has a higher than average division between wealth groups. The group identified as

poor constitutes 18 per cent of the population, which is substantially higher than neighbouring districts. (Thoa et al., 2004). The expansion of aquaculture has led to the marginalization of poorer groups in accessing common areas for fishing and collecting aquatic resources (Thoa et al., 2004).

Tien Hai experiences frequent typhoons. It is estimated that, on average, a typhoon with 45–50 metres per second wind speeds hits the area every three years. The impact of natural disasters has led the government to invest in maintaining the national dyke and planting mangroves to protect the dyke along the coast. (Hanoi National University, 2007). Changes in water flows are an important driver of salinization in delta areas and further upstream. Mangroves also enhance alluvial deposition in delta areas prone to increased sedimentation as a result of changes in river flow upstream. As is described above, the stakeholders in the mangrove ecosystem are characterized by multiple needs and interests. Policies to protect the environment are challenged by policies to develop the economy. Local people are challenged by policies restricting the use of and access to resources.

### **8.8. Conflicting world views and ambiguous transformation**

The management of the mangrove ecosystem in Tien Hai relies on the Provincial People's Committee indicating the balance between conservation and development, reflected by actions at the district and commune levels. The commune administrative level includes the People's Committees of Nam Phu, Nam Thinh, Nam Hung and Dong Minh. Other organizations include the women's association, the Youth Union, the Red Cross association, a beekeeping association, and a Mangrove Planting and Protection Group. Propaganda and awareness-raising or education activities have been developed and conducted by the Mangrove Ecosystem Research Division (MERD) to improve local knowledge of mangrove ecosystems<sup>13</sup>. MERD uses a combination of different tools including videos, exhibitions of paintings by students, comic pictures, posters and photographs, and game exercises (Phan Nguyen Hong et al., 2004). In recent times, the mangrove forest in Nghe An has been managed by the provincial Red Cross association. The management of the plantations is led by the provincial level Department of Agriculture and Rural (DARD). Experience from Nghe An showed that the Red Cross association had limited power and authority, resulting in difficulties with implementing the project. The livelihoods benefits in terms of short term financial resources to cover the salary for people monitoring and protecting the plantations have reduced significantly since the Danish Red Cross withdrew from the area. The restoration-related benefits are now channelled from the provincial level to the commune level. Budgets are very low for those engaged in protection and restoration. This could seriously compromise the quality and long-term sustainability of the restoration initiative.

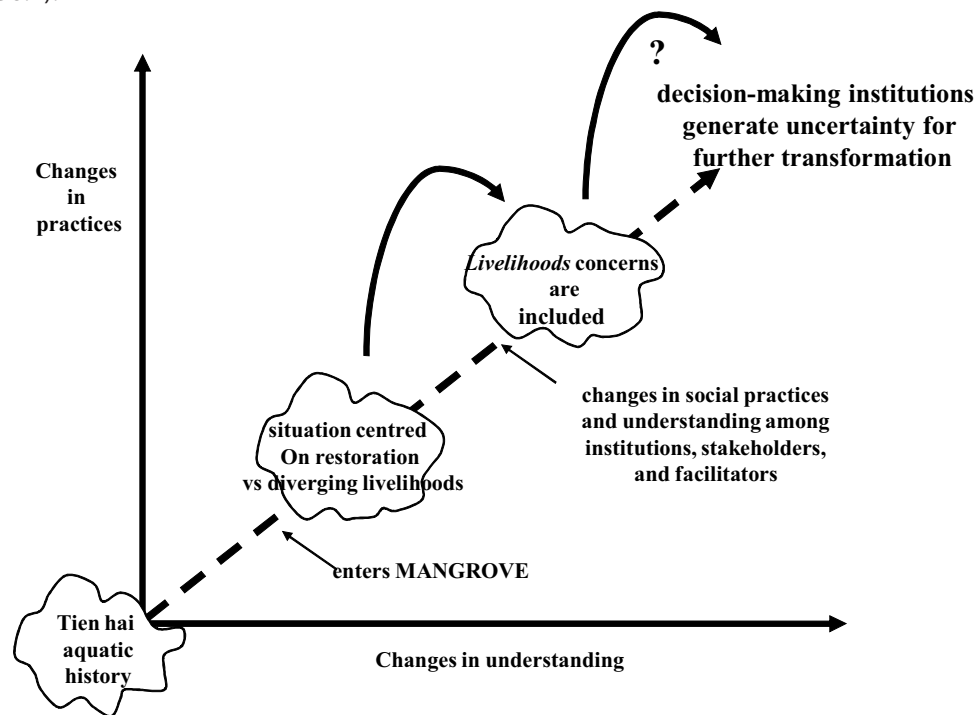
Mangrove conservation and reforestation are reflected in national policy. At the same time, other government policies affecting mangrove forest management have been launched for poverty reduction and rural development. For example, the policy of expanding aquaculture development for export has allowed people to cut mangroves to build shrimp ponds. This implies that there is a need to clarify cross-cutting issues in development policies in order to ensure sustainable development.

<sup>13</sup> Propaganda is the term used for awareness-raising in Vietnam.



Many decisions and regulations are issued by the government based on laws for forest protection, fisheries, and environmental and natural resource conservation. The laws are formulated at a national level, however, without sufficient recognition of the obvious complexity of local contexts. Since the coastline is characterized by heterogeneous climate and environmental conditions, management systems and technologies should be developed that make a greater acknowledgement of local conditions.

The position of MARD is closely connected to the legacy of researcher interaction in coastal systems. Mangroves have been defined as a hard system and the focus is primarily on restoring and replanting these systems. Underlying this perspective has been the bio-monitoring of the ecological services derived from the change in the biophysical status of Mangroves. With the inception of the EU-funded MANGROVE project in Tien Hai, researchers have added a new layer to their research perspectives: mangroves and the interconnections with local livelihoods (see Figure 8.2).



**Figure 8.2.** Mangroves and the interconnections with local livelihoods

The addition of this layer makes it necessary to rethink the hard, biophysically defined boundary around mangrove systems and see mangroves instead as a soft system with stakeholder-determined boundaries, represented by multiple and often diverging interests. In viewing the system as soft, the role of researchers shifts from predetermining the boundary circumscribing the mangrove system, explaining the problems and identifying solutions, to that of facilitators. In this sense the boundaries, issues and solutions are seen as an emerging property of stakeholder interactions. Our role as researchers is to contribute expert knowledge connected to our stake in the system and as facilitators who enable the co-construction of issues and boundaries as well as solutions that emerge from the learning supported

reconciliation of stakeholder interests in the system.

In recognition of this soft systems methodology, the units of analysis become the stakeholders' systems of interest or activity systems (Powell and Larsen, 2010). Figure 8.2. describes the process by which the MANGROVE project intends to contribute to a mangrove action planning process through the SSM lens. Using a situation appraisal as the entry point, researchers within the MANGROVE project have explored the Tien Hai context as defined by issues associated with mangrove restoration and mangrove rehabilitation activities. This appraisal has elicited a baseline of the aquatic history of Tien Hai, described in terms of the interactions between mangrove functionality and livelihoods, and the institutional and policy drivers which have shaped these interactions. In this regard the sustainable livelihoods framework has been a crucial conceptual underpinning (Leach et al., 1999). Building on the way this framework has been described, a sustainable livelihood is demonstrated in a complexity conceptualized by: the "entitlements" from a multidimensional resource capital base; the "endowments" that grow from these entitlements, enabled or disabled by the institutional and policy settings; and the "risks and vulnerability" triggered by the uncertainties apparent in both the entitlements and the endowments.

The entitlements from the multidimensional resource base have been tracked by the MANGROVE project through the development of indicators for ecosystem health and function coupled to biomonitoring of the Tien Hai system. This in turn has been connected to an analysis of the nature, productivity and resource use of the Tien Hai mangrove system. The endowments of this resource base are being explored through a description and understanding of the institutional setting and the conflicts between local, national and international legislation. The uncertainties manifest in the endowments and entitlements have been explored by understanding the institutional setting as demonstrated in the tensions between different policies and conflicts between international, national, provincial, district and local settings.

### 8.9. The clients of mangrove rehabilitation in Tien Hai

There are a number of local clients in Tien Hai who can be described as either beneficiaries or victims of mangrove rehabilitation. It is possible for those directly involved in the replantation and protection of mangrove systems to generate a limited amount of income. The mangrove system partially supports and enhances various ecosystem services, such as crab, clam and coastal fishery production. The mangrove forests contribute bio-mass for fuel and also host habitats of unique species that form the basis of traditional medicines. Many local people depend on these ecosystem services as a contribution to their livelihoods, in particular the poor in Tien Hai (Situation Analysis, 2006). Although there is no scientific evidence to date in Tien Hai to suggest that mangrove restoration and rehabilitation (MRR) has enhanced these ecosystem services, it is assumed that with time it will.

Those engaged in the aquaculture industry in Tien Hai can be described as the clients who are victims of mangrove rehabilitation. The expansion of the total area of mangroves in Tien Hai, especially mangroves that are protected by strong legislation, by default reduces the area available for the development of new aquaculture farms along the coastline. When we speak of

the aquaculture industry it is done in the broadest sense. At the provincial level there is specific legislation that promotes this industry in a way that is contrary to MRR-related legislation. The industry, although manned by local people in Tien Hai, is owned by larger national or international companies that have strong ties and relationships with provincial clients. These clients shape the actions of the provincial government, which are not always in line with the body of legislation entrusted to these institutions.

#### **8.10. The mangrove rehabilitation actors in Tien Hai**

Since the termination of the provincial Red Cross association's project in Tien Hai, those actors principally engaged in the implementation of MRR are the three communes that share the Tien Hai coastline and MERD (Hanoi University). A management board is responsible to the three communes for implementation. The board directs environmental clubs (associations), which implement the planting and protection of mangroves.

MERC has been undertaking research on Mangroves in Tien Hai for many years. MERC has also been acting as development agent in the implementation of MRR. It has been engaged directly by way of stakeholder interaction with awareness-raising activities, which advocate the importance of mangroves in hazard reduction, environmental protection and ecological services. MERC also served in an advisory capacity to the provincial Red Cross association, supporting its project activity with technical advice. This technical advice now supports and guides the limited MRR activities implemented by the environmental clubs at the commune level. MERC has also played an important role in shaping the national legislative environment in such a way that it promotes MRR for hazard reduction. MRR for hazard reduction cannot be entirely reconciled with the livelihoods perspectives of those living and using coastal resources in Tien Hai. Nor can MRR for hazard reduction be entirely reconciled with a mangrove system that serves to safeguard ecosystem services.

#### **8.11. Who controls mangrove rehabilitation in Tien Hai**

The owners of mangrove rehabilitation activities in the Tien Hai system, and indeed in the centralized planning system in Vietnam, are ultimately those higher level authorities entrusted with formulating and implementing legislation that enables the sustainable development of Tien Hai as a coastal area. As the TWOCAGES model suggests, it is these institutions which have the official capacity to direct the form and function of mangrove rehabilitation in Tien Hai. As is discussed above, MARD, as one owner, is attempting to steer this activity so that it mitigates the impact of climate-related coastal hazards, such as storms and typhoons – activities that are expected to increase in frequency and intensity with climate change. The fisheries section of MARD at the provincial level is a new subsection that was previously a separate ministry. This section strongly promotes aquacultural interests in Tien Hai, and thus legislation that is contrary to any form of MRR. The legislation represented by Ministry of Environment promotes environmental services, a form of MRR that will lead to species rich mangrove systems that are not currently present in the homogenous mangrove systems emerging from natural hazard reduction-related MRR activities in Tien Hai. The Commune, the lowest level of official institutional authority in Tien Hai, has the perspective which most closely coheres to the livelihoods perspective of those living in the mangrove systems. However, its role as an actor is simply to implement legislation that represents the perspectives of the owners – legislation

with a confusing body of mixed and ambiguous messages. This confusion and ambiguity provides a safe haven for different stakeholders, particularly those with a strong economic base, to exert their agency as a means to shape the MRR into a form that closely coheres with their own interests. This may explain, in part, why powerful aquacultural interests often act in this system in a way that is contrary to the rules and regulations designed to safeguard the mangrove system.

An increase in the conversion of agricultural land to aquatic production will have gender-related implications. Rice production involves a 50 per cent ratio of male-female engagement, while 85 per cent of labour inputs to gardening is by women. On the other hand, clam and shrimp farming involves 80 to 85 per cent male inputs, and with fishing the gender ratio is 70 per cent male to 30 per cent female. This implies that converting additional agricultural land and putting pressure on wild fish resources will increase the vulnerability of women (Vietnam National University, 2007).

Tien Hai has developed trade in handicrafts, including hat knitting, rattan and bamboo handicraft, embroidery, sedge and mat weaving, and palm leaf conical hats, which contributes to employment and the incomes of many women in the area (Vietnam National University, 2007). These aspects also have to be taken into account while formulating management plans for the coastal areas in order to ensure that the products needed for handicraft production are protected and remain accessible to local people.

#### **8.12. Conclusions**

In the series of stakeholder interactions in Tien Hai, a platform now exists to critically reflect on the management, governance and use of coastal resources from both the stakeholders' and the researcher's perspectives. Although people speak of long terms benefits such as natural hazard reduction, and ecological services, such as better systems for wild aquatic resources, it will be a long time before the coverage of mangroves in these systems is sufficient to provide such benefits. Even once it is possible to draw on the long terms benefits, it is hard to imagine at this moment that this will adequately compensate stakeholders for the various forms of land use that must be compromised to allow for adequate restoration.

