



*The Underlying Causes  
of Ethnic Minority  
Poverty in Northern  
Mountainous Vietnam*

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## Abbreviations<sup>1</sup>

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADPC	Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre
CEMMA	Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas
CCFSC	Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
GSO	General Statistics Office
IEMA	The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NEZ	New Economic Zone
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
UNISDR	United Nations. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
SFE	State Forest Enterprise
VLSS	Vietnam Living Standards Survey
VND	Vietnam Dong
WHO	World Health Organisation

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<sup>1</sup> As a convention throughout this report, an 's' has been added to an abbreviation where it is in the plural.

## Executive Summary

This study is a contribution to CARE's planning process in Vietnam. The body of this report provides a poverty profile of Vietnam's EMs and explores the underlying causes of the strikingly high incidence of poverty among EMs. The conclusion offers some initial reflections on what the implications of this analysis are for CARE, as it develops future programmes in Vietnam.

Vietnam's ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous region are, against every measure, substantially poorer than Viet Nam's ethnic majority Kinh. Although there are important socio-economic differences among the 53 ethnic minority groups including of distinct cultural and linguistic minorities in Viet Nam, a Vietnamese ethnic minority is five times more likely to be born poor than their Kinh countrymen. While the majority of the country has experienced impressive economic growth and reductions in poverty since the introduction of Doi Moi (1986), ethnic minorities have for the most part not enjoyed the same gains. They are disproportionately located in lower income brackets, for example 60% of the Hmong earn under \$380 compared with only 20% of Kinh. Educational attainment levels are much lower with only 12% of Dao entering lower secondary school and an estimated 20% of ethnic minority women have never attended formal education.

Why are Vietnam's minorities so very poor? The underlying causes of poverty in ethnic minorities in Vietnam consist of a complex, interrelated mix of factors which can be grouped in three broad categories, drawn directly from CARE's global 'UCP framework': **social positions, human conditions** and **enabling environment**.

### **Social positions**

Two macro-level social factors are drivers of ethnic minorities persistent poverty: discrimination and weak representation in the civil society sphere. Both majority and ethnic minority informants identified discrimination and stereotyping as a powerful obstacle to development in EM communities. Harmful stereotypes include 'laziness' and 'backwardness'. These harmful stereotypes persist, in part, because civil society organisations representing ethnic minorities are relatively few, fragmented, and generally not influential at the levels they need to be to influence meaningful change. The relatively weak ethnic minority civil society organisations reflect a wider pattern of invisibility and voicelessness for ethnic minorities in policy making processes that directly affect their well being.

A powerful driver of poverty at community level is culturally specific attitudes to gender. Ethnic minority women in Vietnam are based primarily in and around the home and as a result can be almost invisible. The particularly low social status of ethnic minority women inhibits their ability to engage in the public sphere, whilst a heavy work load and an extended working day compounds this isolation and vulnerability.

### **Human conditions**

Substantial human conditions underlie poverty for ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous region. Opportunities for formal employment for ethnic minorities are extremely rare. Ethnic minority engagement with the formal market economy is limited, due to a largely subsistence approach to agriculture and their lack of integration into the cash economy. Costs for accessing markets are higher whilst the returns given the lower quality, unprocessed nature of goods, are generally lower.

Language barriers and geographical remoteness conspire to keep most ethnic minorities from full participation in the education system. Furthermore access to health information is low, whilst distance from health centres high e.g. 8.3km for Kinh versus 13.6km for ethnic minorities.

### **Enabling environment**

A critical underlying cause of most ethnic minorities poverty in Vietnam is the lack of access to productive land. The legacy of land reform in Vietnam has pushed ethnic minorities into ever more remote regions, where the natural conditions are unfavourable and traditional knowledge unsuitable or inapplicable – the traditional way of life has been both undermined and eroded. Population pressure due to migration has increased competition for land, leaving minorities in marginal locations with fewer alternative opportunities for market engagement and development. This increasing population pressure further degrades already marginal land.

Supplementing subsistence with forest products has always been a traditional part of life but for many it is now increasingly vital for livelihood and food security. Consequently forest resources are dwindling and becoming degraded, serving to threaten biodiversity, watersheds and drainage, the onset of climate change serves to intensify the degradation. The very resource base on which poor ethnic minority farmers are dependant is at risk and because of their location, lack of natural endowments and poorly diversified income climatic shocks in the form of natural disasters will bear heavily upon their livelihood security.

In locating new resources to utilise and exploit, ethnic minorities inevitably make themselves more remote in their search, further fragmenting communities and effectually increasing the physical and cultural distances between themselves and the rest of society. Inevitably, land that is yet to be settled on will be of poorer quality and more remote, for the government this will make it increasingly difficult and unattractive to service such areas which will therefore pose further barrier to their social integration and economic development.

The government has, to its credit, introduced several programmes intended to improve the situation of EM people, but most of those efforts – including infrastructure and agricultural extension – have been inappropriate or ineffective. The government in Vietnam (and in most countries) tends to adopt a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to policy and service delivery. This approach may have worked well for the country’s ethnic majority, but it has failed to deliver for Vietnam’s diverse, and highly vulnerable, ethnic minorities.

## 1. Introduction

This report was prepared by Rowena Humphreys and Vu Thi Hien for CARE International Vietnam. This report identifies and explores the underlying causes of poverty for Ethnic Minorities in Northern Vietnam to help inform the design of new Care International in Vietnam programme.

This study sits in the wider context of CARE Internationals 'Unifying Framework'<sup>2</sup>. This framework has generally been applied within the context of a single country or country office although here it is being applied to a set of minority populations within a single country. The concepts of social positions, human conditions and the related enabling environment have all been addressed in the analysis of the underlying causes of poverty, drawing upon key literature and interviews with key informants and stakeholders including CARE International in Vietnam.

Given the broad nature of this topic the reader should be mindful of limitations, in terms of both time and data availability<sup>3</sup>. Glewwe, Agrawal and Dollar (2004) criticise the Vietnam Living Standards Surveys for not sampling enough ethnic minority households which serves to directly inhibit data disaggregation and analysis. Additionally further data disaggregation, based upon gender, is also difficult. As a result most information becomes grouped into the 'Northern Upland minorities'.

Although the causes and drivers of poverty, inequality, and the factors that keep ethnic minorities trapped in poverty are complex, six main thematic causes have been identified in consultation with CARE:

- The legacy of history, past politics and past policies (section 3.1);
- The failure of today's policies to remove social exclusion (section 3.2);
- Lack of access to agricultural and natural resources and vulnerability to natural disasters (section 3.3);
- Limited access to markets (section 3.4);
- Poor access to social and welfare services (section 3.5);
- Pervasive gender inequality dimension that reinforces the poverty trap for women in particular (section 3.6).

Together these factors combine to create a powerful poverty trap, from which it is difficult for ethnic minority peoples to emerge.

To guide the reader, the underlying causes of poverty have been highlighted in bold throughout the report.

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<sup>2</sup> Unifying Framework – Quick explanation

<sup>3</sup> Information is still lacking on a wide range of basic development indicators and questions remain about data quality, gaps in data, and a lack of dis-aggregation, making it difficult to track progress by gender, age, and ethnicity. Almost all nationally available data comes from government sources. However, there are significant differences in data from different government sources, particularly when comparing routine reporting data from administrative systems with survey data.

## 2. Background and Poverty Profile

Vietnam's population is around 84 million. In 2001, the Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (CEMMA) recognised 54 ethnic groups. The majority Kinh made up around 87% of the population, and the remaining population is made up of 53 ethnic minorities (*dan toc thieu so, dan toc it nguoi*). It is recognised, however that the classification of ethnic groups is imperfect (ADB, 2002). These minorities tend to be concentrated in remote upland and mountainous areas, and have poor access to public services and basic infrastructure. Poverty and social assessments have consistently shown that this relatively large population of ethnic minorities (approximately 10 million people) has levels of poverty, food insecurity and hunger levels higher than the ethnic majority Kinh. There are differences within regions, but most evidence suggests that poverty is highest in parts of the Northern and Central Highlands.

Over the last decade, Vietnam has made significant progress in achieving economic growth and poverty reduction. Economic growth averaged 7.3% over the decade 1995-2005, and per capita income growth at 6.3 %. This growth has been achieved with little worsening of overall national inequality – the Gini coefficients rose modestly from 0.34 in 1993 to 0.36 in 2006. However, ethnic minorities have not benefitted from this impressive record of growth. Ethnic minorities in Vietnam are five times more likely to live in poverty than their ethnic majority countrymen. In 2006, 10.2 percent of the Kinh and Chinese people were poor, compared to 52.2 percent of ethnic minority people (World Bank, 2008).

The rural poverty rate of 35.7%, compares starkly to the urban rate of 6.6%, whilst ethnic minorities fare particularly worse compared to the Kinh. They make up 14% of the population but disproportionately account for 29% of the poor in Vietnam.

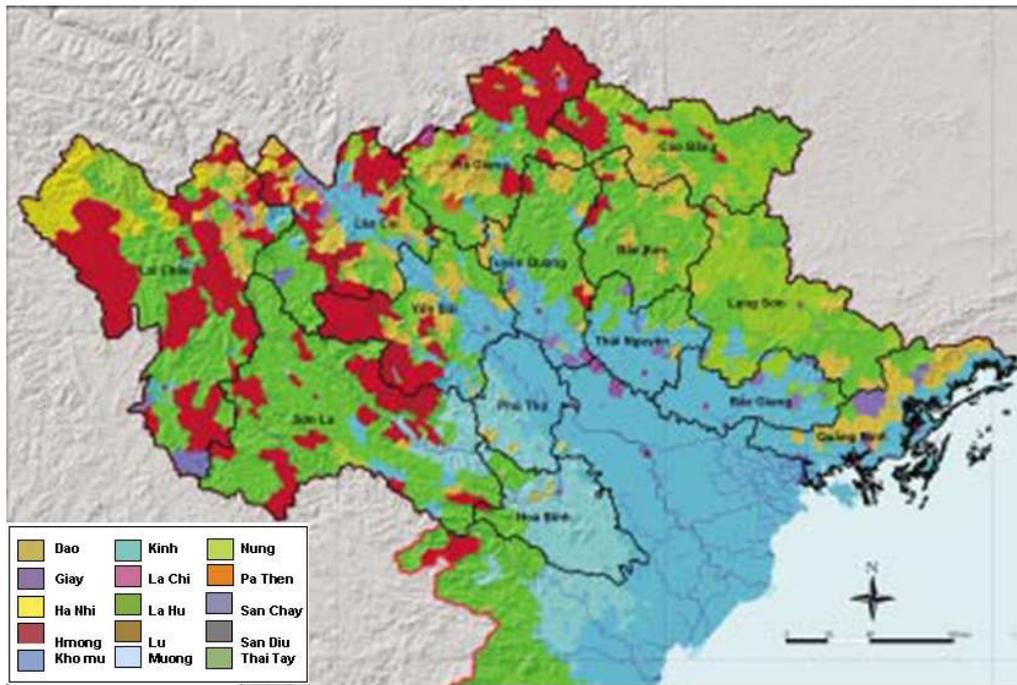
**Table 1: Income distribution of selected ethnic groups in Vietnam**

Income per Household	Kinh (majority)	Pa Co	Muong	Van Kieu	Hmong	Tay	Other Ethnic Minorities
0 – 3,200,000 VND (0- \$192 US)	10.0%	53.5%	13.0%	24.4%	22.0%	18.2%	12.2%
VND3,200,001– 6,300,000 (\$193 - 378 US)	10.0%	15.5%	45.7%	26.7%	22.0%	36.4%	24.3%
6,300,001 – 12,100,000 (\$378 - 727 US)	26.7%	18.3%	19.6%	35.6%	29.3%	13.6%	25%
12,100,001 – 61,700,000 (\$728 - 3,705 US)	53.3%	12.7%	21.7%	13.3%	26.8%	31.8%	25.3%

Source: World Bank (2007)

In ten of the eleven provinces, in the Northern region, ethnic minorities are in the majority. In certain provinces a single ethnic minority group dominates (the Muong in Hoa Binh, the Tay in Bac Kan and the Thai in Son La province). However the mix is intricate and the Northern region consists of approximately 15 different major groups (GSO, 2001a) (See Figure 1 & Table 2).

**Figure 1: Ethnic minorities in the Northern Highlands**



Source: IFPRI (2002)

The distribution of ethnic minorities in Vietnam is such that 75% are found in the Northern and Central Highland region and there is a strong relationship between the spatial distribution of ethnic minorities and the incidence of poverty, as illustrated in Figure 2. In the Northern Mountainous regions where the rural poverty head count is above 60%, the percentage of ethnic minorities is in most case above 50%.

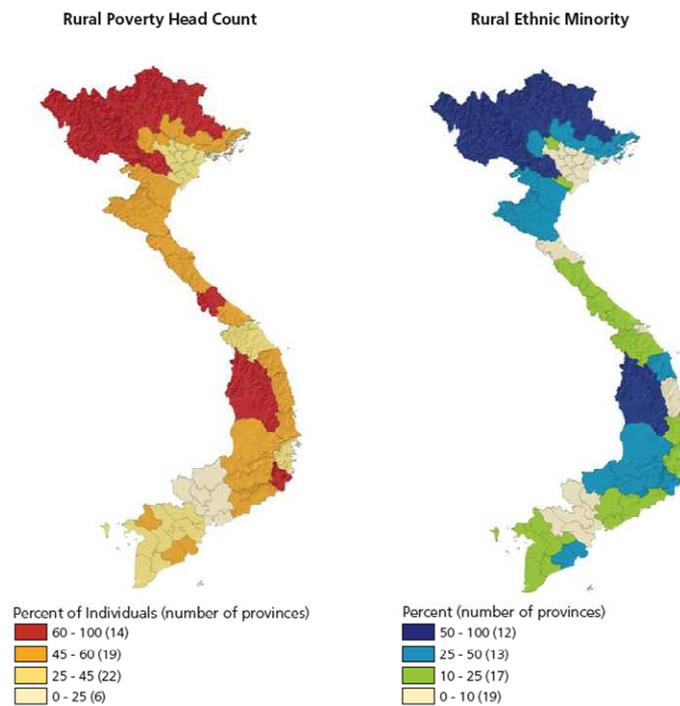
**Table 2: Classification of ethnic minorities situated in the Northern Highlands (with populations of over 100,000 people)**

Vietnamese name	English name	Total population	Major provinces <sup>4</sup>	% of the population, 1999
Kinh, Viet	Vietnamese	65,795,718		86.2
Tay	Tay, Tho	1,477,514	Lang Son, Cao Bang, Tuyen Quang, Bac Kan, Yen Bai, Thai Nguyen, Lao Cai, Dak Lak, Bac Gaing, Quanh Ninh, Hoa Binh, Lam Dong, Binh Phuoc, Dong Nai, Gia lai, Ha Noi, Binh Tuan, Phu Tho, Kon Tum, HCMC, Phu Yen, Lai Chau, Khanh Hoa, Ba Ria-Vung Tau	1.9
Thai	Black Thai; White Thai	1,328,725	Son la, Nghe An, Thnah Hoa, Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Hoa Binh, Dak Lak, Lam Dong, Kon Tum, Gia Lai	1.7
Muong	Muong	1,150,000	Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Son La, Ha Tay, Ninh Bonh, Yen Bai, Dak Lak, Dong Nai, Gai Lai, Kon Tum, Ha Noi, Binh Phoc	1.5
Nung	Nung	856,412	Lang Son, Cao Bang, Dak Lak, Bac Giang, Thai Nguyen, Bac Kan, Lao Cai, Lam Dong, Binh Phuoc, Dong Nai, Yen Bai, Tuyen Quang	1.1
Hmong	Mhong (Meo)	787,604	Ha Giang, Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Son La, Yen Bai, Cao Bang, Nghe An, Bac Kanm Tuyen Quang, Thanh Hoa, Dak Lak, Thai Nguyen, Hoa Binh, Lam Dong	1.0
Dao	Yao, Mien	620,538	Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Quang Ninh, Cao Bang, Bac Kan, Lai Chau, Lang Son, Thai Nguyen, Dak Lak, Son La, Hoa Binh, Phu Tho	0.8
San Chay	San Chai	147,315	Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen, Bac Giang, Quang Ninh, Yen bai, Cao Bang, Lang Son, Dak Lak, Vinh Phuc, Bac Kan	0.2
San Diu	San Diu	126,237	Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh	0.2

Source: World Bank (2007) & WHO (2002)

<sup>4</sup> Refer to WHP 2002 for a geographical distribution of ethnic minority groups in Vietnam and a list of provinces listed by proportion of ethnic minorities.