Based on evidence from stakeholder interactions in Tien Hai, it is clear that serious conflicts of interest underlie the restoration and replanting of mangroves. A number of conflicting interests are obvious at the commune level: (a) support for the intensification and expansion of the aquaculture industry; (2) restoration of mangroves for hazard reduction; (3) restoration of mangroves for local livelihoods; and (4) restoration of mangroves as a means to increase the biodiversity of the landscape and waterscape. It appears that aquaculture is more pervasive, leading to a discrimination against the local livelihoods interests. In addition, insights from institutional and policy analysis suggest a trend for intensified promotion of mangrove replanting and restoration in Vietnam. Contextualizing this trend within Tien Hai, based on the outcomes of the stakeholder interactions, a pragmatic course for MANGROVE would be to make its replanting and restoration activities more efficient by situating them within a strategic action planning process. Such a process in this case would be defined as a platform by which the restoration and replanting activity could be shaped and managed through the

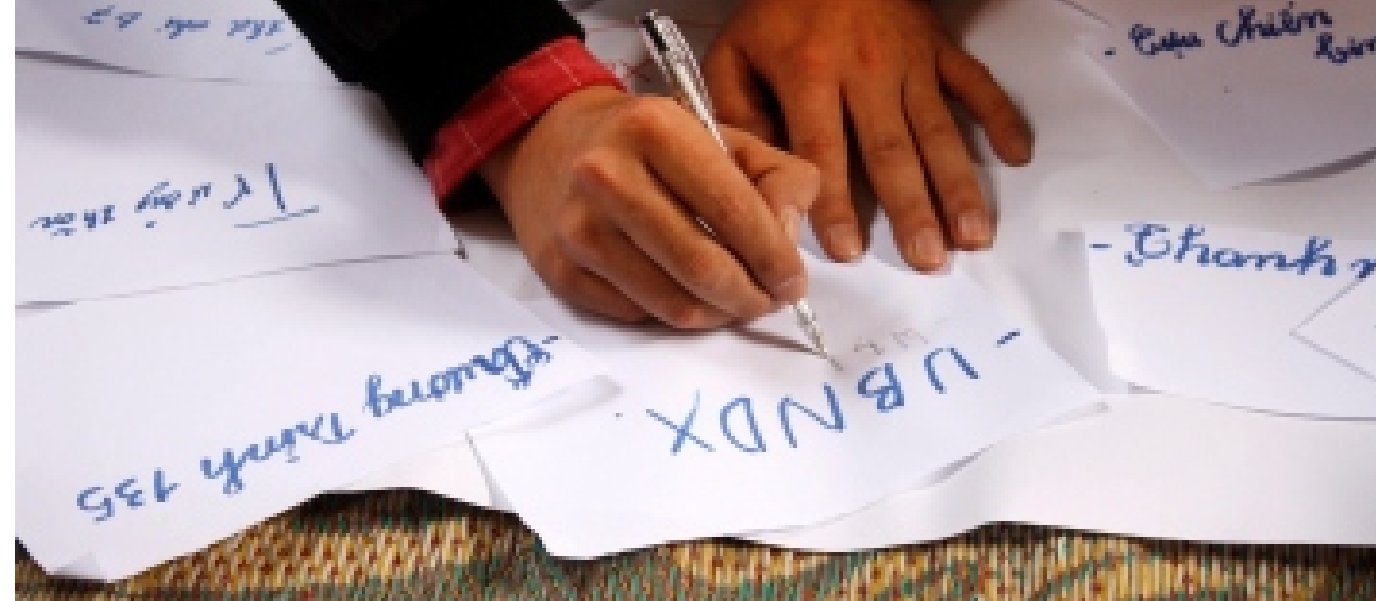
reconciliation of the multiple interests represented by the different livelihood regimes in the system. This reinforces the importance of viewing local communities as heterogeneous groups with a diverse set of uses and access needs for natural resources.

The reconciliation at the local scale would include planning issues, such as site selection, species composition and user rights to and the management regimes of the restored and replanted mangroves. The reconciliation at an institutional and policy scale would include, for example, that the appropriate mechanisms were in place to ensure that user rights were upheld and management regimes were feasible and efficient.

Growing out of this process, preliminary recommendations for the Tien Hai site would be to proceed with research that supports the identification of appropriate sites for replanting or restoration, and the identification of appropriate species. This identification should be undertaken in such a way that it is an outcome of a reconciliation between the environmental services promoted by the researchers, the livelihood interests promoted by both local people and different levels of governance (commune, district and province) and the reduction of climate change intensified hazards promoted nationally.

In Vietnam, the coastal areas are significantly affected by soil degradation and desertification. The management of rivers, especially upland catchment areas, is an important factor in designing coastal resource management plans. Changes in sedimentation and water flow can have serious impacts on coastal areas. The World Commission on Dams (WCD) states that construction of dams upstream can alter coastal water and sediment run-offs, causing erosion, sand accumulation and salt intrusion (WCD, 2000). Their impact should be considered as part of the mangrove rehabilitation efforts. The creation of upstream reservoirs for irrigation or for hydropower, as well as deforestation have been documented as important issues in altering the ecological system in coastal areas (Yang et al. 2001; Nguyen Dang Ngai, 2004).

At the national level, the emerging marine policy may be an appropriate platform for reconciling and better coordinating the confused, mixed and ambiguous body of legislation that is currently being imposed on Vietnam's coastal areas such as Tien Hai. More specifically in terms of mangrove systems, the forestry law and particularly the forest land and natural forest allocation decrees could open new avenues for reconciling and managing the conflicting demands in these systems.



## Chapter 9. Grass roots democracy in Vietnam's decentralizing rural development: Transforming policy perspectives into stakeholder actions

Rasmus Klocker Larsen

### 9.1. Introduction

In the exercise of democracy, stakeholders share and negotiate their perspectives on and experiences with rural agriculture, but also their interpretations related to the exercise of democracy itself. In the international development discourse on deepening democracy, democracy, public deliberation and civil society are typically perceived as rooted in the period of the Enlightenment of the 'West', as well as the work of thinkers such as Kant, Locke and Marx (Kumar, 1993; Hutton, 2007; Huntington, 1996). However, Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen, in *Identity and Violence*, eloquently argues against viewing democratic values as pre-eminently originating in the West, and that history has shown that the values we associate with democracy today have many and diverse global origins (Sen, 2006). It is useful to recall the existence of different interpretations of the origins and nature of democracy and public participation in a discussion of grass roots democracy policy in Vietnam, which is being interpreted in many, sometimes contradictory, ways by Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese alike. Acknowledging that 'constructions of democracy are under contestation' (Gaventa, 2006), this chapter investigates how stakeholders, through their engagement, construct different, more or less operational, forms of democracy in Vietnam. The chapter aims to communicate an impression of the diversity of ways in which stakeholders involved in the implementation of grass roots democracy policy transform their perspectives on the policy into action.

### Grass roots democracy policy: Decentralization of rural development governance

Since the Renovation Reform, *doi moi*, was promulgated at the Sixth National Congress in 1986, Vietnam has embarked on an open door policy towards the market economy, with governance

reform characterized primarily by a process of decentralization (World Bank, 2005). Decentralization is often seen to have currency across the political spectrum as a popular remedy for reforming public bureaucracies and an excessive concentration of decision-making authority in the central government (Turner and Hulme, 1997). There has been an increase in the autonomy of the Provincial Peoples' Committees as implementing agencies, making the provincial level of government very important for agricultural policies (Smoke, 2005; McCann, 2005). Particularly in the early years of *doi moi*, the agricultural sector was crucial for economic growth (Naughton, 1983), and analyses of surveys of living standards conducted in 1993 and 1997 conclude that rising incomes in the agricultural sector accounted for close to 60 per cent of the poverty reduction that occurred at that time (Haughton et al., 2001).

In recent years, economic growth has averaged close to 6 per cent, which is the eighth highest in the world (World Bank, 2006a) but concerns are being raised about rising societal inequality, and about poverty among the rural upland communities (ADB, 2002; Thoburn, 2004). The replacement of natural forests with plantations and rising levels of encroachment on the remaining forests driven by demands for fuel wood and urbanization are also being observed (FAO, 1997, 1998). Despite the 'new revolution' to reverse resource degradation (Quy, 1992), including a number of ambitious political programmes, such as the Re-greening the Barren Lands programme (Decree 327) and the Five Million Hectares Reforestation Programme (see e.g. Junker, 2000), the process of decentralization faces persistent problems linked to land degradation and deforestation. A well-known proverb suggests that 'the Kings Law stops at the village gates' (*Phepvua thualelang*, see also Malesky, 2004).

Like China, Vietnam is perceived by outsiders to be performing 'a political experiment' in the balancing of policy instruments in decentralized public policies, including market-based and deliberative forms (Morley, 1997; Turley, 1993). In a national trend towards increased public participation, community consultations contributed to the formulation of the national Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) 2006–2010 in 15 selected provinces (JICA, 2006), and the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS), now merged with the SEDP, also drew on a participatory process. It was approved by the Prime Minister in 2002 after what the government describes as a highly consultative process involving civil society, with the Poverty Task Force acting as a platform for government, donor and non-governmental organization (NGO) partnerships (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2002). A process described as grass roots democracy is also playing an increasing role in land management and the forestry sector. Amendments to the Land Law in 2003 and the Forest Protection Law in 2004 de-collectivized land and granted user rights, among other things, to increase the care people take of the land. These legislative changes opened up opportunities for community land allocation within a legal framework, and Vietnam is following a global trend towards increasing community-based forestry (Sikor, 2006).

One of the most tangible manifestations of the Vietnamese government's intentions on grass roots democracy and public participation is the Grass roots Democracy Decree (GDD, Decree 79). In its current form (the first decree, Decree 29, was issued in 1998) the GDD calls for the implementation of democracy at the commune and village levels, putting in place "the first

legal framework required to expand direct citizen participation in local government to effectuate the popular slogan that 'the people know, the people discuss, the people do and the people monitor'" (UNDP, 2006). The GDD stipulates which decisions by local government people must be informed of, which require consultation and which require supervision and inspection by the people. Commune level People's Councils and Committees are directly responsible for implementing the decree without further order from higher levels (Mekong Economics, 2006). Under the decree, villagers are encouraged to set up innovative groups, and village conferences must be held to decide on affairs relevant to the community. The village is also responsible for establishing regulations on its internal affairs, and upholding the community's customs in compliance with state regulations through the Village Charter (DWC, 2005). In addition, a Law of Association (LoA), perceived by some as a future law on civil society, has been debated by government since 1993. However, disagreements persist and more than eight drafts of the decree have been produced thus far (Van Nghe Weekly, 2006).

## **9.2. Methodology: Stakeholder-based assessment of policy implementation**

The evidence in this chapter is derived from three months of field work in 2006, involving 76 key informants, primarily in Thua Thien Hue Province and Hanoi, and three field visits to rural upland localities in the central and northern highlands (Phong My Commune, Thua Thien Hue; Dak Lak Province; and Van Chan District, Yen Bai). The study investigated, using open-ended interviews and consultations, the experiences of government officials, grass roots representatives, development professionals and researchers involved in grass roots democracy initiatives in the context of rural development. The use of the notion of stakeholding here implies that organizations, institutions or individuals involved in the implementation of the grass roots democracy policy are actively constructing and promoting their stake through their engagement (SLIM, 2004). During the fieldwork, the author observed at first hand the different perspectives on the grass roots democracy policy and the similar amount of diversity in stakeholders' modes of engagement under its implementation. Although the starting point of this chapter is the perspective of and engagement in the implementation of the policy on grass roots democracy, this naturally touches on the larger legislative framework and other issues seen as relevant by stakeholders. For details of the methodology and the research approach see Larsen (2006).

## **9.3. Stakeholder perspectives on policy**

Based on an analysis of the interviews, four core perspectives on grass roots democracy were identified which stakeholders embody. These perspectives may not be mutually exclusive, and may be owned by a number of stakeholders at different points in time.

### **The "instrumentalist perspective"**

The instrumentalist perspective suggests that implementation of the GDD will lead to improved efficiency in decentralizing rural agriculture. Several participants in the present study described how the GDD is growing out of the government's positive experiences with public participation. Several international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) described a change in attitude among central and local government officials who now widely embrace participation as a means for improved and more effective management. For example, continued problems in implementing public policies on sustainable and equitable rural



development in Vietnam's uplands have led to an appreciation of the need to improve grass roots involvement, and to the implementation of an enabling vehicle to better mobilize the strength of the people. After decades of slash and burn farming in Dak Lak, the provincial government has recognized that it must listen to what people say if the new policies are to have any effect on forest protection. The instrumentalist interpretation is also reflected in the perception of grass roots participation as a key pathway to combating issues of poverty and inequality (UNDP, 2002). This positions the mainstreaming of participatory approaches as part of the larger political project of the state (Hickey and Mohan, 2005). Similarly, Gray (2003) argues that allowing increased space for non-state organizations in the 'science and technology' sector was a pragmatic decision by the Vietnamese government to scale back the bureaucracy in the hope of increased service delivery by NGOs. The same 'paradigm shift' occurred in catering for war invalids (Vasiljev, 2003).

### **The "democratization perspective"**

The democratization perspective interprets the GDD as a step towards introducing democracy and public participation from outside Vietnam. Several INGO staff described how the GDD was inspired significantly by the approaches introduced by INGOs in recent years, and that informal rural collaborative groups are inspired by foreign donors and NGOs. This reflects a belief in the efficacy of introducing external value systems to Vietnamese society. Only a few years ago, no NGOs were formally recognized in Vietnam, but since the late 1990s the political space for local NGOs has increased significantly. Several NGO staff felt uncertain about whether the people-centred reform is a genuine wish for participation or merely a consequence of persistent donor push. Caution is also advised over what is perceived as an emerging civil society, which it is argued has little experience and is in need of gaining capacity. INGO staff perceive civil society in Vietnam as "still quite shocked" over the increasing space for public participation provided by the government. From this perspective, the GDD may be seen as an initiative to realize the aspirations for a deepening of democracy, that is, "developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizen participation in the democratic process" (Gaventa, 2006: 3; see also UNDP, 2006; United Nations General Assembly, 2004).

### **The 'accountability' perspective**

The GDD is equally interpreted as a reflection of the need for improved accountability and transparency. A foreign consultant described the initiative as arising in response to some unsuitabilities with the Communist Party and disagreement in the Party's heartland, and that the first version of the GDD was issued in response to complaints about levels of local corruption, for example, in the Mekong Delta in 1997 and 1998. Similarly, UNDP (2006) highlights the realization by the Communist Party that new measures were needed to connect with its powerbase in the countryside. Many foreign observers see the emerging diverse people's associations as organizations that may also act to help keep authorities accountable and counteract corruption (e.g. Kerkvliet, 2003). Painter (2008: 85) has elsewhere highlighted similar powers as "rule bending and downright illegal behaviour" of citizens, a so-called "bottom-up initiative for decentralization". In relation to the confusion among NGOs mentioned above, this view suggests that the increase in public participation and grass roots democracy is equally an outcome of bottom-up demands translating into new initiatives

through the exercise of democracy within the Communist Party.