**Figure 2: Income groups of different ethnic minorities**



Source: Baulch et al (2002)

In order to address rural poverty in the mountains, the Government of Vietnam has developed a number of targeted rural development policies and investment programmes on poor areas where ethnic minorities are found. For example, the Program for Socioeconomic Development in the Most Disadvantaged Communes (Program 135<sup>5</sup>), launched in 1998, focuses on mountainous and remote areas; of the 1,715 communes it covers in Region 3<sup>6</sup>, there are 1,568 communes in the mountainous areas, most of the population in this region are ethnic minorities. Another well-known programme is the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Programme which contributes to the lives of ethnic minorities with special difficulties through supporting agricultural production and support for essential materials such as nets and dishes.

Despite long-standing commitments by the Government of Vietnam to improving the life of all Vietnamese, poverty has, persisted for ethnic minority communities within Northern Mountainous areas. The reasons for this are diverse but, in summary, ethnic minorities live in difficult terrain characterised by low productivity, complicated further by poor infrastructure and limited access to the market economy. Characteristics, unique to ethnic minorities, also play a major role in determining their status, notably education and land endowments (van de Walle & Gunewardena, 2000).

Not all ethnic minority groups are equally disadvantaged. Improvements and reductions in poverty rates in Vietnam have seen the Khmer and some of the Northern Upland minorities experience reasonable growth. In Ha Giang province the poverty rate among the Tay is 19% compared to the 42% among the Hmong is 42% (World Bank, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> So called, as it was established by Government Decision No. 135/1998/TTg.

<sup>6</sup> The poorest, most remote or border areas

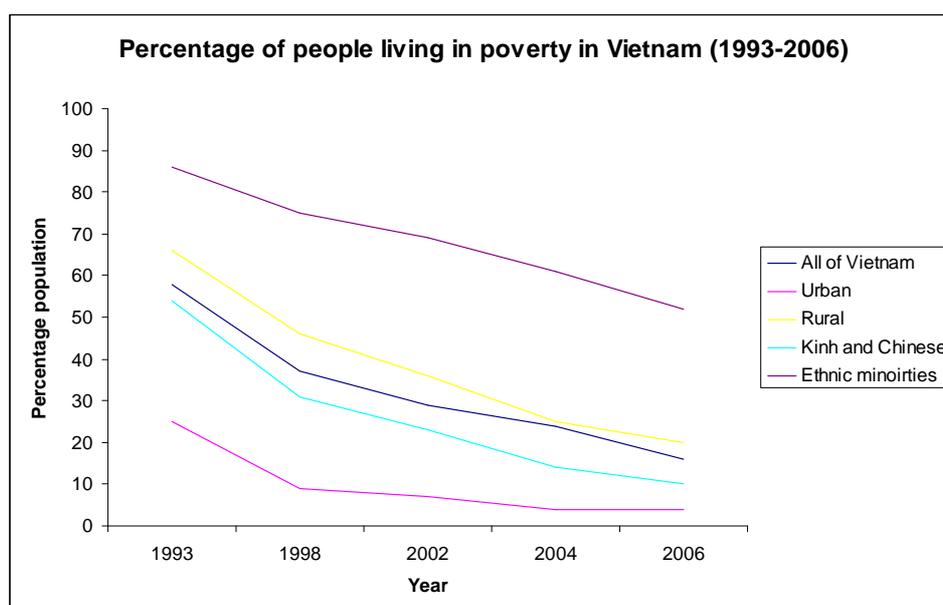
**Table 3: Provinces with the lowest Human development Index (HDI) in Vietnam (16 out of 61 provinces)**

HDI rank	Province	% of EM	Rank of highest EM%	GDP/capita in PPP	Life expectancy at birth	Region
<b>Medium Human Development</b>						
46	Hoa Binh	72	7	777	64.3	NW
47	Binh Phuoc	19	19	861	66.4	SE
48	Bac Giang	12	24	785	66.3	NE
49	Phu Yen	5	33	1016	62.1	South Central Coast
50	Lang Son	83	4	1014	60.7	NE
51	Tuyen Quang	52	10	800	63.4	NE
52	Ninh Thuan	22	18	1011	64.4	SE
53	Yen Bai	50	11	785	63.9	NE
<b>Low Human Development</b>						
54	Bac Kan	87	3	576	62.6	NE
55	Cao Bang	95	1	892	56.3	NE
56	Lao Cai	67	8	751	63.1	NE
57	Son La	83	6	649	65.6	NW
58	Gia Lai	44	12	917	59.4	Central Highlands
59	Kon Tum	53	9	845	56.8	Central Highlands
60	Ha Giang	88	2	542	54.6	NE
61	Lai Chau	83	5	658	58.5	NW
Vietnam				1860	70.9	

Source: NCSSH, National Human Development Report (2001)

In general in the Northern Mountainous region, the Hmong and Dao seem to fare much worse than the Tay and the Thai. Collectively, however ethnic minorities have not witnessed the same gains in poverty reduction as the ethnic majority – poverty rates have declined at much slower and many of the provinces in the Northern mountainous region, where there are high proportions of ethnic minorities, are ranked in the bottom half of the country in terms of human development (see graph 1 & table 3) (Baulch *et al.*, 2002; Poverty Task Force, 2002a; Swinkles & Turk, 2006).

**Graph 1: Percentage of people living in poverty in Vietnam**



Source: Data from the World Bank (2007)

### 3. Underlying Causes of Ethnic Minority Poverty

#### 3.1 The Legacy of the Past: Politics and Policies

##### Coping with Change

No assessment of poverty in the Northern Mountainous region, can overlook the changes that have taken place over the last century. We do *not* argue here that ethnic minorities in the highlands are trapped forever by their history, but rather that:

- Over many generations, ethnic minorities in the mountain regions have developed strong farming and cultural traditions of agricultural self-sufficiency, based on extensive farming systems closely integrated with highland forests;
- Traditional livelihoods have been dislocated by the shock of major policy reforms (land, ethnic Kinh settlement into mountain regions, bans on opium cultivation), from which communities are still struggling to adjust;
- Past government policies were (and arguably still are) based on notions of assimilation of ethnic minorities into the State, and in so doing created sectoral approaches on the ground that could not accommodate to the distinct circumstances of ethnic minorities;
- Investment policies and programmes have targeted ethnic minority geographical *areas*, rather than ethnic minority *peoples*; not surprisingly the primary beneficiaries have often been ethnic Kinh in those areas, and the investments have done little to help shift minorities onto a new livelihoods path that offered a new route out of poverty;
- An enabling environment that would allow, facilitate and encourage ethnic minorities to have more say in, and to adapt, the policies that affect their lives, is not yet in place;
- Ethnic minorities have been unable to access and benefit from ‘one size fits all’ services and programmes, and have therefore remained “trapped” in unproductive livelihoods;

Politically much has changed for ethnic minorities in Vietnam. Vietnamese imperial power was traditionally strongest in the lowlands and weakest in the highlands. Historically their remote location left ethnic minorities, to some degree, autonomous with regards to customary laws, institutions and general ways of life. For example new social organisations like the Farmer’s Associations, Women’s Union and Youth Brigades were introduced that consequently undermined traditional groups and hierarchy within ethnic minority groups. Through resettlement and land management changes, the traditional *nha rong* (communal house), has also largely been lost; these were not just a physical centre for a village, but also an important cultural venue and place – and space - for processes of meeting and sharing information. There was little interference in the highlands, from the lowlands, until about 100 years ago and, by most accounts people in the Northern Mountainous regions were **regarded as outside of the lowland policy agenda**. Policy changes following North Vietnam’s independence posed various challenges for land rights and access which subsequently altered the lives of ethnic minorities living in the Northern Mountainous region and consequently led to a chain of policy events that have significantly altered how ethnic minorities live today.

The official stance on ethnic minority people in Vietnam is that they **need to be assimilated into the national socialist orientation** (Baulch, 2002). The integration of ethnic minorities

are considered important for national unity, particularly in light of past conflicts<sup>7</sup> (McLeod, 1999, Baulch et al, 2002). An overall policy of inclusion of ethnic minorities, was clearly espoused in the VIIIth National Party Congress:

*“From now to the year 2000, active and steady measures should be taken to achieve the three main targets of eradicating hunger, alleviating poverty and stabilising and improving the living conditions and the health of people of ethnic minorities as well as of inhabitants in mountain and border areas, to wipe out illiteracy, raise the people’s intellectual standards, respect and promote the fine cultural identity of ethnic groups; to build up clean and strong political foundations and Party officials and members among ethnic groups in all regions and at all levels”. Development Orientations in Key Fields, VIIIth National Party Congress Documents. (World Bank, 1999)*

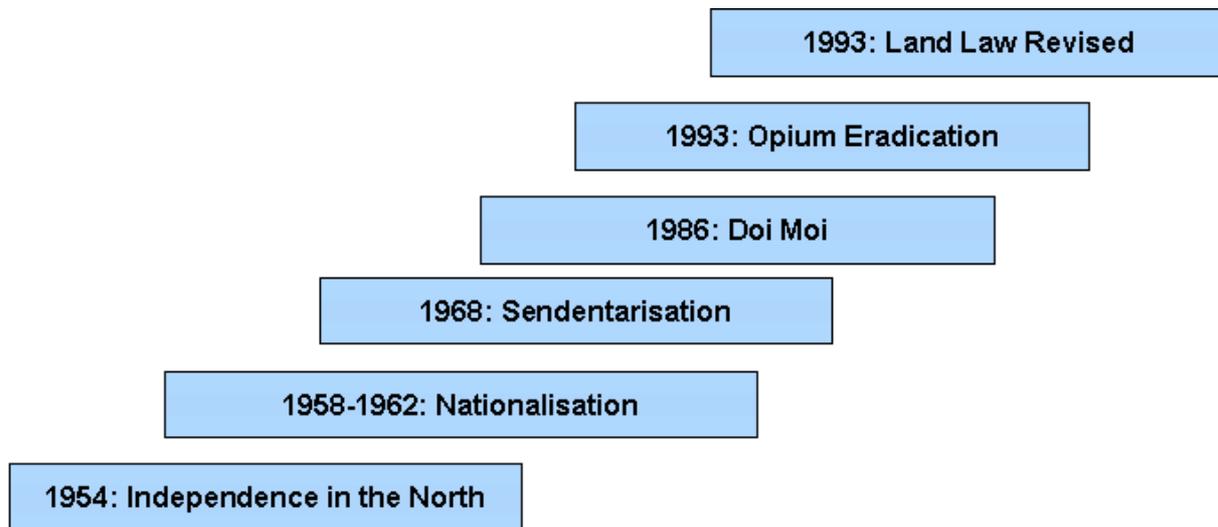
In practice however, the Government’s well intentioned policies have not been realised. One key reason for this is that past policies have **not adequately or sufficiently differentiate between strategies for poverty reduction in the ethnic majority versus the minorities**, furthermore they have not adequately disaggregated between the various ethnic minorities. In the Northern Mountainous region ‘more than half of the districts have ten ethnic groups and each ethnic group may be spread over hundreds or even thousands of communes’ (World Bank, 2008). This extreme ethnic diversity and geographic spread makes poverty reduction a challenge, even for particularly well-intentioned governments.

Ethnic minorities have, over centuries, developed complex farming systems and indigenous practices and knowledge that are well-adapted to their agro-economic environments but modern practices and policies serve to undermine or reject these. Research has shown that past customary land ownership laws effectively managed the ecosystems and social relationships between communities (ADB, 2002) Policies, particularly those implemented at the end of the 1990s have not only impacted on individual farmers’ land use, but have also induced the collapse of existing informal institutional arrangements governing mountainous upland management (Clement et al, 2006). Although these outcomes probably could not have been predicted, there is no doubt that **past government policies have greatly impacted local institutions**.

The view that ethnic minorities have long been considered as outside of the policy agenda perhaps provides some explanation for why **policy making processes are considered predominantly Kinh-centric** and therefore often inappropriate for ethnic minorities, (Jamieson, 1996, van de Walle & Gunewardena, 2003). The key policy shocks, following independence are highlighted in Figure 3 and are elaborated in the following section.

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<sup>7</sup> In particular the wars of the late colonial period, the First and Second Indochina War and the American war whereby ethnic minorities were recruited on to respective sides and are therefore often treated with distrust.

**Figure 3: Key policy shocks for Vietnam's ethnic minorities**

Source: theIDLgroup (2008)

### **Nationalisation**

The government nationalised large areas of land in mid-land and upland areas of Northern Vietnam in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Land with a slope above 25 degrees was designated for forestry purposes and was managed by a system of State Forest Enterprises (SFE's).

In addition to forest management, SFEs played an important role in regional development. Particularly in remote upland areas, SFE's provided their employees with housing, health care and hospitals, and operated schools and kindergartens.

On the whole nationalisation has **served to erode traditional tenure rights** that controlled forest resource use, however in some provinces, such as Ha Giang, there are strong customary rights of tenure for farmers, reinforced by the ongoing allotment of land certificates (IFAD, 2004).

### **Sedentarisation and Doi Moi**

In 1968 the State implemented the policy of Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement which significantly changed land use and management of ethnic minorities in the North of Vietnam. One of the main policy objectives was to eliminate shifting cultivation, seen as a 'backward', environmentally unsound practice, and a constraint to modern agricultural development.

To implement fixed cultivation and fixed settlement, many villages in high and medium elevated areas were moved down for fixed settlement and cultivation together with other peoples in valleys such as the Tay, Nung, Thai and Muong. Forest land in their previous villages was given back to the State management. In the new settlements, **cultivated land of the locals was re-allocated to settled people, which created resentment and conflict.**

The erosion of the traditional culture may be attributed to the dilution of the population, in the face of significant displacement. The resettlement and establishment of New Economic Zones (NEZs), later established as part of the Doi Moi reforms, for example saw the ethnic majority arriving in great numbers, often having starting capital, and the ability to rapidly impose their 'social, economic and cultural superiority in the most accessible and most fertile

areas of the region” (World Bank, 1997). **Many ethnic minorities were displaced into less favourable and more remote regions as a result of the NEZs.**

Between 1955 and 1975, the State moved nearly 400,000 *Kinh* people from lowland areas to the northern mountainous areas. In 1960 the *Kinh* population in the Northern mountainous areas was approximately 600,000 but by 1989 this had increased to 2.5 million, accounting for 19.3% of the total population. Most of the *Kinh* took part in agricultural production.

Migrations and movements clearly had a big impact on ethnic minority communities. Although economic migration by family members brings the prospect of remittances, much of the impacts are negative:

- **Loss of traditional farming systems**, as lowland settlers have moved into mountain regions;
- **Loss of traditional livelihoods**, as traditional shifting cultivation is regarded as an unsustainable practice;
- **Loss – or threat – to cultural values and support systems** which protected individuals within communities in the past.

### ***Opium eradication***

Localised poppy and opium production continued until around 1993. When the ban, launched as part of the National program on Drug Abuse Control, was established, Hmong and Dao peoples **lost significant avenues for engagements in the cash economy**. Although alternative crops were introduced it was difficult to find equivalent alternatives, whilst the impacts upon social and cultural practices were also significant. Due to the previously heavy reliance upon opium the production of other high-value crops such as vegetables and fruits received less emphasis.

### ***Land Law revision***

*Kinh* migrants, and prominent ethnic minorities living in district towns and commune centres, were better positioned to benefit from land allocation programs in contrast to the poorer ethnic communities living in more remote areas. Land purchases and disputes between local people and the new migrants took place, resulting in a shortage of cultivating land for some local families. In the Northern mountainous provinces, some of the local minority groups, which had earlier committed to fixed farming practices and fixed settlement, started to return to shifting cultivation and settlement due to the shortage of cultivating land. Turk and Swinkles (2007) note that ***‘the allocation has been based very much on the ability to invest and with ethnic minorities having a shortage of funds and labour this policy has had the effect of excluding them from a large share of the land allocation’***.

Changes in the control and access to forest land have significantly affected ethnic minorities. While the allocation of forest land to households may be decreasing conflicts between rural people and state enterprises in some areas, in other regions they have appeared to intensify it. Compared to the majority, **ethnic minorities are much more reliant upon forestry for income**. In the lowland areas allocation increases the forest use rights of local households, and often government program goals and community management objectives are similar: to produce timber for a market economy. In many highland areas, however, land allocation may erode community control over forest resources by imposing rigid government-defined guidelines that reduce management freedom held for generations on a *de facto* basis. Land allocation in those areas may accelerate deforestation as it pushes people to open up new areas for the cultivation of food crops and leads to the short-term exploitation of forest land before allocation.