### **The 'power struggle' perspective**

From the perspective of many international organizations, such as the development agencies, INGOs and UN agencies, the GDD is understood as one outcome of an ongoing power struggle between the state and the grass roots. This perspective is nested within a Western Enlightenment worldview in which the grass roots is interpreted as a civil society. This perspective considers NGOs to be struggling to achieve an acceptable environment in which to carry out their supportive activities, and grass roots democracy is seen as a question of community empowerment. The issue of illegal logging is here construed in the language of a conflict between local people's continuing encroachment on natural resources and the Forest Protection Department's responsibility to protect. This view is stimulated by the fact that questions on the right of association, as debated in the formulation of the LoA, are often highly charged in the rural uplands. The recurrent theme in the redrafting of the law is described as a conflict between the wishes of People's Committees at different levels to control the emerging civil society, and civil society's wish for more room to manoeuvre. The existing draft of the LoA is seen by NGO staff as quite restrictive of the right of association, and they continue to push to realise their goals. An international development professional described how one local NGO, which had been navigating within its manoeuvring space, had experienced repression by the Party, which led to its temporary closure. Contacts with certain people and organizations have been prohibited and they must now be more careful about how they communicate their messages. An employee in this organization perceived this as part of a "game" in which the local NGOs are testing the rules, and the People's Committees are letting them know when they exceed what is currently acceptable. However, this interpretation is held predominantly by outside observers and Western professionals. As such, a chief technical adviser in development cooperation stated that he would not like to be involved in any way with projects connected to questions of civil society as it could destroy his relationship with local government and People's Committees.

As is demonstrated below, these perspectives promote, and are constructed within, quite substantial and diverging forms of stakeholder engagement. However, the nature of the interaction between stakeholders can be confrontational and risks contributing to problems associated with trust and collaboration, which may inhibit the attainment of the ultimate goals of rural development and poverty alleviation. One local NGO staff member described how the problems encountered by local NGOs in setting up new organizations and activities are a key reason why people are hesitant about engaging with the implementation of the GDD. In the rural uplands, one influential person in a District People's Committee disagreed that the purpose of the new policy was public participation, and many experiences show how provincial and district governments organize a few meetings in order to satisfy the expectations of central government, but no real effort is made to explore the opportunities provided. The exercise of provincial governance varies, and officials and NGOs tend to have different interests in participatory processes (Malesky, 2004). Moreover, the different levels of administration can act as 'a black box', where even quite extensive participation at the village level can lose its significance (Mekong Economics, 2006).

#### 9.4. Stakeholders' engagement in implementation

This section discusses the nature of stakeholder engagement in the first eight years of implementing the GDD.

##### Stakeholder experimentation

The implementation of the grass roots democracy policy is often ad hoc and its outcomes unpredictable, partly due to local 'trial and error' innovations during the implementation, when policy expectations meet stakeholders' realities. Prior to the amendments to the Land Law and the Forest Protection Law, village allocations in Thua Thien Hue were conducted without a policy framework, and a general discrepancy between legal powers and actions on the ground by stakeholders means that forest devolution has led to very different outcomes in different locations (Phuc, 2006). Stakeholders in Dak Lak experimented from 1999 with an early mode of communal land allocation, and the 'Dak Lak model' remains of interest nationally as well as internationally. In addition, the sharing of land use rights between men and women was not formally recognized until the Land Law amendments of 2003. However, some local NGOs, such as Towards Ethnic Women (TEW), have been able to work in some project sites towards a de facto power sharing arrangement since 1997. The diversity in land relations and conflicting perspectives on the concept of property mean that property relationships are 'fuzzy' and largely derived from negotiations among villagers and between villagers and various state agencies (Sikor, 2004; Phuc, 2006). This reflects how stakeholders insert their agency in situations shaped by policy inefficiency. In addition, the impact of market forces, through increased economic uncertainty and the declining coping capacities of local institutions, especially in recent years, seems to have had a significant influence on grass roots responses to policies (Tarp et al., 2002; Lindskog et al., 2005).

The relationship between local and international NGOs is important in the context of experimentation with policy implementation, but complications can arise. One project manager in a local NGO explained that INGOs criticize local NGOs for being 'undeveloped' and unwilling to increase people's participation. Consequently, international projects decide to bypass local organizations and work directly with villagers using the organization's own participatory approaches. Similarly, the preparation of strategic policy documents such as the CPRGS and the SEDP almost exclusively involved INGOs, and it has been suggested that local NGOs were effectively crowded out by INGOs, which dominated the space for legitimate agency in the participatory poverty assessments. Indeed, it has been suggested (Norlund et al., 2003) that the partnership process behind the CPRGS was a policy level engagement that, as of 2003, had not left an imprint on local level participation. Several INGO staff described how local NGOs are beginning, in an opportunistic way linked to new funding, to act as intermediaries between donors and the grass roots. However, local NGOs are concerned about their lack of resources compared to INGOs, and that they are limited to smaller scale consultancy work. According to a member of one of the NGO Resource Centre Working Groups, many INGOs have grown so big that they no longer depend on collaboration with other NGOs. International and local NGOs are also separated by their differentiated relationship to the government and the Communist Party.

##### Self-organized stakeholder mechanisms

Self-organized and collaborative mechanisms among stakeholders are crucial to enabling experimentation, which is the main driver of policy implementation. In Phong My commune, Thua Thien Hue, a cross-institutional Land Solutions Group was formed, with members from the Commune People's Committee, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment in Phong Dien District, junior resource management officers from the commune and farmers' representatives, as a forum for settling disputes over land issues. In Thua Thien Hue, where the number of NGOs has grown steadily in recent years, an inter-organizational platform has been created to improve coordination between the various projects. This is also facilitated by the WWF Green Corridor Project. Similarly, Tropenbos International Vietnam, Hue City, has facilitated the emergence of a network of NGOs and development agencies through regular informal and formal meetings (TBI-VN, 2004). In Thua Thien Hue, the Green Corridor Project, the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) and Helvetas have established a networked initiative for community forestry, and land use planning and land allocation. In Thua Thien Hue, foresters argue that the land allocation cannot work without collaboration between government and development agencies such as SNV and Helvetas. The regulations and inventories required for forest management are seen as so complicated that local communities, and even local officers, cannot carry out the procedures without collaboration with other professionals (ETSP/SNV, 2005).

The Nature Care Association in Thua Thien Hue was established in 1996 by Vietnamese students from Chiang Mai University in Thailand. It ascribes the core of its success to the good relationships developed with other stakeholders – governmental as well as international and national organizations. When asked what recommendations they would make to others who wish to set up an association, one member responded: "Have good and right objectives, start with simple activities, have new and innovative ideas, go step by step and let the government and the Party agree". All these had led to a situation in which: "we can support the government, and the government supports us". INGOs and the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) established the NGO Resource Centre in Hanoi in 1993 to foster increased coordination and dialogue between INGOs, local partnership organizations and other development actors. The Centre is responsible for coordinating INGO participation in Consultative Group Meetings. It has over 160 INGO members. The sharing of ideas and experiences between the member organizations is mainly facilitated by a range of sectoral and technical Working Groups, headed over time by different Focal Point INGOs. The Working Groups may also support local government by producing documents.

This provides evidence of the importance of the inter-institutional mechanisms that are created by stakeholders *in situ*. The 2006 Civil Society Evaluation, conducted by the national Stakeholder Assessment Group, recommends a focus on function rather than structure when debating organizational issues of grass roots democracy (Norlund, 2006). However, there is a tendency for many actors to overlook the interactions between structural entities such as mass organizations, NGOs and People's Committees, and pursue their own institution building (UNDP and SNV, 2006). In a case study conducted with TEW, Michael Gray (2003) concludes that the massive growth of TEW from 1994 to 2002 provides evidence of the options open for the

development of organizational structures outside the state, but that a lack of agreement with government officials and Party members in several cases prevented benefits from reaching the grass roots. As the Director of TEW has subsequently admitted, in one case the organization was unable to meet its objectives in securing the right of the Dao people in Ba Vi National Park to live permanently in the National Park buffer zone (Lanh, 2000) because NGOs were excluded from direct involvement in land allocation (Gray, 2003).

The important role of these self-organized initiatives highlights the need to dedicate time and resources to emerging collaborative arrangements. However, there are major constraints, in that government officials are not sufficiently compensated for contributing to inter-organizational coordination and thus rarely prioritize this work. Similarly, working relationships can be highly temporary as NGOs and development agencies can rarely commit to long term projects in a location and it is difficult for them to build up a close relationship with resident actors.

### **The power of moral judgements**

As is indicated above, the perspective that power struggles promote confrontation and conflict is not widely owned in implementation, where stakeholders adopt a different perspective to guide their engagement. The traditional view of participation as the mobilization of people through mass organization reflects this view of the proper state of power relations (UNDP, 2006). However, social dynamics among stakeholders are governed equally by considerations of morality and ethics. The idea of the state, characterized as Oneness, and rooted in Ho Chi Minh's thinking, is that of a collective, organic whole which ought to act in concert for the common good of the people. It embodies a strong belief in the power of value judgments. This moral basis for engagement is also reflected in the purpose of the Fatherland Front as 'a place where the people express their will and aspirations, the entire people's great solidarity bloc is built up, the people's mastery is brought into full play' (National Assembly, 1999). In Vietnamese society, much emphasis is placed on consensus and agreement, and people will go a long way to achieve this and to avoid anyone losing face. The one-party state is consequently said to seek 'consensus-governance', by which important state decisions go through extensive consultations at several administrative levels prior to approval (Norlund et al., 2003). In this institutional setting, stakeholders can benefit more from drawing on negotiated norms through ethical engagement rather than confrontational strategies (see also DeFilipis, 2002).

Articulating policy implementation solely in the language of power struggle is thus inappropriate to the political and social context of Vietnamese society, where moral responsibilities and a sense of the righteous path continue to play a strong role in shaping decision-making and societal dynamics. Historically, the judgements involved in finding this path can be made partially in relation to the cosmological scheme of the primordial forces of Yin and Yang. The influence of Neo-Confucianism continues today, and it has played a dominant role in shaping modern ideas on the nature of reality and proper social relationships (Jamieson, 1995; Vittoz, 1993). One example may serve to clarify the role of moral judgements in grass roots engagement. In Nature Care, the organizational philosophy rests on the aspirations of its members to give something back to their city and province, its environment

and people. As one of the members stated: 'We feel we have the capacity to help because we have studied forestry, the environment or management We feel we have the capacity to do something. . . . We wish to contribute'. Relationships between the majority and minorities must also be understood from the perspective of how stakeholders construct their views on what constitutes legitimate behaviour. For instance, one director of a local NGO described how, in rural upland villages inhabited by ethnic minorities, those villages that were supportive of the Communists during the war with the United States can better claim their rights and voice dissatisfaction with the government and the Party, as the Party feels it owes them a debt. What farmers can do and say to the authorities depends on the history of their village and family.

It is argued above and elsewhere that the tendency to conceptualize public participation only in the language of the different degrees of power attained by various stakeholders does not pay adequate attention to the process of engagement in which stakeholders construct their perspectives and decide on engagement (Collins and Ison, 2006). Stakeholders rarely seem to address questions of power directly. Some ascribe this partly to the Confucian heritage which deters questioning of authority (Scott et al., 2005). For instance, many Vietnamese researchers avoid discussing the topic of land allocation with local authorities, as it almost inevitably involves touching on sensitive questions of devolution and the exercise of power. They fear that local authorities will think that researchers have been asked to scrutinize their work by more senior levels of government, that their inquiries will be seen as questioning state autonomy, or that officials will perceive it as an intervention over what is considered 'personal information'.

### **Delineating legitimate stakeholder engagement**

Arguably, a central feature of stakeholder engagement in grass roots democracy in Vietnam is the delineation of legitimacy. This is intractably linked to the formation of grass roots organizations, and the formalization of previously informal groups and initiatives. This is particularly relevant in the socially diverse uplands, where informal networks and social groups based on religion and kinship play a vital role in natural resource management (Korovkin, 2001; Muriuki, 2006; Poffenberger, 1998; Peerenboom, 2003). Legal recognition of organizations plays a strong role in enabling stakeholders to respond to decentralized policies in rural development. In the case of Nature Care, its staff explained how formal recognition is necessary in order to attract funding from international donors, including Sida, SNV and Nord Pas the Calais. This can be enabled in part through the NGO Resource Centre and other local NGOs operating in central Vietnam. INGOs have to obtain permits to operate and for establishment of projects and representative offices from the Committee for Foreign NGO Affairs (COMINGO). The Committee has its office in VUFO, and collaborates with the People's Aid Coordinating Committee, a specialist body of VUFO. There are different options for local NGOs to obtain formal recognition for their operations, and stakeholders must navigate this jurisdictional landscape to apply for formal recognition under different decrees, as companies, research organizations or government agencies. For instance, under Decree 35 (1993), it became possible to register as an association with the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST). Decree 81 was issued in 2001 and has become the popular choice among local NGOs. Before that, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) was the only option for registering local NGOs. Being registered under MoST as a Science and Technology Association is often seen as the most



flexible solution because, unlike with the MoHA, organizations do not have to renew their permit every year.

This challenges the perspective that emphasizes externally driven forms of grass roots democracy. A process of high-level policy dialogue on deepening democracy and increasing popular participation highlighted the uncertainties involved when seeking to introduce legitimate delineations from outside (UNDP, 2006). According to a Hanoi-based INGO, the official Vietnamese translation of 'civil society' is confusing and people rarely use it in practice. Since its revival in recent years, the notion of civil society has become associated with a number of interpretations (see e.g. Anheier, 2005, Jensen, 2006), including as 'the arena of non-state institutions and practices that enjoy a high degree of autonomy' (Kumar, 1993, p. 384). This has triggered an ongoing debate about the comparability of Vietnamese and international NGOs. Some authors prefer to compare the mass organizations to NGOs, and Kaime-Atterhog and Anh (2000: 4) compares the Women's Union to an NGO in terms of its activities but states that 'unlike a traditional NGO, the Women's Union has offices from the central to the grass roots level, which makes it an effective organization for working with women throughout the country'. Despite the similarity in terminology, however, the evidence suggests that the nature of the engagement by local and international NGOs depends very much on the agency and innovation of the people in question, and gains its significance from each organization's own context of operation.

#### **Stakeholders' multiple identities**

The localized construction of stakeholder identities through their engagement is reflected in the multiple identities of actors. In many voluntary associations and local NGOs members have other full time employment, often in government offices or research organizations, and activities are highly integrated with these other duties. For instance, Nature Care is comprised of 50 volunteer members, many of whom work in provincial government offices or as lecturers at Hue University. Its activities, mainly community development, awareness-raising and technology transfer (Nature Care, 2003), are implemented in a network that links the state, local government and international organizations. The multiple identities of individuals are also demonstrated in the national statistics: 74 per cent of Vietnamese are members of at least one of the mass organizations and on average each person is a member of 2.3 organizations (Norlund, 2006). As is argued above, it is difficult to use the term civil society in Vietnam, and delineating between the state and civil society in socialist states is in any case blurred by the fact that that parties and the party system extend networks of organization throughout society (Mair, 1998). In essence, this supports the argument by Sen (2005) that human beings hold multiple and interrelated identities (e.g. it is possible to be both Vietnamese and a rock music fan), which may or may not be in conflict and can be evoked in different situations.