Markets are poorly developed in rural areas which limits the efficiency gains from freeing up land. Ethnic minorities have less cash available to invest and capture by local elites invariably took place. Ethnic minorities, with poor understanding of the allocation procedures, often lost out by selling land at an undervalued price.

Moreover, local officials do not always implement land allocations in the way that national policy makers intended. Land allocations may be incomplete, and communities lack knowledge as to their rights. Based on research observations in Tuong Duong district (Nghe An Province), Vien et al (2006) noted that although “*official land allocation is supposed to allow everyone the chance to buy and sell land...in practice, commune and hamlet officials do not recognise this option*”.

The preceding reforms, following a top-down approach, **saw the clearing of forests that ethnic minorities placed significant spiritual value** on, for agriculture, industry and military purposes. The population pressure as a result of Doi Moi has also seen people increasingly clear forests (some of which were classed, by ethnic minorities as ‘spirit-forests’<sup>8</sup>) for agriculture to satisfy increased market demand. The culmination of these changes in the way land was allocated and utilised left many minority groups out of the development equation, (Bulch et al, 2004). The formalisation of land rights has tended to squeeze slash-and-burn farmers, especially as traditional land and forest use rights are poorly defined and frequently not recognized by the formal legal system (Huy & Dai 1999). The traditional structure of ownership of land and forest has been replaced, resulting in limited access to these resources by ethnic minorities (table 4).

**Table 4. Integration and development between ethnic minority groups in Northern Mountainous Vietnam**

Pre-1960's	Today
Community ownership	State and collective ownership
Community managed	Lands managed by the state or state owned farms
High mobility	Low mobility & reduced living areas
<i>de facto</i> & traditional land management systems	State run and unclear land management systems
Low population densities	Higher population densities
Slash and burn technique	Fixed cultivation and settlement

Source: theIDLgroup

### **Exclusion from Policy Processes**

The impacts of the land use changes have had significant impact upon the lives of ethnic minorities. Figure 3 describes and accompanies the following analysis of why and how ethnic minorities have been generally outside the policy making processes and the impacts this has had on their lives.

<sup>8</sup> Evidence suggests that a complex set of cultural elements are combined in a ‘forest spirit language culture’ however government policies have served to overlook these and the customary laws that governed them (FAO, 1995).

### ***Low representation of ethnic minorities in decision making bodies***

Encouragingly ethnic minorities have a representational quota within the National Assembly and currently occupy 86 out of the 500 National Assembly deputies, however decision making process for being 'too centralised and remote' and occurring without adequate representation of local people (Jamieson, Cuc & Rambo, 1998). This in turn has reportedly fuelled distrust and misunderstanding (Jamieson, Cuc & Rambo, 1998). **Ethnic minorities are under-represented in government ministries and agencies** whilst the main agency for advising and implementing government policies, Committee on Ethnic Minorities (CEM), has low minority representation and is considered relatively weak, particularly in the face of recent corruption scandals. Baulch *et al* (2002) emphasise that 'many minority groups [also] feel remote from the process of policy- and decision-making'.

Moreover are a host of agencies involved in rural governance including Mass Organisations and locals CSO's who are increasingly expected to participate, particularly in the provision of services and upland development (Jamieson, Cuc & Rambo, 1998). However this fragmentation of responsibilities and resources, along with equitisation and deregulation have further complicated and blurred boundaries and responsibilities.

### ***Low cultural awareness of decision makers***

This low representation goes hand in hand with a low cultural awareness which is proliferated through into policy making – **low cultural awareness** between the majority and the minorities and amongst the different minorities. This is regarded as partly to blame for the dissolving of traditional institutions during the independence of North Vietnam leading, in part, to the cultural and geographical fragmentation of ethnic minorities which further serves to inhibit inclusion and engagement in decision making processes.

### ***Weak capacity of decision makers and duty bearers***

Combined with low cultural awareness local government representatives often **have limited capacity to implement policies and programmes** – at times not fully understanding their duties and responsibilities. Anecdotally the Government of Vietnam has under-investment in human resources and perhaps accounts for a lack of trained, literate and high capacity local government/ implementing staff.

### ***Duty bearers are unable to grant rights***

With this weak capacity and unawareness of the policy environment it is noted that duty bearers are therefore in a weak position to inform citizens of their rights. Given language barriers this is exaggerated by an inability to communicate – **often laws and legislation are rarely written in minority language** which further inhibits citizens ability to access by own their accord. The Grassroots Democracy Decree is an important step at increasing involvement in policy making and making the state more accountable but duty bearers, as well as citizens, particularly ethnic minorities, are often unaware of what this really means for them (Embassy of Finland, 200x).

### ***Weak citizenry is unable to claim rights***

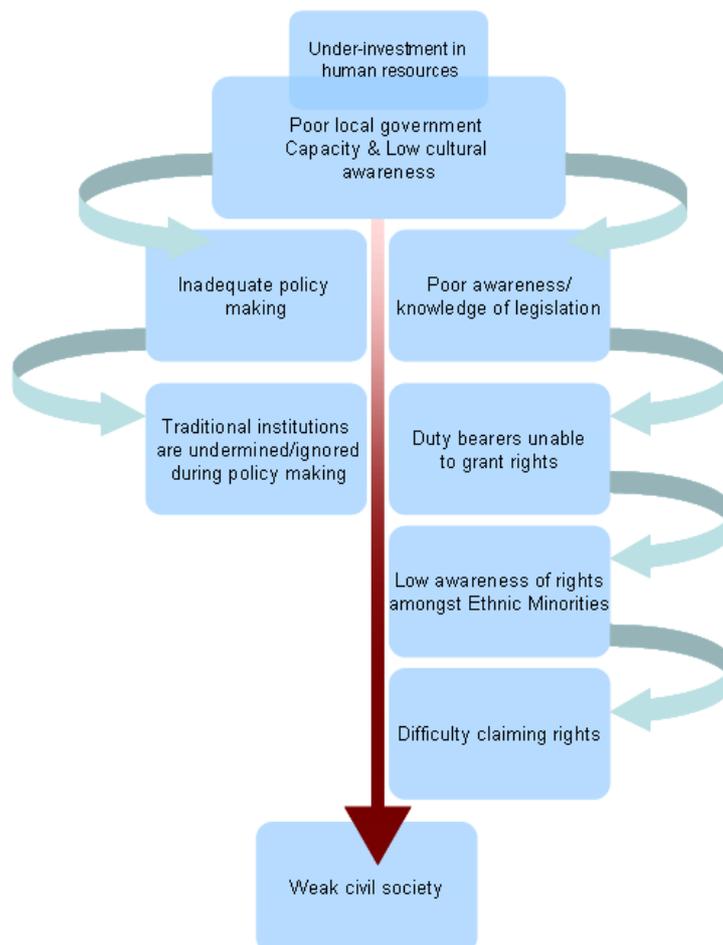
Ethnic minorities have low awareness of rights and are unable to claim them because of duty-bearers limitations – both in their administrative abilities and in terms of not being able to speak the local minority language. Their **low engagements in the decision making processes** is also indicative of lower education levels – overall the enabling environment for their inclusion in such practices is weak (Embassy of Finland, 2006).

### ***Weak voices***

Inability to claim rights and low representation in decision making bodies leads to the voice of ethnic minorities being weak – the people representing them in decision making do not fully understand the 'on-the-ground' situation and therefore policy making can be mis-informed.

**Labelling and stereotypical assumptions of ethnic minorities are common throughout Vietnam.** Ethnic minorities are generally regarded as a group that need to be integrated and assimilated rather than a diverse group with their own norms and way of life. Policy makers often view ethnic minorities as more subsistence orientated and resistant to change or new methods because of their personalities and/or cultural values. However analyses that take a more careful look, and move away from broad stereotypes, show ethnic minorities are often behaving rationally, and that their behaviour is a result of local circumstances and opportunities rather than backward economic decisions that are a necessary product of their ethnicity.

**Figure 4: Claiming Rights – A Vicious Circle for Ethnic Minorities**



Source: theIDLgroup

### 3.2 Social Exclusion

Different ethnic groups have entered Vietnam at different historical periods (Schliesinger, 1998). Some have lived in Vietnam for thousands of years, while others have migrated to the country in the last few centuries resulting in a complex cultural mix. Despite this diversity in groups and their respective lives and culture they are often grouped and considered collectively, further complicated by a lack of disaggregated data.

**Table 5. Integration and development between ethnic minority groups in Northern Mountainous Vietnam**

	Net Primary school enrolment (1999) (percent)	Gross Lower secondary school enrolment (1999) (percent)	Married to another ethnic group (1999) (percent)
Kinh	93.4	64.8	0.9
Tay	94.7	51.0	19.1
Thai	83.9	32.1	6.4
Muong	94.5	52.3	10.2
Nung	89.3	39.2	25.0
Hmong	41.5	4.5	0.8
Dao	71.4	11.8	6.5
All	91.4	60.0	2.5

Source: World Bank, 2007

#### **Stereotyping**

Despite the official drive to assimilate ethnic minorities, **discrimination against Vietnam's minorities is considered pervasive in the government's policies and programmes** and particularly so in the Northern and Central Highlands (AITPN, 2003). Ethnic minorities are considered 'backward', 'inferior', 'lazy' and 'superstitious' and for these reasons are continually regarded as needing to be more like the ethnic majority Kinh in order to succeed, escape poverty and make the same gains as the ethnic majority Kinh.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that **stereotyping is found in the media, donors and even NGOs** today, moreover it also suggests that this has, to an extent, been internalised by ethnic minorities themselves. Discrimination is both institutional as well as on an individual level and the stigma attached to minorities has implications for their propensity to access services, markets and fully participate and engage in wider society.

Stereotypes are commonly used as a reason *why* Government's policy initiatives fail to bring ethnic minorities the same gains as the majority. For example new technologies brought to the highlands in order to develop and improve yields are not always complimentary to the highlands farming systems but Eklof (1995:5) remarks that when the technology is not taken up by the farmer they are considered 'backward' as opposed to those who do and are alternatively labelled 'progressive'. The fact that the technologies might not be appropriate or

culturally sensitive are not often considered. This would serve to reinforce the **low cultural awareness**, as well as perhaps the poor capacity, of local agricultural extension staff. Thus if policy making becomes informed under these sorts of conditions it may serve to reinforce these negative stereotypes, giving ethnic minorities few avenues to challenge potentially discriminatory behaviour.

***'Ethnic minorities should be more like the Kinh'***

Anecdotally it is seen that because the Kinh have done well, ethnic minorities need to be more like them in order to "develop". Although there is official interest in maintaining and developing cultural identity, particularly dances, folklore and modes of dress, standard textbooks tend to emphasise, and even venerate, Kinh culture and history (Glewwe, Agrawal & Dollar, 2004). Baulch et al (2002) notes the 'ongoing tension between the willingness to accept differences, and cultural assimilation or Vietnamization'.

Baulch et al (2002) further indicate that minority groups with higher levels of assimilation with the ethnic majority (e.g. the Tay and Muong) seem to have made improved gains in terms of poverty reduction and development. Those faring better arguably have more resemblance to the Kinh e.g. patriarchal society and lowland cultivators and able to speak Vietnamese better – such as the Tay and Thai. Those that are less assimilated, for example the Hmong, have accordingly not fared so well.

Varied levels of exposure and assimilation to the ethnic majority Kinh, are perhaps linked to economic mainstreaming and development. Glewwe, Agrawal and Dollar (2004) use the following data (Table 5) to describe the degree of assimilation within different ethnic groups. They note that, amongst ethnic minorities, groups with low levels of intermarriage are also the groups for whom education enrolment rates are the lowest. A review of the literature does not reveal whether these groups' separation is a matter of choice, or an unintended consequence of linguistic and geographic barriers.

In policy, the proliferation of Kinh superiority is translated into the nationwide promotion of agricultural practices such as wet rice cultivation, which are appropriate to lowland areas. This approach not only ignores local conditions in the highlands, but also undermines the historical and cultural significance and success of land holdings and livelihoods which have generally developed over time, and have largely been in harmony with the natural environment.

***The environment is not yet enabling ethnic minorities***

A wide range of government interventions designed to help ethnic minorities have been introduced since 1993. These interventions include: subsidizing the cost of transporting essential goods to remote areas; funds for resettlement and sedentarisation; subsidies for salt, reforestation funds, the provision of potable water, road maintenance and upgrading, the provision of livestock and seedlings to farmers; gifts of radios to remote households;

***Alcohol consumption in ethnic minority communities***

A regularly cited negative *cultural* characteristic of ethnic minorities has been that of excessive alcohol drinking. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is often considered a factor behind why ethnic minorities are not making the same gains as the majority. Although research into this is limited for Vietnam, studies from other countries with displaced minority populations highlight three themes notable drinking patterns:

(i) Accumulative stress – which is most typically felt by immigrants that are forced to leave their homeland and adapt to a new society;

(ii) Socioeconomic stress – often experienced amongst ethnic minorities who feel disempowered because of inadequate financial resources and limited social class standing;

(iii) Minority stress, which refers to the tensions that minorities encounter resulting from overt ethnic discrimination and abuse (Caetano, Clark & Tam, 1998). All three factors seem to currently face ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous of Vietnam.

subsidies for connecting villages to the national grid and the provision of educational scholarships.

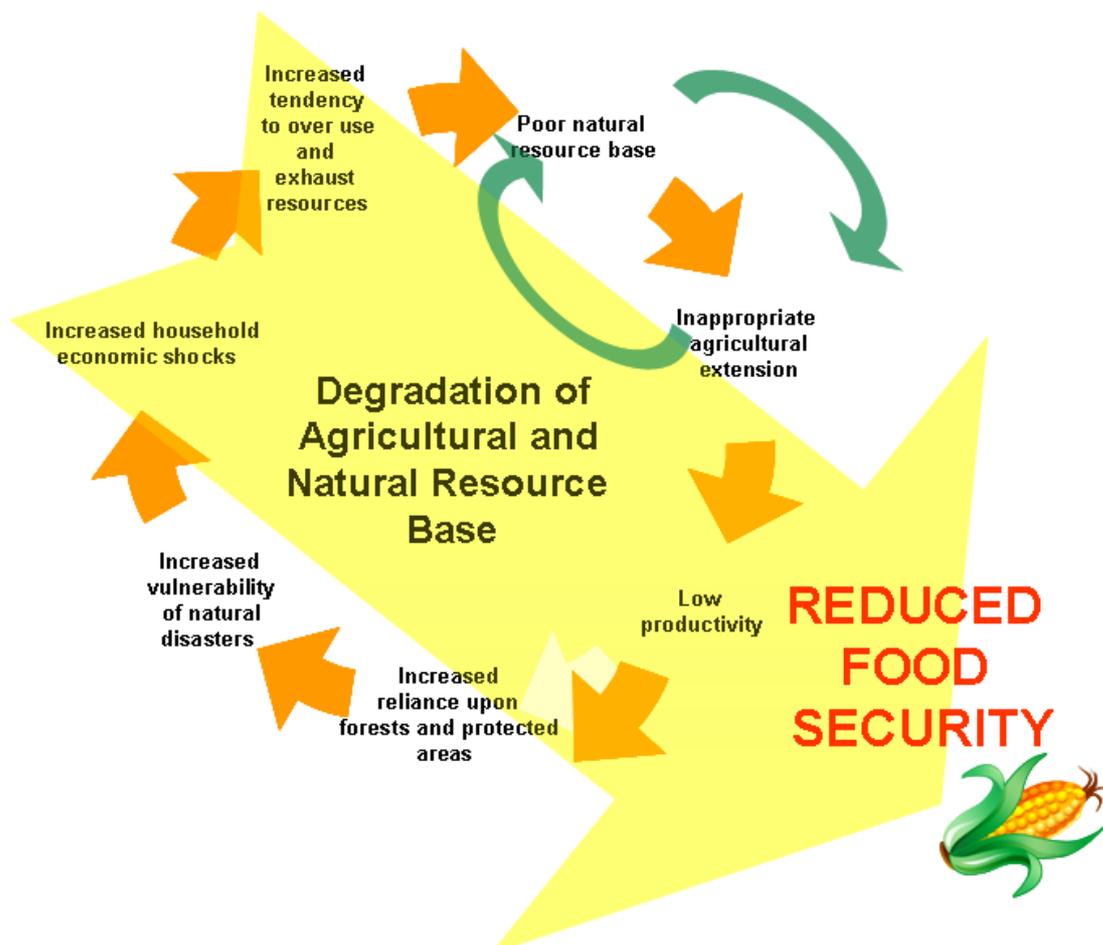
Certainly these policies and programmes have realised some tangible benefits for ethnic minorities in the North. However, the **preconditions for many of these interventions to have an effect are simply not present**. The Government of Vietnam has accordingly been criticised for not being 'universally supportive of ethnic minorities' (Glewwe, Agrawal & Dollar, 2004). For example, education is provided predominantly in Vietnamese, and many ethnic minorities household cannot afford the electricity once connected to the national grid.