Hence, policy implementation depends on the spaces in which stakeholders can engage in the negotiation of their own identities, but the policy environment today is shaped by significant tendencies to impose assumptions on stakeholder identities. This pertains in particular to the 'imposition of reality' (Nadasdy, 1999) in the discourse on ethnic minorities. Local NGO staff members articulate how 'traditional customs' are disappearing among ethnic minority groups, and in Thua Thien Hue NGO staff describe how ethnic minorities in locations with eco-

tourism activities exhibiting local culture have to 'relearn dances and traditions'. A Vietnamese researcher explained how the US war and changes since reunification have affected the ethnic minorities in Thua Thien Hue so severely that they 'can hardly remember themselves'. A Vietnamese forestry researcher asserts that a history of dependency and pacification is the main reason why ethnic minorities are not reacting as hoped to decentralization and devolution. Others suggest that the minorities are not capable of managing the new responsibilities conveyed in the GDD and the Land Law because of the wide gap between the assumptions in the reform policies and people's needs and wants, as well as a lack of supportive policies and the capacity building required at all levels. All these views reflect fairly specific assumptions about what ethnic identity is, and that it is acceptable for others to define such an identity. These assumptions contribute to the challenges in implementing the grass roots democracy policy, which, like decentralized agricultural policies in general, are demonstrated most clearly in the culturally diverse uplands (Jamieson et al., 1998; Doanh et al., 2003). Extension services are more easily accessible for Kinh farmers, as the services are provided in Vietnamese only. This is likely to exacerbate conflicts between different tenure systems, where local resource management institutions are incompatible with the state land management classification scheme (National Assembly, 2004). Kemf and Vo Quy (1999) describe how earlier minority institutions were destroyed by policies, such as New Economic Zones and the Fixed Cultivation and Sedentarization Programme, which led to the inter-provincial relocation of people. In this period, the councils and assemblies that had existed in pre-colonial and colonial times also largely disappeared (UNDP, 2006). Just as when externally driven cultural norms are imposed on Vietnamese society, imposing identities on minority groups contributes to an identity crisis (see also Carens, 2002; Wessendorf, 2001) and undermines the localized innovation required for policy implementation.

#### **9.5. Conclusions: Transforming perspectives through engagement**

This paper outlines four core perspectives on grass roots democracy policy, and discusses some of the experiences of stakeholders and their modes of engagement after eight years of implementation. The evidence presented suggests that diversity in stakeholder perspectives sets in motion complex processes of innovation, which are essential for policy implementation as well as policy adaptation. Self-organized mechanisms among stakeholders play a vital role in drawing on the power of jointly negotiated moral judgements and multiple identities. There is extraordinary potential to support and learn from the creative agency of stakeholders, which, in effect, challenges all four of the core perspectives as they stand in isolation, while highlighting the need for mutual learning.

During the study, a senior officer tasked with policy formulation in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) articulated how policy implementation must be perceived as a learning process, in which current policies are 'only a first step which must lead to a new mode of organization among rural communities'. Guidelines for participatory planning are being developed in the aftermath of the national CPRGS consultation, and a new concept for cooperatives is being sought in the Cooperatives Department of MARD. It aims to develop an action plan up to 2020 aimed at reforming and developing cooperatives to meet the uncertainties associated with market changes and globalization more generally. In the case of



forest management, the Director General of MARD's Forest Protection Department directed special attention to the need to integrate state law and customary law, two legal systems with different frames of reference, for the purpose of management. The reporting mechanisms within the Communist Party and the programmes of the Agricultural Extension Centre were highlighted as important vehicles of feedback in order to effect such changes.

Thus, some mechanisms and aspirations are already in place to receive feedback on the experiences of practitioners. The evidence in this paper, however, suggests that the extent to which these mechanisms recognize the multiple identities of stakeholders and the largely self-organized nature of innovative initiatives at the local level is open to question. One MARD official was concerned that there had been little or no response from among the grass roots to the new organizational opportunities and that there was an absence of feedback from the local level. Decree 29 was issued in 1998, for instance, but after four years it was appreciated that implementation was slow and ineffective, and an amended decree (Decree 79) was issued in 2002. Moreover, Vietnamese researchers highlight that even after five years of the three types of allocation model in the Land Law, no evaluation of its efficacy had been implemented to learn from experiences in the field. Legislative uncertainties create spaces for stakeholder experimentation. However, in the absence of legitimate mechanisms for collective monitoring and guidance of this experimentation, this can lead to unintended consequences.

To support the commitment of MARD and other ministries to learn from stakeholder engagement, it is necessary to improve support for and facilitate self-organized initiatives among stakeholders which play a beneficial role in guiding experimentation during policy implementation. Similarly, it is necessary to ensure more comprehensive feedback to policymakers to address the challenges highlighted above, which currently constrain stakeholders in their creative engagement. Through this process, it is possible that perspectives on what constitutes meaningful grass roots democracy may themselves have to be transformed.



## Chapter 10. State-led agrarian transition and local responses: Everyday practice in Kim Thieu village

Nguyen Phuong Le

### 10.1. Introduction

Among the various schools of thought that represent different interpretations of agrarian transformation, such as Marxism, development and dependency theories and the modernization paradigm, it is the modernization paradigm that has emerged as the most influential. Modernization theorists typically define peasants as rural actors who lack capital for production or as unskilled labour engaged in backward production practices, and hence as irrational in making production decisions. Consequently, peasants need to be modernized, and given access to capital, technology and adequate assistance (Escobar, 1995). The modernist line of thinking has over time affected the perceptions of peasant economies in both developed and developing states, including Vietnam.

The Vietnamese government has promoted the development of agriculture and the rural economy since independence in 1945 (Tam, 2008). This is evidenced by a series of policies that focused on rural development and improving the living standards of peasants. However, as in other countries, the Vietnamese peasant economy has been defined as a traditional and backward sector that needs to be modernized by the state. This is demonstrated by the two major programmes that have strongly influenced the agrarian transition in Vietnam: *collectivization* from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s, and *de-collectivization* since the early 1980s. Although the mode of peasant economy has changed considerably in the *doi moi* period, it is often perceived by policymakers as small, fragmented and subsistence-orientated. Thus, a number of policies have been implemented in order to develop the peasant economy in the form of industrialization and commoditization. In this way, the national authorities expect that a part of the rural labour force will concentrate on non-farming sectors, and the rest will

make a living from agriculture through specialization and commoditization to meet demand from both domestic and global markets. In this process, it is expected that smallholdings will gradually disappear in rural areas of the country (Resolutions of the Politburo, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th sessions).

Nonetheless, the reality of peasants' livelihoods in the Red River delta, especially in traditional craft villages, is that a variety of people still carry on small scale and subsistence farming together with highly commercial non-farm activities, such as woodcarving. It can be argued that people are able to improvise and adapt national economic policies to their livelihoods needs in any context. Under the regulations that existed in either the period of collectivization or the time of economic liberalization, Vietnamese peasants in general, and craft-peasants in particular, actively negotiated to ensure their survival and prosperity. By so doing, they changed local agrarian relations in ways that differed from the changes to the macro-structure.

This chapter is based on a field study that investigated peasant's responses to state policy in a traditional craft village in the Red River delta. In particular, the chapter explores: (i) how craft-peasants responded to the change in economic policies; (ii) how they negotiated around government policies using different strategies; and (iii) how local people employed their mixed identities to further their livelihoods.

## **10.2. Theoretical approach and definition of terms**

The *actor-oriented approach* is employed to analyse state-peasant relationships and the peasant's negotiation with the state-led programmes of agrarian transition in the Red River delta. This examines the role of social actors. Although it may also be true that important structural changes result from the impact of outside forces, all forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing realities of the individuals and social groups affected, and in this way are mediated and transformed by the same actors and structures. An approach that understands social change is therefore needed, one which stresses the interplay between and mutual determination of internal and external factors and relationships, and which recognizes the central role played by human action and consciousness (Long, 2001).

Regarding the issues of agrarian transition, an actor-oriented approach assumes that there are always variations in agricultural systems and thus different patterns of response and change can be expected. These different forms are in part created by the peasants themselves. Peasants are not seen as simply passive recipients, but as actively strategizing in terms of their own projects and their interactions with outside institutions and personnel. Peasants and other local actors shape the outcomes of change. Change is not simply imposed on them, and so different social patterns may develop within the same structural circumstances (Long, 2001).

Structure and agency theorists such as Long suggest that social actors in general, and peasants in particular, are inherently socialized, and that their actions are informed and shaped by social structures such as those norms, regulations and institutions which are prevalent in the society they are socialized into. On the other hand, their actions may, individually or collectively, alter and shape these social structures through interaction, negotiation and social struggle. Scott (1985) sees this kind of activity as 'everyday forms of peasant's resistance', while Kerkvliet

(2005) considers it to be 'everyday politics'. Both agree that peasant's activities of struggle or resistance were developed based on their everyday practices and occurred where they lived and worked. Vandergeest (1997) argues that although the state's laws and regulations are considered legal and legitimate, local people still practice their own rules in their everyday life, rules which existed before the law was formulated. According to Kerkvliet (2005), such everyday practices can contribute to the demise of particular officials, to policy change and even to the collapse of an organization – including a government or a regime.

Negotiation is a form of everyday practice. It involves all sorts of tactical and strategic manoeuvres that affect outcomes in terms of changing and transforming external interventions. People negotiate in everyday life even if they do not know that they are negotiating, because people everywhere are struggling for their livelihood resources and to improve their living standards (Van, 2005). Under various policies and reform efforts, local people tend to put tremendous effort into vindicating, asserting and securing claims to their livelihood resources (Juul and Lund, 2002).

Using the actor-oriented approach, I argue, in the context of agrarian transformation in the Red River delta, that peasants can be seen as active agents who have never been completely dominated by state policies. On the contrary, they know how to improvise and adapt so that they might alter government policy. This chapter focuses on the everyday practices based on which people negotiated with the state and its regulations on their own livelihoods in the periods of collectivization and economic liberalization. It is not direct resistance, but the ways in which peasants improvised and reinterpreted state policies in order to adapt to particular conditions that is the main focus of this chapter.

## **10.3. Research methodology**

The ethnographic approach was used for data collection. The researcher spent almost one year, from September 2006 to late 2007, at the field site. The researcher also had to join in all the everyday life activities of local people in order to identify the ways in which villagers conducted different economic activities. The author's active participation in local everyday practices helped to identify a number of individual tactics used by villagers in their production process. A variety of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques, such as group meetings, participatory observation and oral history records, were used to obtain information from different villagers. In addition, in-depth interviews were used to gather data from 10 key informants: the headman, senior villagers, former and current chairmen of the agricultural cooperative, a former chairman of the handicraft cooperative, the head of the women's union and local government staff. Young male and female villagers were also interviewed.

The information and data collected focused on the ways in which people made their living in the period of collectivization as well as how they make it in the era of economic liberalization. All the data were analysed using qualitative methods, which were mainly based on the typical stories of villagers rather than on general information.

## **10.4. Kim Thieu village**

Located in the Red River delta, 30 km from Hanoi, Kim Thieu is considered a traditional craft village with an age-old history. In 2007, Kim Thieu had 1726 inhabitants who lived in 411

households (*ho*), of which 315 households operated craft activities. As well as woodcarving, villagers still cultivate the agricultural land they were allocated by the government in 1988. The total cultivated area in the village is 36.72 hectares (102 *mau*), making agricultural land area per capita about 200m<sup>2</sup> – the lowest in the Red River delta (on average 500m<sup>2</sup>/person). The prevailing crop pattern is two crops of rice per year. The livelihoods of the villagers combine a number of activities, based mainly on farming and craft activities.

Like other villages in the Red River delta, agrarian life and production in Kim Thieu have been shaped by state policies. This means that villagers' lives and production have varied in accordance with changes in government policy. The villagers have also experienced three major national agricultural programmes. The first was to redistribute land (particularly arable land) from landlords and other larger landowners to landless peasants in the late 1940s, after the revolution in August 1945. The second programme concerned joining cooperatives and combining the fields and other resources of all the individual peasants in order to farm collectively in the late 1950s. The last was the de-collectivization of agriculture, which began in the late 1980s and gathered pace after 1993 when a new land law secured peasants' land rights in the long term. According to the latest government programme, peasant households are once again considered autonomous economic units. Villagers' livelihoods are no longer dependent on farming, especially rice cultivation. Instead, their livelihood strategies are based on both farming and craft making.

Almost all the villagers assert that woodcarving is their traditional industry (Binh, 1999). However, no records are available to suggest when the woodcarving industry first appeared in Kim Thieu village. Villagers suggest that during the period of domination by Sino invaders, some villagers were part of a group of thousands of woodcarvers who had to go to China to work as slaves. There is an assumption that woodcarving was present in Kim Thieu and the surrounding area in the Ly dynasty (the 11th century). A woodcarving cooperative was established in the late 1950s according to the state movement for collectivization. However, like the agricultural cooperative in the village, the Kim Son Cooperative was dissolved after 27 years. Under *doi moi*, the woodcarving industry has been revived and developed at the household level to become a main source of craft-peasant income.

### **10.5. Government regulation and local responses under collectivization**

#### **The process of collectivization in Kim Thieu village**

Like other villages in the Red River delta, the collectivization movement in Kim Thieu village began in the late 1950s. According to a middle aged male villager who works as a local official, all the households in the village joined the agricultural cooperative from the early days. Fewer than ten people did not join the agricultural cooperative when their other family members joined. In such cases the household was not homogenous as there was a differentiation among its members.

All the villagers could join the cooperative at the age of 16. According to the agricultural cooperative's regulations, people were placed in the major workforce at the age of 18, while younger members were treated as auxiliary labourers. Nobody under the age of 16 was allowed to work for the agricultural cooperative. The main means of livelihood was generated

from farming the collective fields. In the group discussion with older and middle aged villagers, many recalled that all the basic needs, from food to clothes, fuel and other goods, were provided by the cooperative. Rice and other foods were distributed by the agricultural cooperative based on work-points which people earned during the crop seasons, but meat, fish, salt and sugar as well as other goods were supplied monthly by the commercial cooperative based on the coupons earned for each labour. The work-points were awarded based on the specific types of work to which cooperative members were assigned. Normally, the members were assigned to specific tasks which were relevant to their age, skill, health, gender and educational attainment. The heavier the work that people did, the more work-points they received. As a consequence, under-age and female labourers received fewer work-points than the men. Apart from determining the physical demands of each task, the agricultural cooperative also played an important role in villagers' spiritual lives. The leaders of the agricultural cooperative were responsible not only for steering production, but also for the organization of weddings, funerals and communal festivals in the village.