Overall, the displacements experienced by ethnic minorities have resulted in a **loss of traditional social structures**, and a lack of inclusion in new 'modern' structures, which have prevented ethnic minorities from realising the gains from economic and social development at the same rates as the majority. De facto exclusion results in a sense of powerlessness, which has the ability to rob people of their self-confidence and aspirations as well as their ability to challenge their exclusion.

### 3.3 Restricted Access to Natural and Agricultural Resources and vulnerability to natural disasters

Figure 5 displays the current status amongst many ethnic minority households in Northern Mountainous Vietnam. Although there are areas where relatively stable farming systems are in place, with little evidence of forest degradation e.g. in the Upper Ca river basin (Vien et al. 2006), other areas experience inward migration and population growth which, along with other factors, have contributed to the degradation of the natural resource base. Inappropriate agricultural extension advice and technologies have been unable to substitute for these declines in productivity. Low productivity is commonplace in most regions of Northern Mountainous Vietnam. Due to the low agricultural productivity, Van de Walle and Gunewarda (2003) find that some land is in fact giving negative returns - but local people adjust to this declining soil productivity by working ever harder. Working an average eight hour day, ethnic minorities work 697 days per year/household. In contrast, the ethnic majority work 397 days to achieve the same returns (Baulch et al, 2002). Ethnic minorities have an increasingly high reliance upon forests. This is particularly the case as crops become more vulnerable to climate change – their vulnerability to economic shocks also increases. The cycle repeats causing households to overuse and further degrade, undermining their most basic asset – land. This is developed and described below in more depth:

**Figure 5: Drivers of Food Insecurity**



Source: theIDLgroup

### **Poor natural resource base – Lacking endowments**

The main factors of production are land, physical capital and human capital. The extent to which a household lacks these, influences their propensity to be poor. Although ethnic minorities tend to have larger quantities of land, compared to the ethnic majority Kinh, the land itself is generally of lower productive potential and quality. Lower holdings of irrigated land partly accounts for this difference. Approximately 14% of ethnic minority farmers have access to gravity- or pump-irrigated cropland. In contrast, approximately 54% of Kinh farmers farm irrigated land (Table 6) (Turk and Swinkles, 2006).

Grazing land is another natural asset. It is often considered a common-pool resource in the agricultural systems of ethnic minorities. Following the decollectivisation process in the 1980s and the 1993 Land Law, resulting in the allocation of individual land use rights, common grazing land has been retained but limited in some villages and completely abandoned in others.

The introduction of a market in land use rights has also resulted in greater concentrations in land holdings with the administrative allocation by the state in 1988. Some poor households lost existing land holding due to distress sales. Despite not having the available ethnicity disaggregated data, a series of household surveys provide clear evidence of an increase in rural landlessness from 2.0% in 1993 to 4.8% in 2002 in the Northern Mountainous region which coincides with population pressure (ADB, 2002).

In sum, ethnic minority households, particularly those in the high mountainous regions, **lack access to high quality natural capital** and lack the financial capital for agricultural inputs, such as fertiliser, to improve its quality and potential yield size.

### **Inappropriate agricultural extension**

The Government's provision of agricultural extension could be seen as a way of achieving greater livelihood security and income stabilization for the poor. However in reality the cropping systems and technologies being promoted by agricultural extension agents have often been regarded as inappropriate (lowland techniques in highland areas), often focusing on wet rice and fruit trees (Vien et al., 2006) – therefore **focusing more on production for markets than on food security**.

Little appreciation of the complexity of the overall farming system – which may comprise valley bottom rice, upland rain-fed crops, trees and agroforestry, as well as carefully managed shifting cultivation and fallowing – is being incorporated into the advice given. Although the selection of agricultural innovations is typically more complex in mountain regions (multiple land types, altitudinal effects on variety duration, and cropping system), there is little substitute for building the capacity of extension workers which needs to be high, their visits regular and the farming advice relevant and appropriate. Given the terrain farmer-to-farmer diffusion of information is relatively slow so extension workers need to be particularly skilled in transferring good practices – including good indigenous practices - when and where appropriate.

**“Extension is often too theoretical, not applicable to the local setting as too infrequent. Extension officers sometimes do not even visit minority households, this is made worse by the fact that many cannot speak minority languages”**

*Key informant interview  
November 2008*

Agricultural policies have generally put a strong emphasis on production and therefore questions whether they fully embrace the issue of food security have been raised. Research by Baulch et al (2002) in the Northern uplands highlights that the higher the degree of

commercialisation and cash-cropping the better-off and more food-secure the farmer. The numbers of ethnic minorities taking this route to food security however is limited; as hunger is prevalent in some communities. Ethnic minorities are much less likely than majority farmers to engage in the cash economy. Despite having relatively higher degrees of crop and food diversification, ethnic minorities tend not to produce a significant surplus and farm mostly at subsistence levels (Baulch et al, 2002). This relatively low productivity and lack of integration into the cash economy are both barriers to full participation in local or national agricultural markets.

Although extreme hunger has been eradicated in Vietnam's ethnic majority, it persists amongst the minorities: a recent study shows that 94 percent of the Thai interviewed in Nghe An and 87 percent of the Muong studied in Thanh Hoa did not have enough to eat for at least 2 months or longer (Turk & Swinkles, 2006). It is striking to consider that the Thai have been considered as one of the relatively better-off ethnic minorities in Viet Nam -- but clearly stark inequalities remain in some areas.

**Low productivity**

There is substantial variety among provinces with regard to degree of reliance on agriculture. For example in Lai Chau, only 6% is used for cultivation compared to the interior of Bac Giang whereby cultivation accounts for 50% of the total land area (Baulch et al, 2006). The agricultural sector is much more prominent in the Northern Mountainous Region than in the rest of the country. Agriculture makes up 42% to gross domestic product (GDP) in the Northern Mountainous Region, compared to the national average of 24% of GDP. Given that crops for ethnic minorities constitute approximately 74% of household income it is perhaps unsurprising that people associated their poverty status with the lack of high quality land and a reliable water supply (Vietnam-Sweden 2000).

**Table 6. Size of land used by Kinh and Ethnic Minorities in 2004 (rural Vietnam only)**

		North East		North West	
		Kinh	Ethnic Minority	Kinh	Ethnic Minority
<b>Annual cropland</b>	<i>% having land</i>	87	98	66	99
	Size <sup>1</sup> (m <sup>2</sup> )	2714	5059	4800	10980
<b>Irrigated annual cropland</b>	<i>% having land</i>	43	13	11	2
	Size <sup>1</sup> (m <sup>2</sup> )	1741	2007	-	-
<b>Perennial cropland</b>	<i>% having land</i>	20	19	20	19
	Size <sup>1</sup> (m <sup>2</sup> )	3513	5460	3834	3585
<b>Forest land</b>	<i>% having land</i>	16	42	15	28
	Size <sup>1</sup> (m <sup>2</sup> )	8011	17674	-	21182

Source: Turk & Swinkles (2006)

**Reliance upon forests and protected areas**

The reliance upon forest land in line with over-exploitation, degradation, and increased vulnerability to natural disasters leave limited opportunities for economic development. Compared to the ethnic majority Kinh, minorities are approximately twice as reliant upon forests as the majority. Their reliance upon forests is for supplementing, subsistence timber, fuelwoods, bush foods and traditional plants. For those involved in agriculture, nutrient supplements from forests are often of critical importance to productivity. Such supplements

can be in the form of mulch from leaves gathered in the forest. Another source of nutrient supplement is forest grazing by livestock which converts nutrients from forest biomass into manure.

People engaged in such commercial activities as trapping, collecting minerals or forest industries such as logging. Such people may be part of a mixed subsistence and cash economy. Where these people differ from the first two categories is in the fact that they depend on income from forest-dependent labour rather than from direct subsistence use of forest products. It is important to note, however, that this type of people-forest interaction can exist even in a highly monetized context, although anecdotal reports suggest that Hmong minorities engaging in illegal timber harvesting have generally receiving an extremely low price for cutting and giving to middle-men who subsequently sell it on for a substantially larger profit (FAO, 2007).

Forest's contributions to ethnic minorities' livelihoods include:

**Household Use:** timber, fuelwood, wild foods, medicinal plants, other non-timber forest products, grazing for animals, forest based agriculture

**Food Security:** Depend on forest foods when crops fail to meet seasonal needs or to provide dietary supplements

**Income Generation:** From sale of any products listed above or sale of agricultural or livestock production dependent on forests, income form forest based labour (FAO, 2007).

### ***Vulnerability to natural disasters***

Poor quality natural assets and the isolation of many communities in the northern mountainous regions has resulted in a greater degree of vulnerability to natural disasters particularly compared to non-remote areas. This increased vulnerability is a function of the marginality of land as well as the greater degree of difficulty of providing rescue and rehabilitation. Remote rural locations are by their very nature often unfavourable locations which are more exposed to climate and other risks.

There are strong links between sustainable livelihoods and people's capacity to cope with and recover from extreme weather events. Sudden reductions in incomes, due to shocks, have led more families to become more poor. A recent survey (Oxfam 2008) showed how farmers in Ninh Thuan were experiencing more droughts with rain coming later, in more intense bursts. Inevitably the poor will be the worst hit, particularly women, due to their roles in providing water, food, fuel and care.

According to the United National Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released in February 2006, the average temperature of the earth has already risen by 0.74 degrees centigrade in the last 100 years, it is expected to increase by an average of 3 degrees over the next century, assuming greenhouse emissions continue to rise at current rates. Even the minimum predicted temperature increase, 1.4 degrees centigrade, will represent a profound chafe, unprecedented in the last 10,000 years. Poor farmers, who are particularly reliant on good weather for their food security and livelihoods, will be the worst affected.

The World Bank highlight that the three main impacts of climate change on the rural poor and their livelihoods will be: increased environmental risks, reduced livelihood opportunities and in consequence stress existing social institutions. Vietnam already suffers from around six to

ten annual storms and tropical depressions which cause floods and heavy rains (Figure 6 presents a hazard map of Vietnam). They normally take place between June to November with increased intensity during September and October. The northern parts of Vietnam are particularly susceptible to landslide, erosions and flash floods (UNISDR, 2004). Fundamental changes in rainfall patterns, together with rising temperatures, will shorten growing seasons, reducing crop productivity. These trends are already in evidence in particular the unpredictability of the weather and the greater the degree of flood and drought intensity compared with previous years is exhibited in Northern Mountainous region of Vietnam.

Chaudry and Ruyschaert (2007) emphasise that people's ability to adapt to climate change is strongly related to their entitlements to access and use resources. The unequal allocation of resource rights and opportunities remains a priority constraint to effective adaptation to climate change for the poor. In general ethnic minorities in the Northern upland regions lack high quality natural and productive capital but they also lack local institutions through which their voice can be heard and information shared.

Ethnic minorities, particularly the Hmong and the Dao, are more rural and remote and there is added pressure on disseminating information and diffusing adaptation techniques. Various adaptive strategies are being practiced around Vietnam but they rely heavily upon institutional strength to disseminate information as well as providing market support to reduce the potential of exploitation from middle-men (ADPC, 2007).

Following a reduction in common grazing land opportunities for livestock production the risk management strategies of the rural poor has also declined. Formal insurance schemes or security networks do not exist and people therefore have increased reliance upon traditional coping strategies but because the potential of raising livestock has reduced so have the potential coping strategies that could be applied to a livelihood crisis.

A study showed that landlessness and near landlessness is greater among poor households and the main reasons cited for this landlessness among poor households were losses resulting from cattle disease, flooding, saline inundation, poor cultivation technology and fluctuating rice process. With all of these rising in frequency, alongside climate change poor households are likely to be at an increasing risk. This serves to drastically affect the households employment security its income and its degree of marginalisation.

Examining the environmental risks that rural populations have historically faced, their cultural responses to these risks and the institutional configurations that facilitate individual and collective adaptation strategies is therefore a fruitful area of inquiry and policy analysis for generating effective coordination with external interventions.

### ***Increased tendency to overuse and exhaust resources***

The effective management of upland landscapes and eco-systems is of critical importance to Vietnam, particularly because mountainous regions represent 75% of the total country area. Environmental degradation, the loss of biological diversity and the deterioration of watersheds with a population of marginalised ethnic minorities have become important problems in Vietnam's mountainous region (Jamieson, Cuc and Rambo, 1998). The challenges are distinct and the economic gaps between the delta and northern mountains region continue to widen (Clement et al, 2006, Pandy & Khien, 2001).

The environment of the ethnic minorities in the mountainous areas has been rapidly and drastically degraded over the past 50 years (ADB, 2002) due to war migration and development programmes. Although the population density is low the natural carrying capacity of the land is being reached (Jamieson, Cuc and Rambo, 1998). This is being proliferated as leading to environmental degradation and poverty.

As a result of these pressures changes in agricultural practices have taken shape in order to get the reach comparable yields. Given the pressure on the land fallow period, which would have been generally lasted 10 to 15 years have now been reduced to just three or four years, leaving significantly less time to restore productivity. Intensification of agricultural practices has also taken place. IFAD note that in Ha Giang<sup>9</sup> that intensive crop husbandry methods and the heavy fertiliser and agrochemical use that poses dangers for both long term soil fertility and human intake of the foods produced.

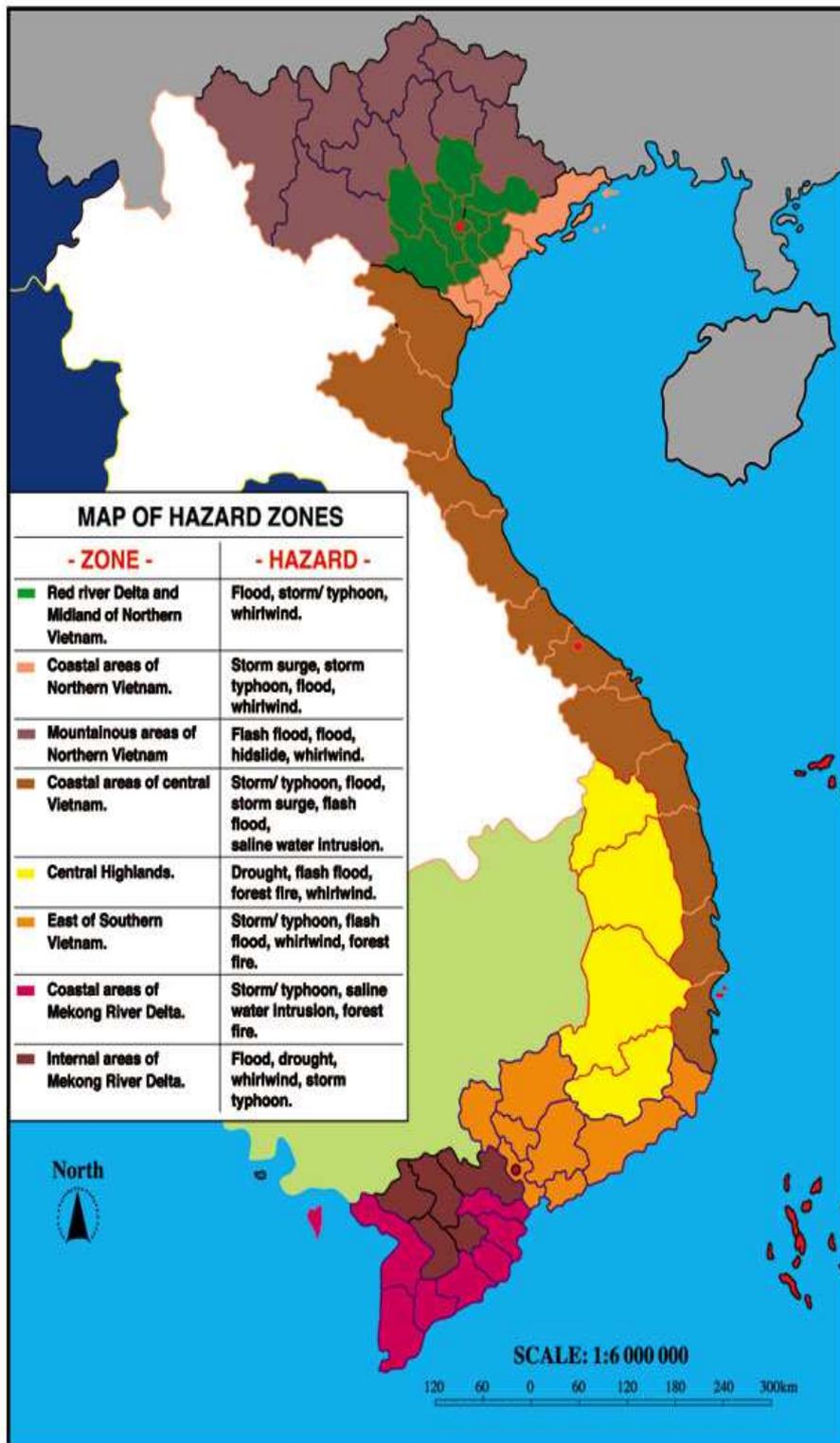
As already noted not all **ethnic minority groups are equally disadvantaged and this is important because if ethnicity is help to target government interventions** such as food subsidies there would be less wastage and identification would be more precise.

Social capital is a pre-requisite for sustainable management and development of natural resources and the engagement of collective action has been a way of life for ethnic minorities. Constructive resource management rules and norms have been embedded into many groups and considered part of the culture and society, common land which is commonly owned and shared by communities plays a very important role in traditional life but in light of decollectivisation has since been undermined.

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<sup>9</sup> N.B. 90% of the population in Ha Giang is form ethnic minorities.

Figure 6: Hazard Map of Vietnam

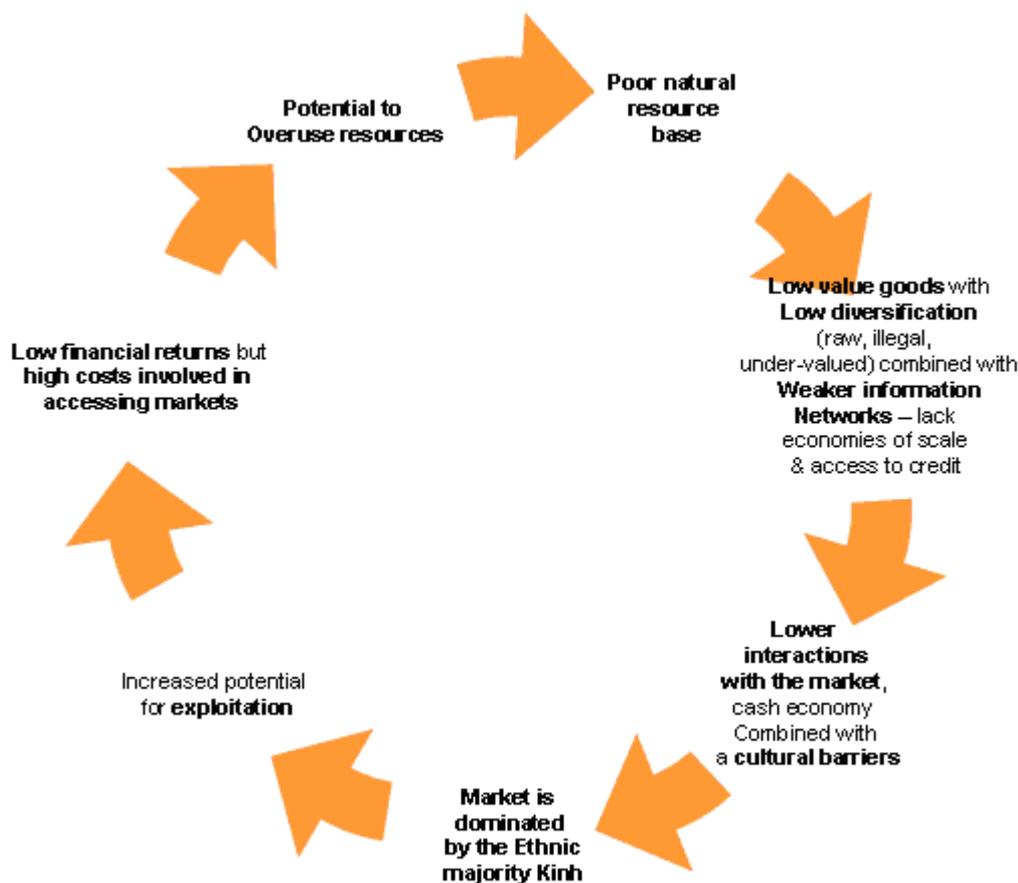


### 3.4 Limited Access to Markets

Conventional policies for market restructuring and reform – such as liberalisation and privatisation – cannot be simply assumed to be poverty-reducing through an anticipated ‘trickle-down’ process. On the contrary, it is now widely accepted that explicit methods must be considered in order to encourage and promote participation by the poor.

Providing access to markets, through physical infrastructure is not always enough, is not necessarily pro-poor, and does not automatically guarantee the utilisation of and exposure to market opportunities. The situation that ethnic minorities find themselves in is once again self-reinforcing policies to date has failed to break the cycle.

Figure 7: Access to markets



Source: theIDLgroup

#### Poor natural resource base

As highlighted in the previous section productive natural capital is key to pulling a household out of poverty. Ethnic minorities have tended to concentrate their incomes on crops, often with an emphasis on greater diversification, growing 1.4 more crops than the majority (IFPRI, 2006) (see Table 2). Overall the ethnic majority households are more diversified in their

income sources with higher reliance upon non-farm enterprises or wage-employment, which serves to reduce their vulnerability to shocks, particularly climatic ones (table 8).

### Goods for markets

As a result of the low natural resource base the goods that can be produced and marketed are often low in quantity, quality and value. In terms of quantity, **economies of scale are difficult to obtain given the geographical fragmentation**. In terms of quality many restrictions exist – knowledge of market expectations and pricing, a restriction of what can be produced given low resources plus low/poor technology results in a lack of finished products and therefore dealing more in raw, unfinished products which receive lower financial returns.

Ethnic minorities tend to rely upon the sale of lower value raw and unprocessed materials and crops such as corn and cassava (World Bank, 2007). It has however been proposed that the extent to which ethnic minorities engage in the market economy may be underrepresented perhaps because of the illegality of the trade engaged in (e.g. opium and medicinal plants to china) (Rambo, 1997).

In an effort to reduce barriers to markets for ethnic minorities credit has been pushed by the government, particularly through Programme 134, although it has been suggested, that such investments might be better spent on the development of markets or policies that ‘increase ethnic minorities involvement in business and trading’ (World Bank, 2007). It seems that ethnic minorities however tend to borrow less than the majority potentially indicating potential barriers to accessing credit (table 7).

The opening up of the Northern Mountainous region and population growth. More recently the favouring of Kinh in migration incentives, has been demonstrated through the financial assistance and incentives given compared with ethnic minorities. IEMA and McElwee (2005) notes that Kinh are given 3 ha of land, 3 million VND in cash, 10 million in construction materials for a house, 5 million VND in food equivalent, and 500,000 VND in moving/travel expenses compared to ethnic minorities who are generally only given 1 million dong government investment per household.

**Table 7: Uptake of rural credit by ethnic majority and minority populations in Vietnam**

Amount borrowed	Ethnic minorities	Kinh majority
None	32.1%	20%
1 – 1,999,999 (0 - US\$120)	11.9%	6%
2,000,000 – 4,999,999 (US\$121 - 300)	22.1%	12%
5,000,000 or more (US\$301 or more)	34%	62%

Source: World Bank (2007)

### Market Interactions

Ethnic minorities are often considered culturally less commercially orientated and their engagement in the cash economy is lower than the Kinh (Baulch et al, 2002). Ethnic minority

households have a much lower propensity to engage in trading, contributing to only 3% of a households income compared to the Kinh where it makes up 27%. Despite this more recent anecdotal reports suggest that minorities are increasing their integration into the market system, and have been doing so for some time. It would be expected that their interaction increases over time.

Indigenous market knowledge may prove decreasingly useful in the market economy particularly given competition from the majority Kinh and their more extensive market interactions. In the Cau Cau market, for example, in Si Ma Cai (Lao Cai province) the Red Mhong are found occupying their own area on the outskirts of the market, away from other minority groups such as the Tay and majority Kinh, in temporary, as opposed to permanent stalls (Widana, 2007). Inhibited by language barriers, they also have low levels of contact with those outside their group, which reportedly makes them 'invisible' to development efforts. According to the 1998 VLSS ethnic minority households that did not speak Vietnamese had per capita expenditures of only VND1.074 million, 60% lower than their Vietnamese speaking counterparts (VND1.641 million). Furthermore some ethnic minority groups have never even accessed university education – however there are strong links between education levels of income diversification.

**Table 8: Contribution to overall income growth of each income source by ethnicity in the rural Northern Uplands, 1993-1998**

Income source	Ethnicity of head of household		
	Kinh/ Hoa	Minority	Average
	(% of overall income growth)		
Crops	26	74	45
Livestock	8	7	8
Fisheries	2	3	2
Forestry	2	12	6
Enterprise	34	-13	16
Wages	12	10	11
Transfers	14	7	11
Other	2	0	1
Total	100	100	100

Source: IFPRI (2006)

### **Market dominance by Kinh**

However, even when ethnic minorities do access markets, the ethnic majority generally dominate. For example the village trader or shop is 'almost always Kinh', even when the ethnic minority population proportions dominate (World Bank, 2007). Swinkles and Turk (2004:1) emphasise that 'those who are able to prosper in the more remote parts of the country are likely to be from the Kinh majority population rather than from an ethnic minority group'. Whilst analysis shows that even if minority households had the same endowments as Kinh households, they would close no more than a third of the gap in living standards (Swinkles and Turk, 2004). This combined evidence would suggest that competition from the ethnic majority is particularly strong and that minorities are generally unable to compete.

### **Potential for exploitation**

Middle men play an important role in facilitating access to markets and will generally have more informed networks and market information and be able to out-compete those with less

knowledge and information. Often these middle men will be the ethnic majority and as such their engagement in the enterprise economy is significantly higher compared to the ethnic minorities (see table 8). However holding less knowledge and information of markets makes **ethnic minorities particularly susceptible to exploitation.**

### ***Low returns V High costs***

The high costs involved in bringing goods to markets are noted given the remoteness of the poorer ethnic minorities. The lower population density (111 people/ m/km<sup>2</sup> compared to the national figure of 231 m/km<sup>2</sup>) also makes such remote areas less of a priority to develop and thus infrastructure is poor. The Northern Upland region has 3,271km of road with an average road density of 0.032km/km<sup>2</sup> by comparison the national average is 0.045km/km<sup>2</sup> (IFPRI, 2006). The remoteness in Northern Mountainous areas and the associated high costs of transporting food grains from the deltas has meant that this area has enjoyed restricted benefits from the lowland rice production.

Past governments heavily invested in roads as a way of developing access to markets. In the Northern Mountainous region however this has deteriorated over the past decades due to war, natural disasters and budgetary constraints that have limited maintenance. More recently, infrastructure construction, particularly in remote and rural areas has been driven by Program 135 which has served to improve the accessibility to and from, what were once, extremely isolated communities with the intention of developing and integrating markets.

Given the terrain and remoteness the provision of infrastructure components such as sanitation, affordable energy and secure buildings remains a challenge. Construction of physical infrastructure in remote areas, especially mountainous and remote areas, is often not only less politically rewarding for central governments, but can also be technically very difficult. However the lack of physical infrastructure, and sometimes poor quality of it, poses obstacles for accelerated, private sector-led and socially inclusive growth (ADB, 2007).

Given the geography and remoteness of most ethnic minorities communities there are clearly limitations on the size of the market and its demand. Considering non-farm employment opportunities, unskilled labour opportunities are more frequent, while commercial enterprise is more frequent in communes where majority households reside. There are a number of barriers inhibiting access (van de Walle & Gunewardena, 2000). The structure of local labour markets entails that there may be mismatches between jobs and skills, particularly given a lack of Vietnamese language skills amongst ethnic minorities. Employers behaviours and attitudes may show tendencies towards recruiting from informal social networks, one in which ethnic minorities will, in general, have lower access to and knowledge of. Accessibility between the home and workplace may also be problematic whilst the labour itself may not provide a consistent income stream due to seasonality factors.

Recent econometric analyses have shown that ethnic minorities are poorer not just because of their location, remoteness, or the quality of the resource base, but because the returns they obtain on their labour and investment (in farming, education) is lower than that achieved by the ethnic majority (van de Walle & Gunewarda, 2003; Imai and Gaiha, 2007).

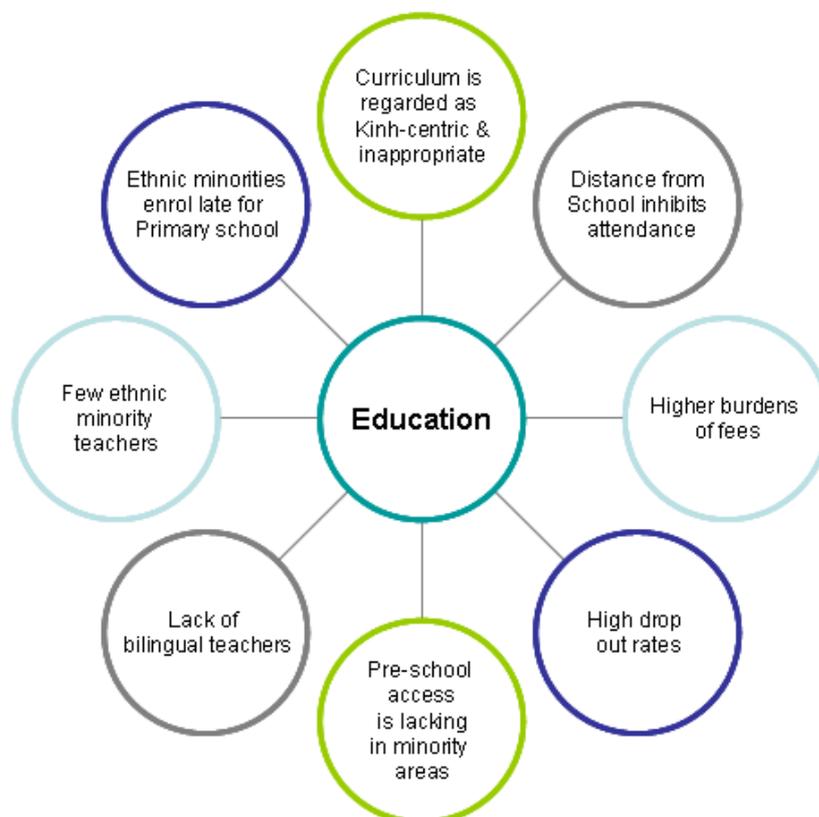
**3.5 Barriers to Social and Welfare Services**

Access to infrastructural facilities and services tends to be worse for ethnic minorities for example, they are much less likely to live in a commune with a permanent (as opposed to a periodic) market, a radio station, a health care centre and a lower secondary school. Ethnic minorities face numerous barriers in accessing government services, particularly in the areas of education, health and agricultural services.

**Access to education**

Like anywhere in the world education makes for a stronger citizen and facilitates engagement in civil society. The World Bank (2007) in Vietnam recently proposed that education is a major driver behind why ethnic minorities have not experienced the same gains as the majority. The provision, uptake, relevancy and quality of it combine to make for an intricate mix - figure 8 highlights some of the factors and challenges facing ethnic minority education in Vietnam today. The returns on education are consistently positive and significant for both the majority and the minority although van de Walle and Gunewardena (2000:13) emphasise that returns to minority groups are ‘substantially higher’.