As is mentioned above, several villagers did not voluntarily join the cooperative. Voluntarism was emphasized as the most important principle of collectivization but, according to one villager, "the number of voluntary members was very small. Most members were either people with little capacity for doing business on an individual basis or Communist Party members" (Nov, 2007). This argument is quite similar to other findings, for example, Vickerman (1986) points out that the majority of people who did not belong to cooperatives were middle and upper-middle ranking peasants. They adopted a "wait and see" attitude as they possessed more productive means than poor and lower-middle ranking peasants. It was therefore necessary to patiently persuade them of the advantages of the cooperative.

A number of interviewees argued that they reluctantly participated in the agricultural cooperative. They had to become cooperative members because of the government's prohibition of individual economic development, and for reasons linked to social control. If they did not join the cooperative, it would have been difficult for their children to go to the village school. Although such children were still allowed to go to school, it was uncomfortable for them to communicate with peers because their parents were seen as "rule breakers". In addition, agricultural cooperative leaders did not help them to organize weddings or funerals for their families, and few other villagers were willing to attend except for close relatives. Although the government did not use force to compel people to take part in the cooperative, the national authorities appeared to forbid almost all individual economic activity.

In line with national regulations, 95 per cent of arable land, labour and draught animals, and all assets of production were collectivized in the Red River delta. People worked together in the cooperative and all the results of production were shared at the end of the crop season. Although the size of the agricultural cooperatives varied from village (from 1958 to the early 1970s) to commune (from the early 1970s to the early 1980s) level, they were divided into different brigades (*doi san xuat*). Each brigade had a leader who was directly responsible for coordinating production. Apart from working in the collective fields, cooperative members were allowed to produce in the private plots they were allotted from the 5 per cent of remaining land and in their family gardens. They were also allowed individually to raise small animals and

poultry. However, any production generated outside the collective fields could only be used for self-consumption or exchanged with the agricultural cooperative for work-points. Activities such as trading in farm products or making alcohol were classified as illegal by the central government, although they were considered important sidelines by many villagers.

#### **Box 10.1. Working under the cooperative regime**

Every morning the brigade leader went to all the members' households to tell them what they had to do that day. The cooperative members worked collectively, but in accordance with the assignment given by their brigade leader. After completing the assigned work, each member had to report to the leader. The leader would make notes in his or her timekeeping book. The total work-points of individual members were calculated by adding up the daily work-points. Rice and other foods would be distributed to cooperative members based on the number of work-points they had earned in a crop season. The cooperative distributed production to its members after the deduction of administrative costs. As a result, the amount of produce per work-point was low (A middle aged village man, July 2007).

The collective model was also applied to the other parts of rural economy, particularly the craft industries. While any villager could become a member of the agricultural cooperative, the handicraft cooperative was primarily made up of village woodcarvers, although it also recruited labour from the agricultural sector from among those who had never known how to carve. However, in the recruitment process, the handicraft cooperative board gave priority to their children, their relatives, those with a higher education and the children of "revolutionary martyrs". This was because the people who worked in the handicraft cooperative could earn more than those who worked in the agricultural cooperative. Craft workers received a monthly salary and coupons for rice, foodstuffs, fuel and clothes. The handicraft cooperative employed a model of specialization in production similar to other industrial sectors. Although handicraft workers were remunerated monthly, their wage rates were determined by the quantity and quality of their output. The workers were paid salaries corresponding to their skills, provided they completed their work on time and to an acceptable quality. The handicraft cooperative prohibited its workers from working individually at home.

In short, the Vietnamese government attempted to "simplify" and to dichotomize rural livelihoods by pushing rural people into either agricultural or handicraft cooperatives, and by ending individual production. Under the early cooperative regime, the people who worked for the agricultural cooperative lived mainly by farming and those who worked for the handicraft cooperative were remunerated in the same way that industrial workers were paid by the government. In this way, the government expected to control both the production processes and income distribution in the rural economy. However, as is mentioned above, peasants and craftsmen in Kim Thieu village neither totally conformed with nor resisted government regulations, but they knew how to improvise around the regulations in their everyday practices to ensure their survival and prosperity.

Unlike Tri (1990) and Kerkvliet (2005), I do not pay much attention to the ways in which people resisted joining the cooperative when the government first collectivized land, labour, draught

animals and other assets of production. Instead, this chapter focuses on the ways in which villagers improvised around the regulations under the cooperative regime to further their own livelihood strategies. Different groups of peasants and craftsmen developed different tactics to benefit themselves and their families. Among the variety of strategies adopted, this study concentrates on the ways in which villagers employed their social capital, developed their individual tactics and diversified their income sources.

#### **Employment of social capital**

According to former cooperative members, social relations played a crucial role in their livelihoods. Social capital is defined in the livelihood framework of the British Department for International Development (1999) as "social resources such as networks, memberships of groups and relationships of trust, and access to wider institutions of society on which people draw in pursuit of livelihood". In the context of Kim Thieu agricultural cooperative, having a good relationship with local leaders could be seen as one form of social capital on the part of members. Anyone who had a good relationship with the brigade leader would be assigned the easy tasks with a higher number of work-points. Among a variety of social relations, kinship could be seen as the most important. One man contended that as the brigade leader was his relative, he used to assign him to work in the plots which were close to the village and easier to plough and harrow.

#### **Box 10.2. Benefits of kinship**

Since the team leader was my kinsman, he gave me work-points not on the basis of the work I had done, but on what he wanted. Sometimes, I worked only half a day but he gave me the work-points for a whole day (10 points per day). I knew that in other cases, some cooperative members were given work-points even if they did not go to work (middle-aged man, July 2007)..

Another way of using social capital to gain additional work-points was to take care of collective draught animals. Although draught animals were collectivized together with other means of production in the early days of collectivization, the poor care taken of them by cooperative members working in the collective stockyards inspired cooperative leaders to shift this task back to individual households. Many households were entrusted with water buffalo or oxen to feed and take care of on behalf of the cooperative. As the cooperative in Kim Thieu did not have enough draught animals for all member households, its leaders had to rotate the animals among them. Former agricultural cooperative members recall that local leaders' families and their relatives used to be assigned to take care of the animals more often than others. The additional work-points earned sometimes exceeded what a typical cooperative member earned annually from collective work. Besides taking care of collective draught animals during leisure time, especially after transplanting and harvesting, people who had close relationships with cooperative cadres would be assigned to some minor tasks such as planting of subsidiary crops (vegetables, peanuts, sweet potatoes and maize), weeding, fertilizing and irrigating. By doing this, people could earn more work-points.



Social capital played a role not only in task assignment, but also in product distribution. Most interviewees contended that the cooperative cadres' families were distributed products of higher quality. They even received a considerably higher amount than they should on the basis of their work-points. The system of work assignment and product distribution caused inequality among cooperative members.

### Individual tactics as a response to the regulations

Together with the use of social relations, cooperative members developed a variety of individual tactics in response to government regulations on collectivization. One such tactic was to work few hours every day and to do little work in each hour. A villager recalls that: "Members had to go to work and get back home when they heard the cooperative's drumbeat. No member explicitly resisted this regulation. Cooperative members used to go to the collective field as soon as they heard the drumbeat, but they did not start work on time. For example, cooperative members went to the field at 1.00 p.m. according to the cooperative's instructions, but they sat and gossiped on the edge of the field until 3.00 p.m. They also returned home at 5:00 PM even if their tasks were unfinished".

#### Box 10.3. Use of individual tactics

We tried to earn more from the collective work. For instance, we did not thresh rice carefully in the cooperative yard because we knew that after threshing, the cooperative would distribute straw to its members. We used to select the pile of straw that had been threshed by ourselves. After carrying the straw home, we would re-thresh. Other villagers did the same, and some households could get from four to six quintals of rice in a crop season (Discussion, December 2006).

Many cooperative members did not take an interest in their work. The quality of collective work was typically below people's capacity. Most cooperative members calculated how many working days they needed to satisfy local cadres and to earn the amount of rice or other staple foods to which they were entitled. The agricultural cooperative members tried to finish the collective work as quickly as possible, and also developed tactics to access products from the collective field.

Apart from hiding the collective produce, the cooperative members used a lot of the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups described in Scott (1985), such as pilfering, feigned ignorance, sabotage and tricks. Because production was carried out collectively, in addition to contributing their labour, households also had to provide manure to the agricultural cooperative to fertilize the collective crops. All the contributions of manure were converted into work-points. More work-points could be gained by mixing rubbish into the manure. A similar tactic was used when weeding the rice field. A woman elder recalled that several cooperative members who were assigned to weed the rice field only weeded carefully the visible parts while the unseen areas were either ignored or done only perfunctorily. As a result, crop productivity was low and tended to fall, especially in the late 1970s. "Kim Thieu agricultural cooperative members were distributed only 0.8 kg of rice per working day [a

working day equals 10 work-points]. So, we worked very hard but very few villagers had enough food to eat in the late period of collectivization" (an older village woman, December 2006). For this reason, Kim Thieu villagers devoted more time, and more labour and other resources to their individual plots and other auxiliary economic activities.

### Diversification of subsidiary economic activities

The most important supplementary economic activity in Kim Thieu village was to cultivate private plots. Unlike the Soviet and Chinese collectivization schemes, the Vietnamese government allowed agricultural cooperative members to keep small pieces of land as private property. This land was either farmland allotted to households from the remaining five per cent of uncollectivized land or the yard around the family's house, which often had a garden and a pond and could be used to grow vegetables and raise chickens, ducks and fish.

As the agricultural cooperative could not provide its members with sufficient food, villagers tended to work day and night on their private plots while doing minimal work on the collective fields. Moreover, a former chairman of the agricultural cooperative recalled that many members stole fertilizer and pesticides intended for the collective fields and used them instead on their individual plots. Son (2001) calculated that the five per cent of agricultural land could account for 60 to 65 per cent of total household income in the late 1970s. As well as planting rice in their individual plots, peasants lived on vegetables and fruit grown in the family garden. However, garden areas were very small in Kim Thieu and did not represent a considerable source of income for the people.

Raising pigs and other small livestock was a common subsidiary livelihood strategy for most families in Kim Thieu village. However, it was difficult to market peasants' products in the time of collectivization. They could only sell to the agricultural cooperative or illegal local traders on the black market. Several pig raisers sold their produce to local traders because they could charge considerably higher prices for it. However, most had to secretly slaughter their pig at night. Prices were squeezed because there were few traders in comparison with the number of pig raisers in the region.

Among several available economic strategies, tofu and alcohol making were considered good choices. Tofu making was allowed but, as is noted above, making alcohol was prohibited by the government. A village man told how alcohol was made secretly in kitchens. Alcohol was usually sold within the village to families holding weddings or for ancestor worship. A small amount of alcohol was sold to restaurants in Tu Son town and Hanoi. It was, however, difficult to transport alcohol from Kim Thieu to remote places due to the state's prohibition. In order to avoid the tax collectors and policemen, villagers had to pour alcohol into plastic packs tied around their bodies under their clothes.

A number of cooperative members improved their living standards through trade activities, which were viewed as illegal in the time before *doi moi*. Such people did not neglect their collective work, but in their leisure time they went to the mountainous provinces, such as Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen and Lang Son, to buy sweet potato and cassava for sale in order to subsidize their families during periods of food scarcity.

Handicraft cooperative workers also knew how to improvise around government regulations

during the period of collectivization. All craftsmen had to work at the cooperative's workshop. The handicraft cooperative prohibited its workers from running their own business at home or any kind of self-employment. Thus, in principle, the handicraft cooperative members merely lived on their salary and coupons. However, the field study found that the craftsmen developed different tactics on livelihood diversification. One of the most crucial subsidiary economic activities was to raise small animals and poultry for self-consumption. Another activity, which was very common from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, was to work as outsourced woodcarvers for Dong Ky merchants who sold wooden furniture. There have been numerous woodcarving merchants in Dong Ky village since the mid-1970s. A number of craft workers in Kim Thieu were hired to make woodcarvings by Dong Ky traders at considerably higher wages compared to the cooperative's remuneration. For example, the present headman of Kim Thieu village asserted that: "whereas Dong Ky traders were willing to pay us VND 10,000 per day [equivalent to 6 or 7 kilogram's of rice], our daily wage in the handicraft cooperative was only 1.2 kg of rice". However, working at home was prohibited at that time so, "we had to work at night after we finished the collective work. In order to avoid being discovered by cooperative leaders, we tried to be as quiet as possible. It was not easy because woodcarving is noisy. If your neighbours heard and they reported you to local leaders, you might be punished".

Although the collectivization programme had attempted to categorize rural people into two groups – farmers or agricultural cooperative members and craft workers or handicraft cooperative members – this did not make sense in reality. Handicraft cooperative members could make a living from both farming and woodcarving because rural people live with their families, whose members are either farmers or craftsmen, but they cooperate and share both production and consumption based on intra-family relations. In addition, almost all the craftsmen had been allocated some of the five per cent farmland. The strategy of livelihood articulation between farming and craft making has been also developed in the era of economic liberalization.

#### **10.6. Economic liberalization: New regulations and peasant adaptation**

##### **De-collectivization: New regulations for the rural economy**

In importing the idea of neoliberalism into its *doi moi* policy, government regulation of farmland and rural labour was progressively loosened, allowing people to make autonomous decisions on production processes and livelihood strategies. The transformation in agriculture and villagers' livelihoods happened only after the 1993 Land Law, through which peasant households were allocated land use rights and given security of tenure over the land that was allocated (Marsh et al., 2006). Under the 1993 Land Law, farmland was allocated to every villager regardless of their previous occupation: both ex-agricultural cooperative members and ex-handicraft cooperative workers were allocated farmland. The area of farmland per capita is so small, however, that people cannot sustain livelihoods. As a result, almost all the villagers must pursue a living from different income-generating activities either on-farm or off-farm. The dramatic transformation in peasant's livelihoods in Kim Thieu was through state programmes of rural industrialization and commoditization, especially the strategy of "leaving the rice field but not the countryside". This programme promoted a process of the commercialization of both farm and non-farm sectors. In promulgating this programme,

the government has once again tried to classify rural labourers into two groups: large-scale commercial agriculture and off-farm livelihood strategies such as craft industries.

In the case of Kim Thieu, Decision No.132/2000/QD/TTg, signed by the Prime Minister on 21 November 2000, and Decree No.134/2004/ND/CP, signed by the Deputy Prime Minister on 9 June 2004, have significantly influenced villagers' livelihoods. According to these policies, the traditional craft villages will be revived and developed to meet both domestic and global demand. The government has encouraged the revival and development of traditional craft occupations which use natural domestic materials such as wood, bamboo, rattan, straw and sedge.

The introduction of a market-oriented economy means that rural labourers are less controlled by state regulations on occupation and spatial mobility than they were in the time of collectivization. In general, the new policies have been viewed as effective in terms of employment creation, improving household incomes, poverty reduction and the preservation of traditional culture (Anh 2006).

Nonetheless, in the context of commoditization and globalization, woodcarving producers have been pushed by the networks of multiple and contradictory regulations which are generated by the Vietnamese government, on the one hand, and international organizations and market demands, on the other. In some cases, woodcarving producers have to face conflicts between regulations issued by different institutions. The contradiction between government regulations on natural forest conservation and the demand for raw materials by the woodcarving industry to meet the preferences of Chinese consumers is a typical example. All the species of timber preferred by Chinese customers, the most important for the Kim Thieu woodcarving industry, are prohibited from logging, transport or exchange by bans issued in 1992. As a consequence, materials for the woodcarving industry in Kim Thieu, as well as nearby villages, must be imported from Laos, Cambodia and elsewhere. In recent years, however, sources of imports of raw materials for woodcarving production have declined markedly as exporting countries also restrict logging and ban exports. As well as restrictions on inputs, export markets are also limited because of various regulations and agreements on natural resource conservation and environmental protection. For instance, Kim Thieu woodcarving products cannot be exported to the European Union or the United States because they do not have the certification required for wood sources. Even if producers can prove the source of materials, the species of timber that are used in production are also restricted.

In the case of rural labourers, although they have been freed from Vietnamese government regulations, they are now driven by processes such as pressures for cost reductions and the spatial division of labour regionally. In the industrialized countries, production stages need smaller amounts of highly skilled labour at a central location, and labour intensive but low skilled work can be carried out elsewhere to take advantage of cheaper labour. The process of the spatial division of labour has gone beyond the borders of the more developed countries to the less developed ones. This spatial division has existed in the woodcarving industry in Kim Thieu village since the early 1990s. Chinese producers try to exploit cheap labour in Vietnam's rural areas, and Kim Thieu villagers, in turn, attempt to utilize migrant labour from those who come from farm-based communities as much as possible at a lower cost.

#### Box 10.4. The regulation of the global market

Chinese traders only buy semi-finished products from village exporters. They then dry them and polish them again using modern techniques which we do not have. After reprocessing, woodcarving products can be sold at much higher prices in comparison with what we have received. For me, they just want to buy the materials and carving skills from us. Some Chinese traders told me that carving is a very labour intensive stage, and wages in China are higher than in Vietnam, so it is more efficient to leave the carving stage for Vietnamese craftsmen even if Chinese workers can do it (A female furniture exporter in the village, November 2006).

In short, at present Kim Thieu woodcarvers have to face ore complicated regulations which emanate from not only the Vietnamese state, but also other institutions at the regional and global levels. Nonetheless, even under multiple levels of regulation, these small producers know how to use different tactics, such as diversifying business strategies in the woodcarving industry and building different modes of livelihood articulation, to sustain their livelihoods. The ways in which local people negotiate with state policies in the era of economic liberalization is discussed in detail below.

#### 10.7. Peasants' adaptation to the new regulations

##### Flexibility in the woodcarving industry

This section focuses on how villagers engaged in woodcarving production develop tactics in order to respond to the market regulation of the woodcarving industry. Craft-peasants not only avoid the negative impacts of market forces, but also prosper. The first strategy is to diversify in terms of products and types of raw material. Several family woodcarving workshops provide products to different types of consumer, such as high- and medium-income urban households and high- and medium- income rural households. Woodcarvers vary the species of timber they use from high grade and high value woods, such as rosewood, sandalwood and mahogany, to lower grade and less valued woods such as acacia and sienna.

As well as diversifying their target markets and types of raw material, a number of individual tactics related to timber use have also been developed. Producers tend to use even the smallest pieces of wood, which previously would have been discarded. Even small branches with diameters of five centimetres are brought into play in making the arms for chairs, small statues, trinkets and decoration for furniture. In addition, a common technique is to glue together many smaller pieces of wood to form a bigger one before carving. This tactic is often used for rosewood and sandalwood because they are both expensive. Villagers only use this tactic to make and sell finished products to domestic consumers. Only experts in woodcarving would notice after polishing and painting. A popular strategy employed especially by export-oriented villagers is to create flexible commercial relations with customers.

##### Modes of livelihood articulation

As is highlighted above, almost all the villagers engage in the woodcarving industry today, but the ways and the level in which they participate as well as the income they can earn differ widely because of the heterogeneous levels of skill, educational attainment, financial capacity and social capital. As a consequence, while a number of people take advantage of state policy

on the revival and development of traditional craft occupations to become factory owners or entrepreneurs, others opt for positions as outsourced and contract workers. Some villagers cannot participate in any stage of woodcarving production even though they were born and grew up in the village. The differences among villagers have contributed to a process of the re-division of labour in both woodcarving and farm production at the community and household levels.

Most households who run medium-sized and small-scale woodcarving workshops and those who work as contract labour still perceive farming as a crucial occupation even if rice farming brings them an income that in most cases is much smaller than woodcarving. They argue that their off-farm income is beyond their control because job opportunities and wage rates depended on market demand, in particular the Chinese market. For this reason, they have decided to keep farming despite its low economic return. The differences in woodcarving production scales and the stages in which labour participates have caused variations in the ways in which people combine woodcarving with farming activities. My observations and household surveys show that there are four typical strategies by which villagers articulate woodcarving production with farming activity. Based on such combinations, households in Kim Thieu village can be categorized into five groups (see Table 10.1).

**Table 10.1.** Classification of households by livelihood strategies

Source: Household Survey, 2007

Groups	Per cent of total households	Woodcarving Industry	Farming Activity
Group 1	30 %	Large scale factory owners	Do not farm; lend out land.
Group 2	10 %	Large scale factory owners	Self-sufficient farming; lend out part of their land
Group 3	30 %	Medium or small factory owners	Farm allocated land and borrowed land
Group 4	20 %	Skilled labour (framing, carving and whittling)	Farm allocated land and borrowed land on a large scale
Group 5	10 %	Unskilled casual labourers	Large scale farming

The first group is made up of about 30 per cent of the households in the village. These households run woodcarving production on a large scale. Although they totally rely on the woodcarving industry and have given up farming, they keep their farmland for different reasons, such as social security, property rights and business strategy. While some people keep farmland for reasons of security in case the woodcarving industry faces a downturn, others keep it to see what its future value will be.

The attitude to farming of these villagers is also determined by state policies on farmland. In the case of land owners who no longer cultivate their farmland, state rules allow them to transfer or rent it out to others on a long-term basis. Farmland has been allocated to individual households for long-term use since the early 1990s, coupled with a number of property rights,



but leaving land fallow is seen as illegal by the state. Any plot which is fallow must be confiscated and turned back into communal land by the local government. The large scale woodcarving producers avoid leaving their land fallow by lending or leasing it to others who are willing to continue or expand their farming activities. The mechanism for farmland lending and borrowing is totally dependent on social trust rather than economic relations. Almost all land borrowers do not pay anything to the lenders, except for fees for services provided by the agricultural cooperative.

The second group consists of those who own large woodcarving workshops but still carry on rice cultivation on a subsistence scale while their remaining land is leased out to other villagers. For most people, continuing rice cultivation does not mean that they do not have enough money to buy rice, but they believe that home-produced rice is of higher quality than what can be bought in local markets. Moreover, these households grow rice not only for ordinary consumption, but also for special occasions such as traditional festivals, anniversaries of the deaths of grandparents and parents, wedding parties, and so on. In addition, some regard having to buy rice from the market as shameful because it symbolizes poverty.

The third group consists of those who are willing to cultivate all their allocated land area, and sometimes add land which is borrowed or rented from others. These households farm all the area allocated to them since the early 1990s even if their woodcarving workshops are large. They do this because their supply of family labour means that they can afford to. In addition, they decide to keep farming because food security is important not just in the short term, but also in the long term – especially in case of a crisis in the woodcarving industry.

Apart from growing rice for self-consumption, some villagers still consider farming to be an economic strategy from which they can make a profit. According to one middle-aged woman, her family consumes little rice, and she often buys rice from a familiar stall in the local market while the rice she produces is kept in reserve for consumption and as speculation for sale in case the market price increases. As a result, she cultivates rice on her family land and on borrowed land.

The fourth group is formed by those who do not have established factories for woodcarving for a variety of reasons. They engage in one or several stages of woodcarving production as contract or outsourced labour, such as wood framing, carving, whittling and painting. Many villagers explained that they could not establish their own workshops because of a lack of social and financial capital, and others have decided to work as contract labour even if they have the skills and capital because they are risk averse. The contract workers' employment status fluctuates with variations in the production of the factory owners. For this reason, these villagers have no ideas about giving up farming. Most cultivate all their allocated land and land borrowed from others, mostly from siblings and relatives. According to most interviewees, they grow rice for self-consumption, animal feed and to sell to other households in the village, including, interestingly, to those who have leant them some land.

The last group is made up of those who are not skilled enough and have no financial capital to establish their own factories. For these people, farming remains a major livelihood strategy. They tend to expand their rice areas by borrowing farmland from anyone who no longer wishes

to cultivate. Woodcarving is seen as a subsidiary economic activity because of its contribution to their household economy. They participate in the woodcarving industry as hired, unskilled labour after they have finished all their farm work.

In sum, together with several other tactics employed in the woodcarving industry, operationalizing modes of livelihood articulation is considered a strategy that can help craft peasants to cope with fluctuations in the market for woodcarving, but the reasons why villagers decide to keep their farmland and continue farming are not all the same. Many large scale producers keep farmland not to farm, but to maintain their property rights and to wait for new economic opportunities. In such cases, farmland and farming do not go together. Farmland becomes property rather than a means of production. At the same time, a number of large and medium-sized producers keep farming on a small size in order to sustain their property rights to land and provide their families with safe food. On the other hand, small woodcarving producers as well as contracted outsourced workers continue to perceive farming, particularly rice cultivation, as an important livelihood strategy. Additionally, in the case of an off-farm-based economy like that in Kim Thieu, some villagers keep cultivating rice for commercial reasons.

#### **10.8. Contested meaning of being a craft-peasant**

In addition to its policies on agrarian transition, the Vietnamese government has categorized rural households as agriculture-based, on-farm and off-farm mixed, and off-farm based. Similarly, the General Statistical Office categorizes rural labourers into different groups, such as farmers, craftsmen and petty traders, based on the time they devote to each economic activity. By doing so, the government has classified rural people into a specific group based on their main livelihood strategy. However, this classification does not make sense in reality.

Most Kim Thieu villagers define themselves as peasants even if they spend almost all their time in the woodcarving industry. During my ethnographical fieldwork, one of my recurrent questions was why villagers try to claim that they are “just peasants”. The reasons why people define themselves as peasants instead of artisans should be seen from different angles. First, most villagers consider themselves peasants because of their relations to the farmland. In the past, villagers who had farmland were respected within the community. This conventional perception of the relationship between peasants and land remains and affects villagers' definitions of their identity.

The second reason why villagers call themselves peasants relates to the government's policy of non-farm administration. According to this policy, households which have registered for any non-farm business have to pay taxes and fees. As a result, almost all Kim Thieu villagers avoid paying taxes and fees by claiming that the woodcarving activity is just a 'sideline' or a 'subsidiary economic activity' to the farming sector rather than an enterprise. In Kim Thieu, the claim to not be in business is quite widespread because each person is merely pursuing a traditional village occupation. An elderly village man said that “all the people here could make woodcarvings since their childhood because they could listen to the clatter of chisel and hammer when they were in their mothers' wombs”. This statement implies a distinction between business being an occupation for profit and traditional occupations, which aim to



employ idle agrarian labourers.

The socialist idea of class in the early days of the independent state can be seen as the third reason affecting villagers' perceptions of their peasant status. During the time of the first land reform in northern Vietnam in the early 1950s, poor and extremely poor peasants were considered to be the "basic class" with which the government could build a socialist society. By contrast, the strata of merchants and artisans were described as "free labour", "unorganized labour" or "spontaneous labour", which needed to be "re-educated". Thus, many senior villagers try to adhere to the characteristics of the so-called basic class, despite the fact that they are no longer dependent on farming.

However, a peasant's status is not fixed. Hence, villagers construct their identities in accordance with specific contexts. People define themselves as peasants when they need farmland as well as when they want to avoid taxes. By contrast, villagers call themselves craftsmen when they are looking for help from a programme on rural industrialization. For instance, villagers commonly change their identities when faced with financial limitations, particularly when they must borrow money from the bank. Village producers can only borrow small amounts (about VMD 20 million) from the Agriculture and Rural Development Bank if they are peasants, whereas other banks such as the Commercial and Industrial Bank are willing to lend them much bigger amounts (a maximum of VMD 1 billion) if they are craftsmen who possess a medium-scale family woodcarving factory. Furthermore, peasants can only access to short- and medium-term loans while craftsmen can easily obtain long-term loans.

A reason why villagers claim to be craftsmen relates to the profits made from the woodcarving industry. Like local knowledge in any sector, the traditional skills of the craft making industry which have been inherited and reproduced from one generation to another can be considered a type of cultural capital. In Kim Thieu, the know-how of woodcarving is retransmitted within each family or kinship group. However, the special techniques of the industry are not static, but dynamic – especially because of the processes of adaptation to modern technique. Kim Thieu villagers have invented their tradition by tailoring these techniques and re-designing products to specific contexts in order to secure their livelihoods. By claiming woodcarving as their traditional industry, these villagers contend that they are controlling a special resource which enables them to extract 'monopoly rent' from both domestic and foreign customers.

In short, the concepts peasant and artisan should be redefined in the context of the commercialization and industrialization of a traditional craft village. The terms craft-peasant or peasant-craftsman may be more relevant to a Kim Thieu villager than peasant or craftsman alone. It seems that being a peasant at the same time as being a craftsman helps a villager to sustain his or her livelihood in the context of market fluctuations, and that such a mixed identity gives him or her a certain social position. Nonetheless, the construction of identity happens in different ways for different villagers because they are differentiated from one another in terms of age, social background and other unique characteristics. Thus, while a number of villagers want to maintain their peasant status, others tend to perceive themselves as 'modern residents' whose livelihoods are detached from farming.