**Figure 8: Education – Challenges and barriers**



Source: theIDLgroup

**Table 9: Education attendance levels between ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities (%)**

Ethnic group	Gross	Net	Net (Boys)	Net (Girls)
Kinh	113.6	93.4	93.5	93.4
Tay	135.4	94.7	94.9	94.4
Thai	135.5	83.9	87.2	80.5
Muong	133.4	94.5	94.9	94.0
Nung	135.6	89.3	89.7	88.9
Hmong	80.5	41.5	51.5	31.5
Dao	126.4	71.4	73.7	68.8
All Country	115.4	91.4	91.7	91.0

Source: World Bank (2007)

### **Kinh-centric education system**

The constitutions, education, laws and educational policy documents support the use of ethnic minority language and bilingual education<sup>10</sup> although in reality Vietnamese is the main medium for education, even in the areas where Vietnamese is not the predominant language spoken. In the 1998 VLSS only ten out of 334 primary schools surveyed provided some courses in an ethnic minority language (seven of which were in the Mekong Delta) (Baulch *et al*, 2002). What this meant in practice is well described by a visitor at that time (Box 1).

### **Gender gaps**

The gender gap in education is particularly striking in ethnic minority groups, whilst both girls and boys have lower attendance rates than the Kinh, female Hmong attendance is the lowest at only 31.5% compared to average female Kinh attendance of 93.4% (table 9). Educational activities are considered a top-down approach in which communities are rarely involved (Kosonen, 2005). There is a tendency to send boys to school over girls which reflects the need for families to use child labour and the greater share

#### **Box 1: Education: The Challenge of Turning Policy into Practice**

Kinh teachers are sent to these remote areas because there is a severe shortage of teachers from the local minority ethnic groups. The scenario described below typifies the many dilemmas they face. ....Teacher's dilemmas: A Hmong multigrade satellite school with a Kinh (ethnic Vietnamese) teacher in Lai Chau Province. The children and community speak no Vietnamese. The teacher has:

- no Hmong language
- no local knowledge
- no communication with students
- no materials, no teaching aids, no literate environment
- multi-grade training but cannot apply it
- no visits from educational support staff to date (e.g. by the headmaster of centre school):

The teacher wants to leave as soon as possible.

The quality of learning also suffers because many communities are too poor to make the best use of the education provided. Poor attendance and high drop-out rates, especially for girls, reflect the need for families to use child labour on their farms. In many areas high levels of iron and iodine deficiency impairs the ability to learn and lowers achievement in school.  
(Source: Pridmore, 1999)

<sup>10</sup> See the following policies for more details: 1991 Code of Primary Education – Policy and laws for education for all citizens. Directive 1450/GD-DT – Program of consolidation and development of education in mountainous, remote and difficult areas. Education is also tackled under the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction.

of the households burdens being placed on the females.

### ***Education policy development***

The Government have made encouraging steps towards to improving and providing incentives for accessing education. They have given admission to schools without entrance examinations, lowered standards to pass the examinations, scholarships and waiving of tuition fees and created attractive packages for teachers to attract them to the area. ***The quality of education however remains a cause for concern*** and the language in which it is delivered is often not in tune to local ethnic minorities needs. One estimate suggests that 40% to 50% of teachers in the Mountainous areas are not even trained (ADB, 2007). Therefore despite well meaning incentives on the government's part the language barrier serves to negate some of the impressive steps made by the government to facilitate enrolment. For example if a child cannot adequately speak Vietnamese by the time they reach primary school the child's access to education will be limited regardless of whether the examination standard for entry is reduced. Wider literature highlights that when the language in which the service is offered in is not native to the user the user will access the service less.

### **Access to health**

All minorities are more disadvantaged than the majorities in terms of health. Similarly to education, health services lack **staff able to speak minority languages** and who have an understanding of the customs and culture. Further more female health workers are particularly under-represented in the health service which impacts upon uptake rates (WHO, 2003). Similarly to education questions have also been raised about the appropriateness of the service that's regarded as poorly funded and with poor quality medication which often leave patients to go privately, therefore paying more and not using their health cards which entitle them to free/discounted access.

A combination of **geographical isolation** of many ethnic minority populations, such as the Hmong and Dao, reinforced by a culture of self-reliance particularly amongst the subsistence households, might be an important factor mitigating against the collection of benefits or claiming of services. Visiting health clinics is as much about having one available as it is about the motivation to seek treatment (Phuong & Baulch, 2007). Both social and economic factors play an important role in the decision to visit a clinic, Phuong and Baulch (2007:29) highlight that 'Poorer minority parents are much less likely to report child illness episodes, regardless of the severity of illness'.

Thus **access to health information is also key**. Health education campaigns are an important element of several vertical programmes, but are mostly conducted by volunteers and/or by members of the mass organisations. WHO (2002) report that because these volunteers have limited background information they do not always pass on appropriate messages. As a response WHO (2002) therefore recommend that better training should be given, with health campaigns conducted in minority languages and with pictures, to account for the higher illiteracy levels.

The fact that services are not being accessed is partly a function of a community's remoteness. The VLSS surveys of 1993 and 1998 highlight the distance of minority households from key services compared to the ethnic majority (see table 10) (Baulch et al, 2002). The distance adds to the costs spent on travelling there. In general ethnic minorities will be more remote than the ethnic majority and therefore further away from a hospital 13.6km versus 8.3km for ethnic majority households, whilst those in the Northern Highlands are also more likely to be situated in high mountainous areas (table 11).

**Table 10: Community remoteness variable for majority and minority households, 1993 and 1998**

	Kinh	Minorities
Km to nearest primary school	0.35	0.43
Km to district centre	8.8	18.9
Km to nearest hospital	8.3	13.6

Source: Imai (2007)

A further barrier associated with this remoteness has been that it has been difficult to attract health workers and teachers with high enough capacity to work in such remote areas, a particular disincentive for women (WHO, 2002). Although this is perhaps testament to low government spending, in comparison to other countries in the region, on human resources – particularly in health and education (WHO, 2005).

Government funding has been criticised as too low, particularly in health and compared to other countries in the region spending levels are low, for example per capita spending is US\$134 for Vietnam, compared to Cambodia which is US\$184, China US\$224 and Australia US\$2,532 (IMF, 2005)

**Table 11: Geographical location of ethnic groups in Vietnam 2002 (%)**

	Majority	Tay	Thai	Muong	Nung	Dao
Coastal	8.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Inland Delta	<b>64.0</b>	0.5	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hills	8.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Low mountainous	13.4	32.1	22.5	<b>64.4</b>	15.2	14.6
High mountainous	5.7	<b>67.0</b>	<b>76.5</b>	35.6	<b>84.8</b>	<b>85.4</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Imai (2007)

### **Quality and Access to Services**

So why, despite the investment into services, are the returns for ethnic minorities generally lower the returns experienced by the ethnic majority? From the previous examples this is due to a complex, intricate and interdependent mix

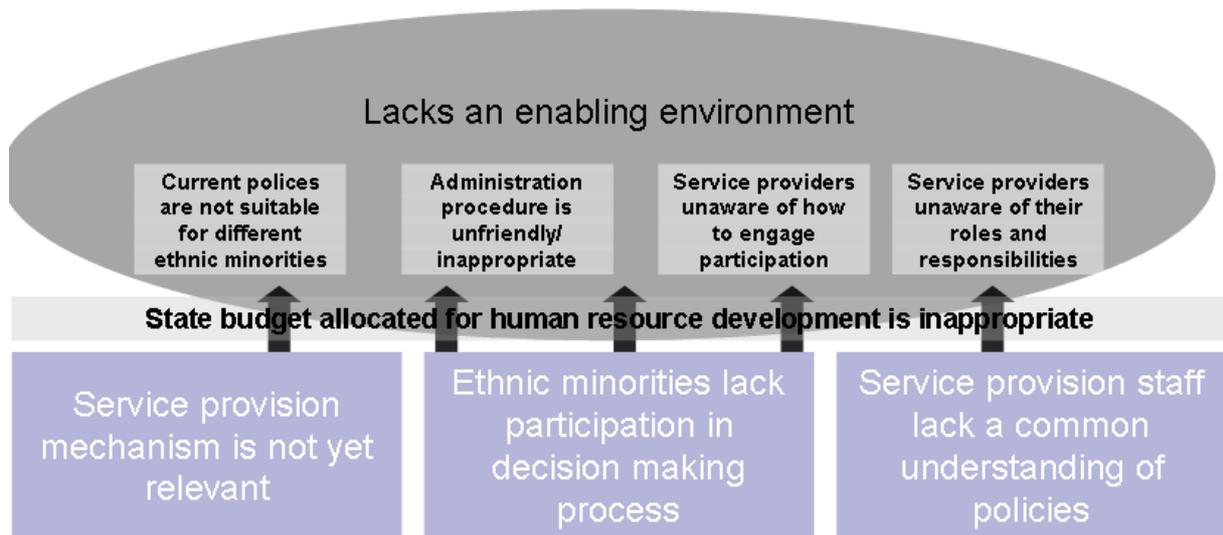
- **Awareness** - Lower awareness and knowledge of the services from the outset, due to ineffective information flows and informant networks

- **Appropriateness** - Inappropriate services that are often not culturally sensitive – the motivation for accessing the service may therefore be low
- **Availability** - Availability of the service in the first place – If it is not readily available then the propensity to use it will decline
- **Convenience** - if for example it is too far away to access then the likelihood of accessing the service in the first place will be very low

In short this means that doing more of the same is not enough. The expansion of policies, programmes and projects that work in the lowlands, and for ethnic Kinh, will not tackle the persistent poverty in the mountains. Further, interventions need to be specifically targeted at ethnic minority communities, and not just the areas in which they live. Policies and programmes need to be smarter, more appropriate, and much better targeted on ethnic minorities. It implies significant changes in the way that Government and others work with ethnic minorities; as the enabling environment for policy success is very weak (Figure 9).

Central to any change is the need for better policies, services, programmes appropriate to the ethnic minorities. As Figure 9 illustrates ethnic minorities lack the involvement and participation in the decision making process and information on how to access and participate whilst service provision staff lack understanding of how to implement workable policies. Combined with inappropriate budget allocation for human resource development this serves to create a weak enabling environment for ethnic minorities. As a result policies are deemed inappropriate, administration procedure unfriendly, and on overall lack of awareness of on what to deliver and how to engage people.

**Figure 9: A Weak Enabling Environment for Ethnic Minorities to Access Services**



Source: theIDLgroup

### 3.6 Gender Equality

Ethnic minority women suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty than do ethnic minority men. The situation is influenced by socio-cultural practices that are related to gender issues. Although gender equality in Vietnam has a good overall reputation, ethnic minority women are referred to in the Vietnam Development Report of 2000 as facing the particular problems of: very heavy workloads; limited decision making power within households; high levels of domestic violence; little access to education and knowledge as well as little access to productive assets such as land and credit.

In the divisions of labour between men and women, the latter are assigned traditional tasks such as domestic chores, reproductive and family care and activities related to hygiene and sanitation. In preventive and health care practices at household level women take responsibility as well as dealing with food preparation, cooking and diet. Ethnic minority women also face added pressures of engaging in agricultural labour. Women make up 53% of the agricultural labour force, and conduct 65% of the work, other reports say that they in fact execute the same amount of agricultural work but because of the additional duties (mentioned above) they start their working day earlier, and finish work later.

Much of women's work revolves around the home, which can make them almost invisible in wider society. Generally, women have a limited role and representation in the public community sphere and therefore engagement in civil society is low. However this situation is exacerbated by language barriers, which are typically more pronounced for women than for men and therefore presents itself as a barrier for engagement particularly with the market dominant Kinh.

Indicators show that illiteracy is much higher in the mountainous areas than in the rest of the country. In addition, adult women are less likely to be literate than men. As already highlighted women's education levels are particularly low amongst some ethnic minorities, notably the Hmong. One survey has reported that 20% of ethnic minority young women have never attended school (World Bank, 2006). Education has distinct linkages with other indicators, most notably health. Lower education levels are associated with higher birth rates, higher infant mortality, higher levels of abortions, lower levels of contraceptive use and higher maternal mortality.

Estimates of the maternal mortality rate show that approximately 165 per 100,000 live births for 2003 as the national average, although it was 411 in Cao Bang Province (WHO 2002). However this is estimated as being much higher amongst ethnic minorities, particularly given that more than 80% of births, in ethnic minority households take place at home, compared to less than 30% in Kinh households (ibid).

Poor women are often the hardest hit by natural disasters. In coastal areas for example, they are less likely than men to be able to swim. Women have fewer assets to translate into alternative livelihoods when crops are destroyed. Women have fewer paid employment opportunities than men, particularly outside the home. Given that ethnic minority women are geographically and culturally isolated with generally poor access to information – these women would predictably be even more susceptible than ethnic majority women.

**Men represent the household at funerals, which can take days. These expose men, and the sons that they often take along, to the ethnic majority. They therefore have a much higher likelihood of picking up the language than women.**

*Key informant interview November 2008*

A small study in Northern Vietnam showed that all assets, including natural assets, are considered to be owned by men and that they have the primary right to decide upon their use (Fischer & Beuchelt, 2005). However the risk-management strategies hardly vary between men and women. In case of a crisis, it is the household as a whole, which makes use of the available resources and the existing social networks -- not individual household members. Nevertheless, if the access of women to certain assets (e.g. knowledge and credit) is increased, their social position improves and thus leads to more involvement in the decision-making process of the household. In the long run, the changed composition of assets have the potential to improve women's capabilities to use the scarce natural resources. This leads to a higher efficiency in the households resource use and hence reduces its collective vulnerability.

The policy environment places significant disadvantage on women because most land titles are held by men, except in some matrilineal societies (e.g. Ede and Hmong). Holding land titles is one opportunity for women to improve their circumstances, because collateral of this kind can provide them with a line of credit. Creditworthiness can provide the opportunity to develop other, diversified and off-farm businesses or perhaps scale up productive agriculture. A World Bank project in Hoa Binh is promoting jointly-registered land titling which is improving the lives of ethnic minority Hmong women.

Ethnic minorities in Vietnam, like the ethnic majority Kinh, are patrilineal, with distinct preferences for sons. Sons traditionally afford status and legitimacy to their parents within the community. Comparatively and traditionally women have however observed the "three obediences" i.e. to the father, husband, and adult sons (Jacobs, 2008).

**Table 11: Key health indicators for ethnic minority groups**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>IMR (‰)</b>	<b>Life expectancy at birth (in years)</b>	<b>Total fertility rate (1999)</b>
<i>Kinh</i>	21	73.5	1.87
<i>Tay</i>	39	67.3	2.1
<i>Thai</i>	37	67.8	2.56
<i>Muong</i>	34	68.5	1.95
<i>Nung</i>	37	67.5	2.86
<i>Hmong</i>	56	63.0	7.06
<i>Dao</i>	44	65.8	3.62

Source: WHO (2002)

Although cultural barriers and the notion of keeping the family together often inhibits an ethnic minority household from 'splitting up', this may increasingly play a role in families. If this does occur the role of ethnic minority women may become increasingly burdened. Whilst these figures are for all women is not possible to obtain data specifically pertaining to ethnic minorities.

Women have little say in the reproductive issues: Ethnic minority households are generally larger which is seen to have a direct and strong negative impact on household welfare (van de Walle and Gunewardena, 2000). Long et al. (1999) also emphasise how distance, fear of social isolation, indirect costs and poor health services are particular reasons as to why women delay in getting health treatment.

## 4. Conclusion

The issue of poverty in the wider context of Vietnam cannot be addressed without tackling the specific challenge of poverty in ethnic minorities in the mountain areas. The underlying causes addressed within this report are highlighted in on page 42 in accordance with Care's unifying framework.

Despite its largely good intentions, the state's policies in support of ethnic minorities in the northern mountains have for the most part failed to tackle poverty there. There remain stark contrasts in poverty reduction, which present an urgent challenge to Government and all its Development Partners. Poverty reduction outcomes have not been achieved, for a number of reasons:

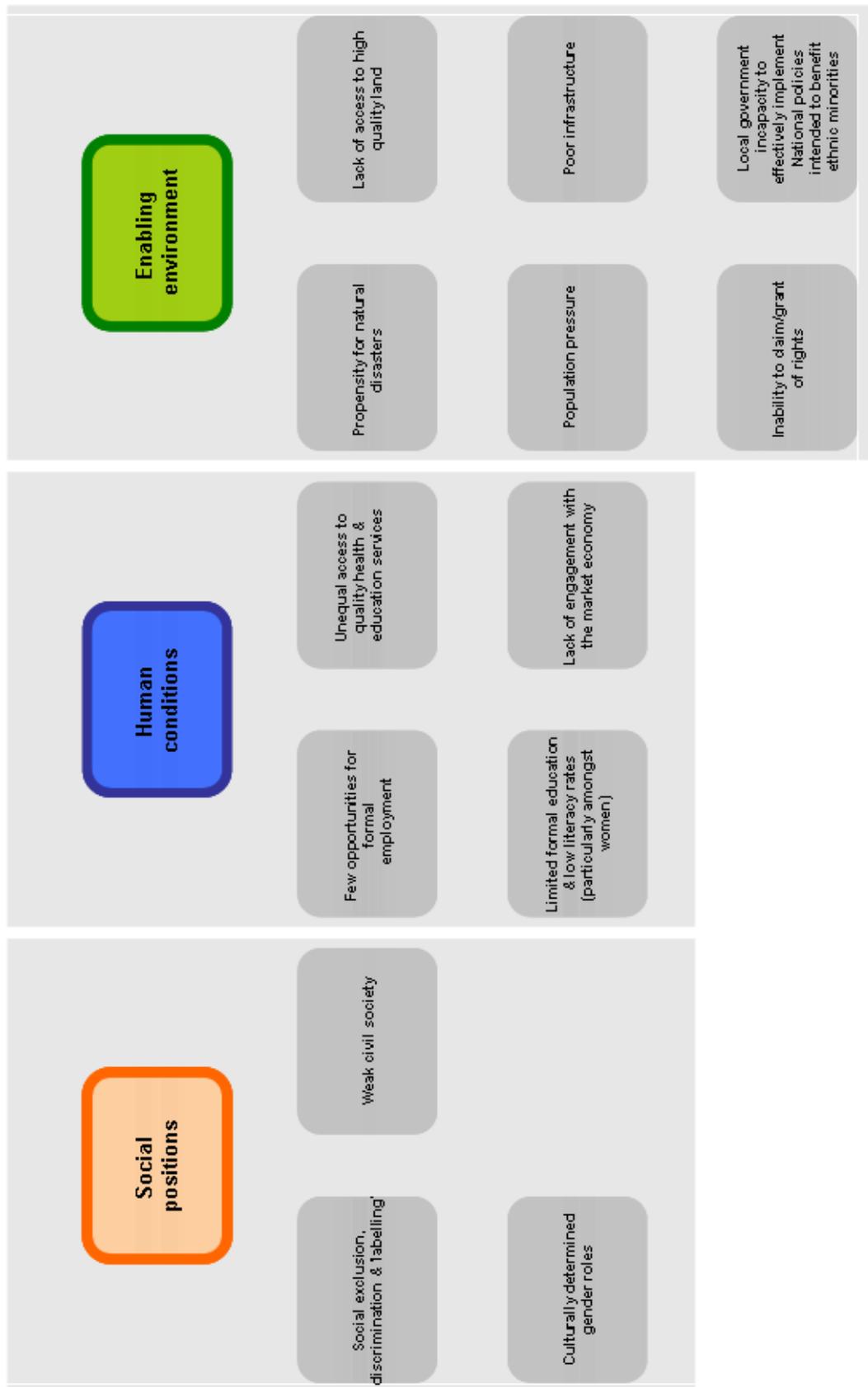
- Application of a common approach to development, which is not nuanced or differentiated to take account of the culture, language, skills and farming traditions of the ethnic minorities. What works for lowlands, and for ethnic Kinh regions does not necessarily work for mountain communities of ethnic minorities.
- Policies and programmes have targeted (geographic) "minority areas" rather than "minority peoples".
- Policy packages and prescriptions which are incomplete, some of which can make ethnic minorities poorer, such as:
  - Land reform and sedentarisation programmes, but not matched with appropriate agricultural technologies for the mountains
  - Reduced standards for entrance exams for schooling, but with no complementary measures to address the linguistic barrier faced by many ethnic minorities
  - Resettlement programmes following construction which have too little provision for effective new livelihoods.
- There has been too much focus in development programmes on the provision of physical infrastructure (roads, building) without consideration of the social aspects, and the barriers to accessing services experienced by ethnic minorities. The lessons from social safeguards and social impact assessments have not translated into practical lessons for the design of interventions that will tackle persistent poverty amongst minorities.
- There has been too little genuine participation by ethnic minorities in debate on policies and programmes that affect their lives. As the development "frontier" of modernisation and development moves further into the northern mountains, promoted by new dam and road construction projects, then there is ever greater – and more urgent - need for genuine participation by ethnic minority communities.

In summary, ethnic minorities in the Northern Highlands are trapped in a poverty cycle, due to the inter-locking combinations of low quality 'human' assets (poor or no education and in poor health); few natural assets (no land and reducing access to common property resources); few physical assets; minimal financial assets (no savings accounts and no access to formal credit); and, limited 'social capital' (a network of kin and neighbours with few assets and suffering from soil exhaustion, and lack of demand for casual labour). Add to this a lack of 'political capital' - the capacity to effectively use 'voice' to influence decisions in social and political arenas - and the notion of the 'vicious circle of chronic poverty' seems appropriate imagery.

There is clearly no silver bullet for solving these highly complex and interrelated challenges. Any response from CARE will need to be an integrated approach that utilises both existing knowledge held within the organisation and the rich experience of potential local partners. Strategies CARE might like to consider include:

- Identification of appropriate agricultural technologies, drawing on indigenous skills and competences (i.e. these may already be in place within the mountain communities)
- Supporting faster farmer-to-farmer, and community-to-community diffusion of “good” and adapted technologies, including strong participation of women
- Helping the shift the local frame of analysis from the “problem” of the ethnic minority communities to the skills that are retained, and the opportunity. Approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry, can help in this regard
- Helping state agricultural agents to nuance and differentiate their services to match the needs, and the agricultural ecology, of the landscapes
- Raising awareness amongst communities on their rights in regards to access and use of land, forests, and other resources
- Research and reviews and monitoring of the targeting of services in mountain regions.
- Supporting ethnic minorities in their access to education and the applicability of what is targeted towards them
- Improving awareness towards cultural differences and facilitating their involvement in the health services provided
- Supporting access to services to capitalise on infrastructure development
- Supporting Government initiatives to realise the wider GoV policy goals; the past history of failure to achieve national policy objectives in the mountain regions, suggests some fundamental revisions of thought and paradigm shift are needed.
- Better data collection, over time, to record whether services, and actual access and use of services are improving. These might include participatory monitoring by communities themselves.

## CARE's Unifying Framework The Underlying causes of ethnic minority poverty in Northern Mountainous Vietnam



**Annexes**

<b>Annex 1</b>	<b>Terms of Reference</b>	<b>44</b>
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<b>Annex 3</b>	<b>List of key actors and institutions working on ethnic minority issues</b>	<b>49</b>
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**Annex 1: Terms of Reference****TOR for study of the  
Underlying Causes of Poverty  
for Ethnic Minorities in Northern Vietnam  
to inform the design of a new  
CARE Vietnam Programme****1. Background**

The programme Civil Action for Socio-economic Inclusion in natural resource management (CASI) began in 2004 and is currently mid-way through its second phase 2007-09. CARE Vietnam has decided to initiate a process to design a new programme to succeed the current one.

The overall goal of the CASI programme is to contribute to rural poverty reduction and livelihoods improvement of poor and natural resources-dependent people, particularly among ethnic minority groups who lack access to resources and influence over decisions that affect their lives.

The programme works with civil society organisations engaged in poverty reduction at various levels, including community-based groups and organizations, farmers' cooperatives, Vietnamese NGO's, professional associations, and mass organisations to: a) strengthen their capacity to provide appropriate and relevant services to the poor people in rural areas; b) facilitate people's participation in decision-making and c) promote sustainable natural resource management based on community rights, needs and involvement.

The current programme has five main components:

- Community Empowerment for Forest Management (CEFM)
- Livelihood and Rights Club (LARC)
- Participatory Watershed Management (PWM)
- Effective Networking for A Better Learning Environment (ENABLE)
- Program Development and Coordination Facility (PDCF)

CASI has moved from direct livelihoods support towards a more business oriented value chain approach combined with capacity building for community empowerment. Four main civil society strengthening strategies: rights-based approaches and advocacy, capacity building, gender equity and partnerships continue to be the backbone of CASI.

CASI has strived to respond to new challenges as the operating environment in Vietnam experienced rapid change in the social and economic development context. This includes responding to Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization as well as new economic trends such as high inflation. It also provided opportunities to further develop the rights based approach to include local enterprise development together with community empowerment, democracy and community based Natural Resource Management. With Vietnam being one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, CASI has begun to study impacts and potential responses to climate change linked to disaster risk reduction.

The current CASI program will be closed in December 2009 and CARE in Vietnam is in the process of development new programme (2010 – 2015). The new programme will maintain the programmatic focus on

- enhancing rural rights and livelihoods in line with CARE Vietnam priorities and through addressing the underlying causes of poverty in order to achieve sustainable change
- promoting community involvement in natural resource management reflecting CARE Denmark thematic focus
- engaging civil society organisations as viable actors in promoting accountability and citizen participation.

The new programme development will start by reviewing CASI experiences as the inputs and foundation of a new programme. It is envisaged that a new programme will reinforce a focus on ethnic minority poverty in Northern Vietnam.

As part of its general programme approach CARE is committed to base its programming on an understanding of the underlying causes of poverty as experienced by the target group. Underlying causes are most often the result of a combination of political, social, economic, and environmental factors that are related to the systemic and structural underpinnings of underdevelopment, residing at the societal and often the global level.

At the international level CARE has developed a unifying frame relating to these factors within which the following four underlying causes of poverty are seen as particular concerns for CARE's work.

- ❖ Gender Inequality
- ❖ Social Exclusion
- ❖ Unmet Rights to "Access" to Resources and Services
- ❖ Poor Governance

Sharpening this understanding within CARE and with partners will help articulating and elaborating the theory of change upon which the programme will base its interventions.

## **2. Consultancy Objective**

The study will identify underlying causes of poverty for Ethnic Minorities in Northern Vietnam, including key factors and an assessment of how these interrelate. The output will serve as a basis for CARE's subsequent programme design enabling interventions to relate to and address underlying causes of poverty for ethnic minorities in an effective and comprehensive manner.

## **3. Main task of consultant**

The consultant will conduct a literature survey to provide CARE Vietnam with A thorough **analysis** of underlying causes of poverty and social injustice at multiple levels with multiple stakeholders.

- "Multiple levels" means community through global.
- Analysis includes scenarios based on potential risk.
- Analysis identifies and prioritizes the causes that **MUST** be addressed in order to achieve the goal.
- This analysis is updated regularly to incorporate changes in context.

The analysis of causes of poverty will include:

- The access of ethnic minorities to form and engage in associations in civil society who can help articulate and represent their interests and claiming their rights
- The extent to which the current pattern of growth (export oriented agricultural and industrial product-based) has implied a marginalisation of ethnic minorities and reasons for this

- The extent to which vulnerability is influenced by the physical environment in which ethnic minorities live and their particular risks relating to natural disasters and environmental degradation
- The role of infrastructure and other physical barriers to participate in socio-economic development of Vietnam
- The extent to which ethnic minority communities can be seen to be dependent on livelihoods which make them particularly vulnerable and unable to gain from general progress enjoyed by poor people in Vietnam in the past 10-15 years
- The extent to which cultural differences of ethnic minority groups contributes to their poverty, discrimination and marginalisation
- The role of ethnicity-based social exclusion in limiting rights (e.g. land rights, gender equity rights) and access to services (such as extension, education, health, credit) which would otherwise facilitate a move out of poverty
- Impact of policies and national targeted programs (NTP)'s implementation towards ethnic minorities and how these influence poverty trends
- Reasons why ethnic minority groups are not climbing out of poverty at the same rate as the majority group and why their poverty is becoming entrenched, with differences between different ethnic groups, gender issues and specific locations in Northern Vietnam
- Underlying causes behind all the above and how they are related to each other: what are the key forces driving ethnic minority poverty (could be categorised by human conditions, social positions and the enabling policy/governance environment)

#### **4. Methodology**

The consultant(s) will use different kind of methods to collect information, including:

- Desk study of existing materials prepared by research institutions, government bodies and other development agencies
- Identify key resource persons in consultation with CARE and hold interviews with the resource persons
- Selected CASI Quarterly and Annual Programme Reports reviewed for information on experiences with ethnic minority groups and poverty;
- Prepare and present key findings to date during the CARE Vietnam program visioning workshop on 26<sup>th</sup> November and consider feedback provided by participants

#### **5. Outputs of consultancy**

During the course of the consultancy the consultant will produce the following deliverables for CARE in Vietnam:

A presentation of draft key findings as a power point presented during CARE's visioning workshop

A report on the underlying causes of ethnic minority poverty including.:

- Poverty analysis situation in northern of Vietnam but not limited to the above list of topics to address.
- Analysis of the underlying causes in relation to human conditions, social positions and the enabling policy/governance environment that maintain ethnic minority poverty and prevent these people to fulfil their rights and inclusion in development process.
- List of key actors and institutions working on ethnic minority issues
- Reference list of all sources of information for the report

- Interview list
- Itinerary
- Methodology used

The report is expected to be of approximately 20 pages

## **6. Consultant**

The consultant will have proven experience in social research and analysis, knowledge of ethnic minority issues and ability to access necessary information and key resource persons.

## **7. Preparation and Logistical Support**

Relevant CARE and other documents and reports will be forwarded to the consultant prior to the start of the consultancy. CARE Vietnam will facilitate the work through the provision of all required logistical support including materials, appointments, translation, workshop documentation, accommodation in case of travel out of Hanoi and any other logistical arrangements.

It is expected that the study will not require travel outside of Hanoi. Care will provide an introduction or arrange meetings for interviews of key actors identified by the consultant and CARE in those cases where the consultant requires this.

## **9. Itinerary**

The consultancy will require approximately xx working days during the period starting November 4, 2008 to 10 December 2008 including reporting in line with the Process Action Plan. The consultant will provide detailed time sheets.

## **10. Contacts in Vietnam**

Fiona Percy, RD Coordinator, [fpercy@care.org.vn](mailto:fpercy@care.org.vn) 0912 398028  
Le Van Son PDCF Component Manager [lvson@care.org.vn](mailto:lvson@care.org.vn) 0912 621895

Mai Thuy Hang PDCF Coordination Facilitator [mthang@care.org.vn](mailto:mthang@care.org.vn) 0904263651

Lars Udsholt, program design consultant

## Annex 2: Methodology

**Primary data collection:** Interviews with key actors involved in ethnic minority affairs in Vietnam/Northern Upland regions. Interviews were conducted by one or both of the consultants. Additionally the CARE Visioning workshop, held on Wednesday November 26 also provided helpful thoughts, suggestions and ideas for the report's contents. Ms Vu Thi Hien has extensive experience in the field of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous region so her insights were particularly key for guiding the research.

**Secondary data collection:** This entailed using a wide range of literature from academia, donor reports and informal 'grey' literature – all referenced in Annex 4.

**Annex 3: List of key actors and institutions working on ethnic minority issues**

<b>Government Departments and Ministries</b>
Ministry of Agriculture and rural development (MARD) Department of Agriculture and rural development (DARD) Agricultural extension Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) Department of Planning and Investment (DPI) Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MONRE) Department of Natural Resources and the Environment (DONRE) Ministry of Labour, invalids and social affairs (MOLISA) Department of Labour, invalids and social affairs (DOLISA) Ministry of education and Training (MOET) Department of education and Training (DOET) Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) Ministry of Health (MOH) Peoples committee Peoples council
<b>Mass organisations</b>
Women's Union Farmers Union Youth Brigade
<b>Bilateral/multilateral Donors/Foundations</b>
UNDP WB ILO ADB UNICEF ICCO AusAID USAID Bread for the world Ford Foundation EC Asian Foundation

International NGOs
PLAN HELVITAS Oxfam ActionAID E & D CWS AFAP SNV VECO CRS SADU
Banks
Agricultural Bank Bank for social policies
National NGOs
DWC - Centre for women and development CSDM - Centre for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Area CERDA – Centre of Research and Development in Upland Area SRD – Sustainable Rural Development CSEED PanNature RDSC CRD Centre for Preventative Medicine
Other
Centre for Preventative Medicine

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## Annex 5: Key informant interviews

**Semi-structured Interview** – Loosely based on the following outline

**Section 1** - General questions, first half of the interview very open and free for the interviewee to discuss the issues they think are important

- What are the main problems that ethnic minorities are suffering from?
- What you think are the main causes of poverty amongst ethnic minorities?
- A World Bank report by Swinkles and Turk (2006) identified that the improvements in ethnic minorities living standards have been realised much less than the Kinh – why do you think this is?

**Section 2** - Test out own research topics. Triangulate our own findings and knowledge with the interviewees

To what degree do you think that...