## 10.9. Conclusions

The Vietnamese government's economic policies on agrarian transition have shifted over time, but they have regulated the orientation of rural transformation. The idea behind them remained the same in the period of collectivization and that of decollectivization: that rural economy in general, and the peasant economy in particular, is backward and therefore needs to be modernized. By strongly intervening in the rural economy and the agricultural sector, Vietnamese national authorities expected that agriculture in particular and the rural economy in general would move towards commercialization and industrialization on a large scale. However, as Long points out:

...there is no straight line from policy to outcomes. Also "outcomes" often result from factors which cannot be directly linked to the implementation of a particular development program. Moreover, issues of policy implementation should not be restricted to the study of "top-down", planned interventions by governments, ...since local groups actively formulate and pursue their own program of development, which may clash with the interests of central authorities (Long, 1992: 34).

Indeed, as the active agents, Vietnamese peasants were able to determine the process of agrarian transformation themselves. Unlike in other countries, Vietnamese peasants have not explicitly resisted government programmes. Instead, they have improvised their own livelihood strategies around such programmes and regulations. Peasants' manoeuvres around government policies have magnified the trends of agrarian change. Kim Thieu villagers still diversified their livelihoods even though the government tried to simplify them in a cooperative regime. Similarly, in the context of economic liberalization, several policies have been implemented in the hope that part of the rural labour force will move from the agricultural sector to the industrial sector. Agriculture is expected to be commoditized on a very large scale in order to meet not only domestic, but also international market demand. In this way, purely agricultural communities, which have overwhelmingly been smallholders, would be likely to gradually disappear. The reality in Kim Thieu village, however, demonstrates that local people can create so-called alternative trajectories of agrarian transformation (Taylor, 2007), in which small scale farming can co-exist with large scale craft industries. Therefore, the government's expectation of the disappearance of small scale farming should be questioned. It is difficult to determine whether, where or why small scale farming will persist and whether off-farm activity is more valuable than on-farm activity to the lives of villagers. The meanings of farm work and craftwork are not fixed, but contested under particular conditions. Moreover, the history of Kim Thieu village is witness to the fact that farming and craft making activities have co-existed for a long time.



**SECTION 4. CO GOVERNANCE:  
PUTTING PARTICIPATION INTO PRACTICE**



## Chapter 11. Co-governance: Putting participation into practice

Neil Powell, Åsa Gerger Swartling, Minh Ha Hoang

In this concluding chapter, the conceptual framework presented in chapter 1 is drawn on to reflect more generally on the empirical findings laid out by the authors in this book. In line with this framework, the notion of *co-governance* is examined, by assessing the capacity of rural development actions and processes to deliver *options* and *scenarios* (epistemic resilience) in the face diverging interpretations and ongoing changes in their preferred function.

### 11.1. Centralized versus decentralized

In chapter 2 it is argued that even ancient Vietnam struggled to stabilize its socio-economy on account of transnational pressures and the harshness of its bio-physical setting. Vietnam moved out of the era of French rule and Japanese occupation in 1945. Under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, major reforms were made to the colonial structural legacy. In line with Confucian ideology, and a strong cultural identity shaped by years of colonial rule, the emergent people's republic of Vietnam proclaimed a new set of policies shaped on a precondition of "self-reliance".

Growing out of this Vietnam embarked on an intense programme of purposeful governance. In so doing a host of policies were launched which were intended to promote socio-economic stabilization in a self-reliant manner. The governance system has had three central pillars: the Communist Party, the state and the people. Since 1945, the relationship between the Party and the state has shifted away from an era where the party and its members dominated the functions of the government by centralizing planning and prioritizing state ownership. Chapter 10 presents this era in the context of a rural craft village in the north-west of the country. In the post-colonial era, Vietnam was faced with a legacy of fragmented land and a concentration of land holdings in the hands of the wealthy elite. A widespread programme of collectivization was instituted in order to redress the issues of inequality and an attempt was

made to industrialize both on- and off-farm (e.g. craft) components to achieve a more productive rural development sector.

Chapter 10 finds that, unlike other post-colonial states such as Russia or China, the participation of households in collectives was voluntary, although 90 per cent of all households became part of these collectives. A number of observers suggest that the industrial potency and relevance of these collectives diminished rapidly. Peasants employed a mode of agency which served to prioritize the household as an economic unit, thereby bypassing the collectives. Indeed, Le argues that it was these inherent acts of manipulation and adaptation that ultimately led to the demise of the collective programme after a span of 30 years. This process pre-empted the institutionalization of resolution 10 and the 1986 policy reform known as *doi moi*. *Doi moi* marked the inception of the market socialist governance structure in Vietnam.

From 1986, the changes underlying *doi moi* were instituted in the governance structure. There was greater separation of the functions of the Party and the state, that is, the executive and legislative functions. It was also recognized during this period that there was an over emphasis on industrial production and that, contrary to earlier expectations, this was undermining the socio-economic stability of the country. In response, a new economic reform package was announced at the Fourth National Party Congress of Vietnam in Hanoi in December 1986. In the rural sector this reform was manifest in the way households, rather than the collective, were now promoted as the primary economic unit. Discrete portions of land were redistributed to peasants after 1982 on a leasehold basis for 10 to 15 years. In 1993, there was further liberalization, reflected partly in the issuing of long term user rights. Land users also gained additional rights including rights to transfer, lease, inherit and mortgage.

In Chapter 2 it is argued that Vietnam's institutional structure still holds true to the motto: "the Party leads, the state manages and the people own". Under this system the decisive role in policymaking rests with the Party, and its implementation and management are the responsibility of the state. Despite this prevailing institutional structure, it is argued that there is an inherent ongoing redefinition of relations between Party and state. This transformation began in the tightly bound relationship at the height the centrally planned era, and in the modern Vietnamese state the judicial functions of the party are relatively separate from the legislative structures. This development is reflected in the composition of and ultimately the way in which the National Assembly operates as the principal representative administrative body of the Party. During the period when central planning and state ownership prevailed (1956–86), the National Assembly was made up of Party members who were in turn chosen by Party members. It has also been asserted that the National Assembly was presented with fait accomplis by the Party leaders. This suggests that the National Assembly derived policy from the interpretation of a fairly fixed set of norms and ideologies (a structure), initially inspired by Ho Chi Minh and Marxist-Leninist ideology which was considered to be the embodiment of the Party. This structure was essentially isolated from the diverse set of perspectives of "the people", particularly non-party members. The policies emanating from the National Assembly were in turn managed and implemented by the state.

Owing to the absence of feedback from agents external to the Party, even when, as a number of

authors in this book argue, the efficiency of these measures and policies were seriously compromised, the structure in which they were embedded was impervious to change. Moreover, it was self-reinforcing, exhibiting an extremely limited capacity to change and adapt. This approach adheres very closely to governance inspired by the engineering resilience approach presented in the introductory chapter. In Chapter 3, the critical examination of Kim Thieu Village during this period clearly shows how, on account of the inadequacy of policy in putting food on the table, local people were forced to bypass these monolithic policy structures. The roadmap manifest in this central planning process clearly did not reflect the diversified contextual realities of the intended recipients, the "people", and ultimately this led to an undermining of structures that had been engineered to be resilient

It is suggested in Chapter 2 that present day Vietnam is moving towards a situation that allows for greater stakeholder participation in governance. Modern Vietnam more than ever is characterized by a flexible policymaking environment which grows out the state's ongoing attempt to respond to pressures from below. In this regard the National Assembly (parliament) plays an important role in maintaining a division between the Party and the state. Although representation in the National Assembly is broadening through the inclusion of different sectors, non-governmental actors are still not permitted to participate. Non-governmental actors are either mainstream organizations, the principal role of which is to support the state, or other organizations that operate clearly within predefined boundaries. This system is referred to as "organized democracy". In line with the arguments in Chapter 2, Chapter 9 notes that democracy has been inspired by many contexts – not only those of the West. It is argued that there numerous contested conceptions of democracy. One of Vietnam's attempts to enhance democracy has been implementation of the Grass roots Democracy Decree (GDD) of 1998. The decree was issued as a means to enhance citizen's participation in local government. The grass roots democracy movement has been motivated by several expectations. These include: (a) the instrumental, whereby the mainstreaming of participation is considered a means to reduce the transaction costs associated with policy implementation; (b) participation, which will lead to enhanced democratization and accountability in policy processes; and (c) institutionalization of participation, which will reduce the presence of the ongoing struggle between the state and civil society for greater participation. Despite the ambitions of this movement, Chapter 9 suggests that implementation has been slow and ineffective.

### **11.2. Economic development, economic stability and environmental sustainability**

Chapter 3 provides statistics suggesting a general growth of the agricultural sector in recent times. The agricultural export industry, for example, grew annually by 16.8 per cent between 2001 and 2007. These figures suggest that for the first time since Vietnam shrugged off its colonial legacy, at least part of its key policy ambition is being fulfilled by the agricultural sector – economic stability at the national level. Despite this, chapter 3 tells a less positive story in terms of the integrated ambition for socio-economic stability, which at the local scale requires more systemic approaches to measuring well-being. The rural development context in Vietnam is exposed to fluctuations in market prices, disasters and epidemics, commonly referred to as the vulnerability context in the sustainable livelihoods framework. The cropping industry still occupies over half the sector, while other sectors which have shown great



potential, such as aquaculture, forestry and animal husbandry, are lagging behind. Production techniques are fragmented and infrastructure is under-developed in rural areas. The livelihoods of rural people in general and those of people living in remote areas and minority groups in particular are lagging behind those of people in urban areas. Serious emerging environmental issues, such as loss of biodiversity and chemical pollution, are overshadowed in an environment that promotes production.

The complex mosaic that is presented in Chapter 3 gives rise to a set of intractable problems in rural development contexts which are difficult to resolve with conventional coercive policy instruments. Chapter 8 deepens the analysis of these ill-defined problem contexts by exploring the case of the rehabilitation and restoration of mangroves in Tien Hai. The case uncovers a high degree of controversy associated with measures employed to mitigate the impact of the shocks, such as coastal storms, which are expected to increase in frequency and intensity with climate change. It depicts a policy environment made up of different levels of governance and different sectors promoting a diverse set of interests reified under a continuum stretching between conservation, livelihoods and economics represented by the aquaculture industry. Chapter 4 suggests that the issues connected with rural development are not only controversial, but also often characterized by a high degree of *non-linearity*, *complexity* and *uncertainty*. The chapter illustrates how the policy environment responds to periodic typhoons, which have widespread impacts on the productive capacity of the rural sector, and also, clearly, the greater vulnerability of the poor in this context.

### **11.3. Bypassing policy as a response to uncertainty**

Several of the authors write about the uncertainty created by the ongoing liberalization of markets in Vietnam. In Chapter 5, the issue is presented in terms of the market uncertainty faced by tea growers in the north-west of the country. It is argued that increased liberalization, linked to conditions set by the World Trade Organization (WTO) for Vietnam's membership, has led to even greater uncertainty for tea growers in Dai Tu. Chapter 10 introduces the case of furniture production in Kim Thieu village and the difficulties local producers face in obtaining the species of timber required to produce furniture for the Chinese market. This problem has been compounded by the introduction of international policies intended to regulate the exploitation of many of the timber species used in the production of furniture.

Such conditions of uncertainty and controversy tend to be the breeding ground for resource dilemmas and intractable problems. Under such conditions the single messages embodied in traditional policy instruments are difficult to reconcile with the multiple perspectives and dynamic processes manifest in these rural development contexts. In this regard Chapter 2 defines the legacy of the political landscape, which has attempted to promote rural development in this intractable problem context by various modes of governance, all of which have been characterized by the employment of coercive policy instruments. In the post-colonial era, Vietnam was faced with a legacy of fragmented land and a concentration of land holdings in the hands of a wealthy elite. A widespread programme of collectivization was instituted in order to redress the issues of inequity and an attempt was made to industrialize both on- and off-farm components to ensure a more productive rural sector. Since *doi moi*, the governance system has gradually opened up in an increasing liberalization of the market

conditionalized most strongly, as is noted above, by Vietnam's entry into the WTO in 2006. Despite this increasingly nuanced approach to governance, where fiscal and legislative policy are mixed and matched to deal the social dilemmas and uncertainty in rural contexts, a number of the authors suggest that policy compliance remains low.

Authors in the above chapters have uncovered a rich set of narratives that collectively reveal some of the main drivers of this crisis in policy compliance. Many authors argue that the lack of policy compliance is partially a result of the embedded ambiguities that characterize the policy environment in Vietnam. Chapter 8 highlights the ambiguities that grow out of overlaps in policy implementation and diverging messages between sectors. Chapter 4 explores the ambiguities precipitated by the need for immediate disaster response versus creating and promoting the development of rural contexts that are more resilient in the face of shocks and climate change.

It is suggested that these ambiguities in turn create gaps and therefore space for stakeholders to exert their agency in an informal sense. Chapter 7 explores the processes associated with devolution of rights through the methods used to implement the land and forest allocation policies in central Vietnam. By studying the policy implementation chain from the national level to its operationalization at the district and commune levels, the author reveals a lack of coherence between the policies, their purpose and their outcomes. Moreover, the chapter identifies a striking set of inconsistencies in policy implementation. Chapter 7 argues that these ambiguities create confusion and thus greater degrees of freedom in terms of the interpretation of policies within the levels of governance targeted to implement them. Using the endowment and entitlements approach to understand who gains and loses, the author suggests that the outcomes are distributed across groups of actors, such as head men, the poor and the non-poor, and on gender lines. There is also great regional variation. The implementation process is referred to as a negotiated outcome between those at the governance level and donors, which have been active participants in the policy implementation process.

Chapter 6 presents a case of policy implementation in the Cat Tien National Park, Dong Nai Province, which resonates closely with the command and control legacy. The devolution in this case was the reassignment of responsibility for the management of national parks to district level organizations. The author studied how three different ethnic groups who live in the buffer strip immediately circumscribing Cat Tien National Park respond to the enforcement of the protection policy. Two of these groups are referred to as indigenous minorities. They consider the designation of the land as a park to be an imposition on their ancestral land rights. This land has been fundamental to sustaining their livelihoods and, despite the harsh laws which preclude any rights to timber and non timber products from the park, law breaking is the norm within these groups. The third group living in the buffer strip is the Kinh, the group that makes up the majority of Vietnamese. Most of the Kinh have only recently settled in the buffer strip. A large part of their livelihood is sustained through land cultivation. Livelihoods, traditions and different degrees of acknowledgement of the state as a moral authority have created a space in which different ethnic groups adapt to and/or bypass conservation measures.

#### **11.4. Participation as a complementary instrument of change**

Vietnam has generally relied on conventional coercive policy instruments to bring about change. While official reports continue to critique the polity sphere of governance, which is perceived as legitimate in Vietnam, this book has also critiqued the informal spheres. Even during the height of the era of collectivization in Vietnam, the role of the economy and civil society was much more developed than was acknowledged by the state. Authors write about how stakeholders, households and even individuals bypassed and adapted policies emanating from the “polity”. Gaps and ambiguities within the polity have created the space for informal markets to operate in the “economy”. Moreover, networks and relationships have empowered individuals and households to operate informally in the domain of civil society.

In recent years the Government of Vietnam has certainly demonstrated its ambition to pursue a more participatory approach to development in the country. The democratic argument of stakeholder involvement appears to be most explicit in the context of contemporary rural development in Vietnam. As is shown in Chapters 2 and 9, the principle was clearly manifested in the GDD, which marked the beginning of a national level policy reform calling for grass roots democratization in Vietnam. Other studies also make this point (Wescott, 2003; UNESCO, 2007).

As is argued in Chapter 1, a better collaborative relationship between policymakers and stakeholders plays an important role, in a pragmatic sense, to promote learning, a sense of ownership, trust, acceptance and the empowerment of stakeholder groups. The empirical findings in this book suggest that it is particularly important to address this issue in the Vietnamese context since there is a need to enhance the public legitimacy of national rural development policy and to minimize the risk of the bypassing of policies at the individual level and to ensure enhanced rural development policy compliance in the future. The authors of chapters 4, 6 and 10 have highlighted the general ability of the Vietnamese people to adapt to changes and cope with difficulties in order to secure their livelihoods. Most notably, in Chapter 10 we see that individual or household responses are based on informal but nevertheless effective rules and are not controlled by collective, ethical guiding principles. Consequently, the outcome is not always optimal from a governance perspective. This is supported in the literature. For example, Jutting et al. (2007) demonstrates the high impact of informal institutions and social norms on development outcomes and shows how ignoring such informal institutions and rules can be costly to the nations concerned.

The importance of local participation in the co-production of knowledge in policymaking should also be highlighted. Citizens and agencies operating at commune level have access to local knowledge that is unfamiliar to authorized central expert and policy communities, and they therefore possess expertise in the contexts of their local experience of rural livelihoods which is valuable to the central government. Consequently, national policies that are not based on regional or local contexts are not likely to be relevant to the particular livelihood conditions, everyday practices and norms of rural people across the country, and may not address the problems they aim to. By creating an enabling environment for public deliberations on rural development policy, the Government of Vietnam is likely to make progress in both policy development and implementation processes. Both the central government and

rural communities and organizations would gain from such interactions by sharing perspectives and knowledge. In the longer term the deliberative process is likely to build mutual trust, deepen understanding and lead to more democratic decisions as well as an enhanced public commitment to complying with rural development policies.

Good governance in rural development is not merely a question of involving stakeholders from all the spheres of governance depicted in the Boulding triangle. It also requires a meaningful dialogue and collaboration across existing vertical governance levels. Furthermore, as is illustrated in Chapter 7, there is a need to improve communication between the national, provincial, district and commune levels in Vietnam. This evidence corresponds to that from other studies that highlight the significance of strengthening the national government's relationship with the provincial and commune levels (e.g. Fritzén, 2005). Moreover, Chapter 2 suggests that the entry of foreign actors such as international donors and international NGOs into the policy domains of Vietnam has changed the policymaking landscape in recent years. This change should be recognized explicitly and drawn on in the context of rural community development and sustainable resource management.

Chapter 7 examines a case of direct democracy in practice. The author describes the impact formalism has on the quality of participation in policy processes. Her case studies from two communes in central Vietnam show that communication processes connected with people's participation in the land allocation process were poorly managed. In many instances the potential recipients of land or forest were discriminated against owing to incompatible means of communication. Ethnic minority groups were particularly marginalized in this regard. As formalism will be part and parcel of policy processes the case study suggests that measures such as facilitation and process management should be integrated into the skill set of those implementing policy processes. Moreover, the Peoples Committees should monitor the effectiveness of facilitation, communication and learning as a fundamental part of the policy implementation process.

#### **11.5. Conclusions**

The Communist Party General Secretary, Nong Duc Manh leader, in his welcome speech at the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) national congress in Hanoi, on 28 September 2009, urged the VFF to “elevate” its position in the country as the country enters a new era of development. He suggested that the VFF was well placed to play an enhanced role, owing to its broad base of 989 delegates, representing a diverse set of stakeholders that also included 54 ethnic minority groups, religions and Vietnamese based abroad. He stressed that the VFF, in its elevated role, and other socio-economic organizations need to thoroughly grasp legacy of Ho Chi Minh to use the party's policies and guidelines to foster national unity and promote democracy and consensus.

Insights from the chapters in this book suggest that many of the inefficiencies in policy implementation, and subsequent low levels of compliance, have created space for a host of stakeholders to influence policy outcomes. This policy vacuum, characterized by the absence of a functional moral authority – the role advocated for the VFF by Manh the party leader above – has led to extremely mixed outcomes in terms of issues such as poverty reduction, the

enhancement of sustainable livelihoods and ecosystem services, and the reduction of risk and uncertainty. Moreover, the intractability of the context is increasing with further market liberalization, and global and national responses to climate change. This situation has led to the precarious positioning of governance for rural development in this new era for development. This reasoning closely coheres with the views of the 2009 Economics Nobel Prize winner, Elinor Ostrom, when she argues that people tend to bypass policy if it is not in their interest to follow or implement it. She also suggests that citizens tend to self-organize and act collectively even in the absence of policy when they have a recognizable common interest.

Building on Manh's the party leader's reasoning above, the challenges posed by this new intractable era can be addressed in part by enhancing and complementing the role of a number of Vietnam's existing articulated structural democratic foundations; foundations that correspond closely to notions of social learning as a complementary governance instrument (cf. Paquet, 1999b; Ison et al., 2007) and "radical democracy" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). In terms of these foundations we are speaking more specifically of the process of consensus building, where, under conditions allowing for dialogue and learning, different stakeholders build cognitive coherence or consensus that in turn leads to a point where these stakeholders can self-organize themselves to enable collective action, or, in the language of the party, "mass mobilize". This non-coercive form of mass mobilization (communication) can be seen as complementary to what more typically today grows out of what in the context of Vietnam is referred to as propaganda (information). This complementary approach can be considered a means by which Vietnam's existing direct democratic approach can be "deepened" (UNDP, 2006).

While the research presented by the different authors in this book does not provide evidence to draw conclusions on the enhancement potential of structures specifically in terms of addressing intractable rural development issues, more general conclusions can be drawn. In this regard a strengthened relationship between the Party, socio-economic organization and the state is advocated. Moreover, there is scope for enhancing the potential of the GDD.

After 1986, when "people's agency" had instigated a stream of change processes that bypassed monolithic structures, the General Assembly began to diversify its membership beyond perspectives bounded by the traditional "production-orientated" party line. The National Assembly is increasingly objective in the legislative role of the state, serving as gatekeeper between the legislative functions of the government and the judicial functions of the Party. In many ways the present National Assembly more closely resembles a multi-stakeholder platform than a parliamentary structure in a Western democracy. In a Western democracy, no autonomy or objectivity exists between the democratically appointed party or parliament and the state's legislative structures. In this regard, the messages embodied in policy and the character of legislative structures can abruptly change at the end of the party's mandate. In contrast, change processes in Vietnam are becoming increasingly incremental, tempered by pace and process, and cognizant of the consensus-based decision-making embedded in the National Assembly.

The nomination process for the National Assembly is managed by the VFF. The basis for

consensus continues to diversify as more non-party members, more women and the inclusion of previously marginalized voices are considered. The process by which decisions are reached is also becoming more transparent for citizens. Meetings are now televised and open to the public, and the ministries are exposed to open critique in question and answer sessions. As the membership of the National Assembly becomes inhabited by a more diverse set of stakeholders, incremental changes are likely to become even more pronounced in the future. In short, within the domain of polity in Vietnam, the National Assembly has begun to bridge human agency with legislative structures. It has in terms of intentions at least begun to serve as an arena for co-governance.

One of the key functions of the National Assembly is to monitor citizens' complaints, approximately 14000 complaints annually. The resources required to respond to these complaints are so substantial that it has been suggested that this undermines the National Assembly's capacity to adequately undertake its other roles (UNDP, 2009). Moreover, the overall independence of the National Assembly is still questioned. All national and provincial ministers and the government's executive are members of the National Assembly. Furthermore, the National Assembly remains overshadowed by claims of cronyism, for example, Party members are actively promoted among those who qualify for election. This has led to the existence of a small pool of individuals who circulate between different positions within the peoples committee and the mass organizations. This has serious implications for broadening citizen participation in these platforms. This, as is argued by the UNDP (2006), compromises the role of the representatives, how questions can be posed, and whether accountability lies with the administrative unit or the citizens.

As is noted above, in Vietnam, the party is made up of people's committees at different administrative levels: provincial, district and commune. The role of the people's committees is to monitor the executive branch, and in particular the pathway for information between higher authorities and citizens; and to support and encourage state agencies to implement laws effectively. In theory the peoples committees should safeguard processes of citizen participation in policy processes and ensure that direct democracy is implemented. In practice, however, the committees have only limited capacity to carry out this supervision in an effective manner, and too little attention is paid to process and too much to formalities (UNDP, 2006).

The stories told and examinations made by the authors in this book depict rural contexts as host to diverse sets of stakeholders, often characterized by serious conflicts of interest and diverging vulnerabilities perpetuated by uncertainty in and shocks to their livelihood systems. The strong formal role of polity in promoting rural development during the centrally planned era and its limited adaptive capacity in terms of meeting the diversified and dynamic contextual needs led to the bypassing phenomena introduced above. Vietnam's transition to a market socialist economy means that the economy has become an important sphere of governance in Vietnam.

The liberalizing of the economy was intended in part to increase the adaptive capacity of the governance system. Many observers suggest, however, that a totally deregulated market,



devoid of any collective responsibility, could have the contrary effect, and instead undermine the adaptive capacity of rural contexts to address controversy, uncertainty and complexity. The effects of the 2008 economic crisis suggest that there is some truth in this claim. In this regard, representatives of the economic sphere should clearly feature as stakeholders in the National Assembly and other party-level multi-stakeholder platforms. In this way, just as in the polity, the perspectives of the different stakeholders can temper or regulate how the market operates as a change agent in the governance of rural development processes in Vietnam.

The changing character of grass roots democracy and the gradual appearance of international and local NGOs in Vietnam show that civil society is gradually becoming a legitimate sphere of governance in Vietnam. Civil society will undoubtedly appear more often as an important sphere of governance. Many authors, for example, highlight the contribution of this sphere in promoting adaptive capacity in rural contexts.

Mass organizations in Vietnam are intended to represent the wider views of the citizenry in Vietnam and are the main channel by which a citizen can access the polity sphere. Looking more specifically from the perspective of the rural development sector, mass organizations are under-represented, and civil society and the private sector remain absent from mass organizations. The inclusion and acknowledgement of these two spheres in the operation of mass organizations would secure a more broadly based participation by stakeholders in the governance of rural development. It would also address one of the principal criticism of mass organizations – that they are too closely aligned to the state.

Experience shows that some of the structures in place intended to deepen democracy, such as the GDD, fall short of the mark. Chapter 9 suggests that the guidelines embodied in the GDD are too general and do not take into account some of the contextual and sector-related needs manifest in prevailing issues. The GDD should be operationalized more actively to complement the formalistic and its articulation as a legal framework for direct participation, and more attention should be paid to process. The GDD has been heavily criticized for its lack of adaptability to local contexts. In this regard, UNDP (2006) argues that more local autonomy should be granted in the implementation of the decree. Additional incentives should be put in place to encourage the active participation of clients of and actors in governance processes. New approaches should be employed that monitor more effectively the coherence between the act of participation and outcomes or change processes. UNDP (2006) also suggests that funding and rewards should be applied to those institutions that rigorously apply the principles of the GDD, for example, the mass organizations.

At present, implementation of the GDD is restricted to the public sector. In order to ensure that it is mainstreamed into a broader set of change processes it should be operationalized in civil society and the private sector. If all spheres of governance are going to be involved in implementing the GDD, then monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be put in place to ensure rigorous implementation and support the adaptive capacity of the decree.

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## APPENDIX 1 THE RDVIET PROGRAMME

These research activities primarily include projects related to the agriculture, forestry or rural development sectors in Vietnam. The objective is to further develop existing research and teaching capacities at the collaborating institutions to enable them to carry out multidisciplinary research that will analyse rural development and reduce poverty in the rural areas. It combines approaches from the social and natural sciences, systems analysis, natural resources management and rural livelihoods analysis. This has been achieved through networking activities, including annual national workshops and scientific meetings; support to relevant multidisciplinary research projects with a focus on poverty reduction; institutional analysis and work on food security at the participating centres; support for research training and capacity building; and a programme website. The capacity building component includes a two-year MSc programme, PhD training and participatory curriculum development. The results from the first phase (2004–07) include the publication of 15 to 20 scientific papers, seminar proceedings, popular scientific articles, training manuals, the production of 10 MSc graduates, and initial training for five to eight PhD students.

In 2008, Sida, and SAREC its department for research cooperation, held a scientific meeting in Hanoi. These scientific meetings have been an annual event since the research cooperation between Sweden and Vietnam formally began. The 2008 meeting had an additional function. It marked the end of formal research support to Vietnam from the Swedish development aid budget. The participants in developing this book looked critically at some of the key messages which can be found in an emerging partnership arrangement between Sida and Vietnam: Partnership for Adaptation to Global Environmental Changes (PEARL). One of the major conclusions of this book is that, owing to the gaps and inefficiencies in present rural development policies, stakeholders can either completely bypass many policies or adapt them in such a way that they are better aligned to their direct needs. Cast in a negative light, this outcome could be viewed as a problem in terms policy compliance. Findings from the different cases suggest, however, that this trend can instead be viewed as a means to pave the way for a process that has already begun – power sharing and negotiation between the state, the commercial sector and civil society. This conclusion has been taken on board when formulating the PEARL concept, in which Sweden can share its lessons learned on co-governance on a level playing field.