- 1) Land resettlement policies how have they impacted on poverty amongst ethnic minorities? Why? Difficulties ethnic minorities are facing for income and sustainable development ?
- 2) Remoteness and geographical fragmentation impacts upon ethnic minority poverty rates? Why
- 3) Their access to sustainable productive assets have impacted upon ethnic minority poverty? Why
- 4) Poverty reduction policies like program 135, 134 are addressing ethnic minority poverty? What do you think about the real results/impacts of these have been? Is there anything needs to be improved in term of policy itself and the process of implementation?

### Transcripts from interviews with key informants:

#### Interview transcripts

##### A. Interviewee: Vu Thi Lan Huong, Centre for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Areas (CSDM)

- 1) The problems now EM are suffering ?
  - Poverty and hungry: Tay and Nung EM group is not hunger but not easy to get rich. Some other EM groups are hunger who live in remote areas.
  - Infrastructure: roads to village is so difficult.
  - Education: Children drop out school so early just at grades of 5, 6,7, 8 or 9. This is because, children have to pass a long and far distance to school, they get tired, in raining day, they do not go to school.
  - Human resource: Number of children go to university and college is very rare or no one per village. Consequently, the education level of community is still low, it is difficult to create or have jobs that inhibit the social-economic development. The young people/community come to the standstill.
  - Market: products are not easy to be transported to market. In case the farmers bring their products to sell, it costly (petrol) and time consuming. In fact, all products sold for middleman at very low price.
  - Government programs: Poor access to policies/programs. Some programs made negative effect - Some golf-course built and made the road from village to centre of commune more far and more difficult in Hoa Binh province.

- Access to public service/information: Local people seriously lack of knowledge, information, technologies / technique/market information for their livelihood activities and also lack of social knowledge (laws, rights, policies ....). Many villages have no electricity, so no TV accordingly ... Electricity just come almost the commune centre
- Health: many people get sick, especially women, but they keep disease without any treatment, as it is costly for transportation, and other fee even they have health card.

## 2) Causes of poverty in EM

- Access to productive asset:
  - o Some household do not access land (paddy land and forest land) or access to a little land
  - o Almost household access to forest land, but they are not able to make new and sustainable income from forest, accept collecting some products at a eradivative manner.
- Access to public services:
  - o Access to Agro/Forest Extension: Agro/Forest Extension and Industrial stimulation extension is not helpful a lot. The methodology is not good enough to make people fully understand what they want to convey, poor practical, just focusing only on short training courses in class without any following up.
  - o Rights and laws: Local people have not known about their rights, not knowledgeable at laws
- Social culture
  - o Too much drinking (men), so they are not able to work well (sleeping a lot at day time)
  - o Too much time consuming ceremony events (long ... funeral, weeding, birthday, one month baby, new house, Tet holiday, ceremonial offerings...)
  - o Gender inequality: women have to work a lot, not participate in decision making process. Work distribution in household is not equal. Women work a lot more than men. The opportunity to exposure to public is limited for women. Men go out much than women.
- Institution: some association is existing (like association to organize funeral), but the linkage among farmers for the commodity production is weak. No villagers stand up to set up and lead groups, as they thought that it is a duty of government, their thinking too much is influenced on the top-down approach for years (always waiting for the orders from higher levels)
- Environment: Using too much chemicals, this is because of lacking of knowledge on how to use it properly.
- Low education
- Language problems, especially for women and middle age people.
- Human: Human recourse is limited. The main cause comes from education. The education is not developed in EM group. The children are not able to enter high education. They drop out school. There is a lot government programs, but they are not much effective. In addition, the parent always ask children to stay at home to work at high time seasons for harvesting one or two weeks. After that, they perform not very well at school , they get set up and then drop out school. The government had a lot program to support to deal with human resource but the impact is limited.

## 2) The government programs/policies

- Credit policy for the poor do not help the poorest household. This is because they are not able to make profit from loan, sometime they get poorer because of loan. The social policy bank just provides loan without the training on how to use loan for profit
- Program 135 having a component to do capacity building for the target communes, but this only have done with commune cadres (even with this activity, it is not very much helpful) and nothing have done with village cadres or villagers.
- Program of eradicating dilapidated houses is not effective to the poorest households. The government gie the free 5 millions VND away, but they can not contribute some to make their houses better.
- Program of settlement is not done in the proper way, the target people come and go. Because they can not earn for living in that new living quarter. for example the field is too far ...

- Health cards is not much usefull at commune clinic by villagers, as the medicine provided is just simple and the people live too much far away from clinic, they do not come to clinic when being sick just for some simple medicine

The way of implementing program is not proper, as the cadres are not understanding EM's culture. Some technique introduced but not suitable/or destroy indigenou knowledge

Note: If the government programs with a such amount of money would work effectively, so the EM group's living standard should be improved a lot.

### 3) Why King groups overcome their poverty better than EM

- Difficult geographic condition: Living in scatted area, home is far away from home and far way from the centre and less opportunities to exposure outside. Thai, Nung, Tay, Muong with the bigger population and live nearer the centre of commune) groups is more progress.
- Inter-village road and roads to commune centre is very much difficult, especially in rainy season.
- Middle-aged people of EM is almost not good at Vietnamese
- Children often drop out school early, so the education level of EM community is low. Job opportunity is limited as they are not capable to meet the requirement
- EM people do expose to outside as a Kinh, especially women is just around their home
- Access to Agricultural/Forest extension and Industrial stimulate extension, information, electricity is very limited and ineffective (extension cadres speak Vietnamese, the people do not understand much)

### B. Mr. Le Thanh Binh, ISEE.

- Problems: poor and vulnerability
- Causes
  - All kind of capital (human, fiscal, natural, social and finance) change a lot, especially limited land area
  - Traditional livelihood that depends on nature, which is now limited. But they are not capable to adapt with the changes of natural resources for their livelihood.
  - No or poor opportunities to get jobs
  - Almost indigenou knowledge only are effective in the previous condition with the rich forest. Now it is not suitable with climate change
  - The official governmental structure replaced all most the traditional structure. The traditional institution changed accordingly
  - Government does not accept almost the customary laws. Meanwhile the EM people do not know the existing laws.
- Government program:
  - Program 135 and 134 is poor at implementation. Infrastructure cost a lot of money but the quality of work is not so good. No investment for human capital, even that is a vital factor for poverty reduction and sustainable development.
- Access to agriculture/forest services is so poor. The quality of service is very poor. The cause is the poor method.
- Education: preschool is not good, so the children face the language problem. As a result, the children are not to do well in school, and then fed up with school and drop out of school. The young people are not able to get jobs
- Health care: The quality of service at clinic is so poor, that is why the local people do not get benefit.
- Land: according to customary law, the whole forest and paddy land belongs to ethnic minorities, but things changed, the laws allow state farms and companies can receive land for their business . The land area controlled by EM reduced. The shifting cultivation stopped by laws and by land area limitation as well.

### C. Mr. Bui Xuan Thanh, Director of Truong Xuan Limited Company (Ageless)

\* Main problem and causes

There is 53 groups of EM. The degrees of poverty are different among EM groups. 4 groups of Tay, Nung, Muong and Thai make progress. The other 48 groups is still hunger for some months per year.

The EM groups now are self-confident, wait for the support government, the traditional value faded, less active, good customs worn out. The more EM groups exposure to outside, the less they associate together.

The official administrative structure established in the whole country as well as EM communities, the traditional institution nearly have been broken. The land policy set up and realized. The setting up of the state farms as well as agricultural cooperatives in EM groups before have influenced the traditional institution of EM groups. The EM were not capable to keep their traditional institution by themselves as previous to keep their live and struggle with nature's disaster. So the traditional institutional structure have been almost broken, just some small association still exist like the association of organizing funeral, mutual assistant fund in kind – paddy in some communities ... .The traditional value like "village patriarch" ... was faded, now is not easy to restore. The shifting cultivation can not apply any more. Everything around them changed, now the EM in three way crossroads, in the dilemma, they have no place to step back and are not capable to go ahead. It is hard for them to make progress because of difficult geography, poor access to education and health care, the support from government is not effective for economic development. The way of investing is not effective and wasted even with the big amount. The way of giving freely away something in kind or in cash is mainly used in government programs. The quality of infrastructure (daily water and irrigation ...) is substandard as the beneficiaries do not participate actively in the process of implementation. NGOs have programs to work with EM, the depth is good but scope is small.

Land and soil quality: Soil becomes exhausted. The indigenous knowledge like shifting cultivation is no longer used as the land area reduced, the population increased much.

Forestry: Government supposes tha the communities of EM could not create the area of raw materials. So many companies came and receive a lot of forest land with the aim of making raw materials, but they are not successful much.

Market: With some new varieties and technique done by Agriculture extension among EM groups, farmers did suffer a lot as their product could not be sold. To link farmers of EM to market is a vital factor to reduce poverty but nobody does.

The main point is that lack of community workers who are capable and committed to work with EM. Agricultural extension staffs are not capable, lacking of method and skills to work with EM groups. Very poor access to education and health service  
Drinking culture that inhibit development, it is not easy to overcome this custom.

#### Why Kinh group better get out of poverty quicker than EM?

Kinh households even living in the same area with EM, Kinh people is always richer than EM. Because Kinh household often do business, or they are cadres and have land near the centre of commune and in favourable condition. The EM people see the interest in the short term and willing to sell their favourable land to Kinh people and go further to the remoter area.

The more remote and higher EM groups live in the more they are poor. EM groups do want to live in the flat land and do want to improve their life, but they are in a standstill.

They drink a lot that very much inhibit development but it is not easy to change this culture. To overcome this it needs to education, better access to electricity, good roads, TV

#### Solution:

- It needs to have a enormous jostle for EM to make progress
- Government programs and NGOs should integrate. How to do ?????
- Restore the institution of community based on community's own and participation to promote institutional sustainability inherently.
- Focus on improving social capital and human capital
- It should focus on process more than results during the project/program implementation. It needs the participation of beneficiaries
- It needs community actors/workers to work with EM who are talent, committed and paid high salary.
- To overcome poverty among EM groups, it needs a holistic approaches and comprehensive intervene.
- Regarding to government program, it should reduce or stop the free giving in kind or in cash to individual households

**D. Mr. Trinh Cong Khanh, Chair of International relation dept, CEM**

## • Problems:

Poverty and hungry: accept 4 groups of EM (Tay, Nung, Thai and Muong), the other groups are poor and hunger. Some groups live in a very very low condition.

Poor health

Low education.

## • Causes:

- Live very far away from the centre, very much scattered (this is a history story). The Kinh bought the good land for settlement. EM accepted the far land (no choice), sometime they are willing to sell land for the daily expenditure. H'mong group is very clever and have a firm stuff, but they still very poor as they live very far and high.
- Many children (accept 4 groups : Tay, Nung, Thai and Muong)
- Number of people use drug
- Poor access to education, health and extension.
- Inter-village road is poor
- Education: time in classes is short, even government have done a lot of programs but it is not much effective.
- Market: products can not be sold or sell at low price, middleman control the price. Farmers have no chance to negotiate price.
- Land area is not much, water for cultivation is getting shortage.
- Soil is degraded and vulnerable to erosion
- Income coming from collecting products in forest is almost finished as the forest is exhausted.
- Some EM groups is not hard working (Ma Lieng ...)
- Drinking wine too much from morning to afternoon
- EM groups need to produce commodity, they are not capable to link to market, but who will help EM groups to do,
- Programs and policies of poverty reduction: Investing for infrastructure is not much (500 millions per commune per year). Support to make paddy field and land for house is not effective. Policies of crossing out dilapidated houses is rather good. There is a big lost during implementation
- Province and district staffs are not committed to work at grassroots levels

## • Solution:

- It needs more the support from government and donors for EM.
- Government staffs can not work at grassroots levels like NGO
- It needs to have people who work directly with local people, NGOs or social workers, but not government. Government should focus on management job.
- The EM should live closer in cluster of households, not so scattered as now. The government should help.

**Trinh Thi Sam: Oxfam GB****1) Causes of poverty among EM**

- Land area reduced by policies of making state farms or companies' coming
- The products in forest have gone away by collecting in eradicated manner for years
- Human resource : Farmers are low at education
- Road: Still poor road to communes in some communes and poor roads from village to commune. Just some inter-village roads have a little bit improved since 5 year time
- Custom: some customs that the local people can not overcome by them selves. For example, H'Mong group, they produce food to eat (rice and corn ...) by themselves, do not want to buy it.
- Effectiveness of government structure's work
  - The policies/programs is still not effective: In terms of policies: it is so slow at implementation, there is some steps from the decree to circular (circular provides the instruction for lower levels to implement policies or decrees), some time it takes a lot of time.
  - Some policies or circular can not be implemented. For example, the higher government required the evaluation of the lose caused by flood or coldness, but the lower government did not implemented with the reason that they have no budget to do.
  - Number of government staffs is many, but the work is not effective. The main reasons is that the management is not good enough, no monitoring and evaluation mechanism at all. The government staffs are not clear about their job description. the mechanism and the way of

implementing is not transparency and open. Number of staff is many, just some work a lot, many do not work. This situation are existing for years. Poor management and monitoring. For example, Agricultural extension staff do not work effectively, the assessment of staff's work do not measure by the quality of work, but quantity (number of training courses)

- Economic: lacking of market for local products. The products could not be sold.
- Farmers are seriously lack of knowledge and information for livelihood
- Argo/forest services: poor access to agro/forest extension
- Role of government: Disaster: flood, drought increased that make the poor poorer very quickly
- Poverty reduction program (135, 134): The design is so good in the paper, the approach is very much participatory in the paper. But the results/impact is not good as objective required. As during implementation, there was no participation of beneficiaries, poor methods, not transparency, corruption at all levels. The common method is that to buy some things (fertilizer, seeds, seedlings) and provide freely to the poor. This methods are quick and can get some extra money during the dealing of he sales contract.

#### Solutions

- Young people should be access to education
- Inter -village road building with good quality
- Bank should cooperates with other department like agriculture to help EM make the profit from loan
- Reduce the loss of disasters
- Holistic/comprehensive intervention
- Government cadres must be knowledge at many areas and committed to work with communities

#### Entry points at Oxfam

##### The existing structure

- Work with province, district with the aim of influencing their attitude, policies through the activities and the project evaluation
- District will work with commune, village and grassroots people by setting up farmer groups basing on their initiatives with focus on livelihood activities and promote democracy at grassroots level
- Oxfam support the local people at all levels (province, district, commune and grassroots levels) to find out their problems and solutions

##### The upcoming areas to interfere

- Economic justice = livelihood + education
- Governance
- Disaster reduction

The upcoming approach: Development + Advocacy

#### H. Bui Thi Kim, Director of DWC

##### 1. Main problems:

- Lack of information
- Lives depends on agriculture, but lack of cultivative land and water for cultivation
- Public services is not effective
- Language problems
- Low education
- Serious lack of social skills and productive skills
- Lack of safe water
- No latrine
- Children lack of care from parent for their development.

##### 2. Causes:

Living in far and remote area, very far away from the central level

Capacity of government staffs, officials is limited

Needs and aspiration of grassroots people is not been reflected to central level

EM people is passive, rely on others, alcohol drinking, gambling, low ability to acquire knowledge, technology, technique, habit of not conforming to meet requirement of technology and technique

Human: Poor human recourse, that is a big cause of poverty

Institution: Poor institution that influence moderately poverty

Access to public service: Poor access to public services that seriously cause poverty

Land degradation, land contamination – pesticide and fertiliser that seriously cause poverty

Government programs is not so effective, the support is not totally reaching the target people, big waste in terms of finance. The reasons are 1) top-down approach, 2) poor participation 3) not suitable/logical/sensible, for example one component of program 134 is to provide the fee money (5 millions) to the poor to erase dilapidated houses

Traditional customs cause a huge waste in terms of time and money.

### 3. Why Kinh household get out of poverty is quicker than EM

Area	Kinh People	EM
Access to information	Much	Too little
Access to services	Easy	Difficult
Access to public services	Comprehensive	Incomprehensive
Job opportunity	Many	Rare or nothing
Needs	always not satisfied	accept and satisfied
Government policies	Through contract – equality - sustainability	Free giving - unsustainable
Habit/custom	active	rely on others
Government investment	controllable	Not easy to control
Human resource	Higher	Too low.
Infrastructure	Good, convenient	Difficult, inconvenient
Goods circulation	Quick and easy	Slow and difficult
Negative impact socially and economically by customs (much drinking and time consuming and costly ceremonial events)	Little	Much