

**MUONG LIVELIHOODS AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THEIR  
DEVELOPMENT:**

**A case study of a Muong community in Cam Thuy District, Thanh Hoa Province,  
Vietnam**

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# **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is an attempt to clarify the role played by education in the livelihoods of the Muong minority people who live in remote mountainous areas of Vietnam. The argument focuses on critical factors that impact on livelihood performance such as livelihood assets, government policies and non-government programs. Indigenous mountain people, including the Muong, throughout their history have relied on natural resources to secure their livelihood. In the past it was thought that they lived sustainably in harmony with their environment but the impact of globalisation and the growth of the monetary economy has changed all this. Formerly isolated communities have been increasingly drawn into the modern state's system of governance and this has resulted in reforms that, while considered good for the nation, have disadvantaged highland peoples. The views of policy makers and program designers are too often quite at odds with the needs of local indigenous people.

This study was conducted in Muot village in the Thanh Hoa Province of Vietnam. In the village 98% of the villagers are of Muong descent. The research used a mixed method approach which included the use of questionnaires to collect quantitative survey data from 154 of the total of 198 households (population 678) and 75 school aged children. I was also permitted to access data from a household poverty survey initiated and authorized by the provincial committee in which I participated as an enumerator. All of this data was supplemented by qualitative engagements with both the students and householders who had participated in the personal surveys. I used a handful of participant observation techniques including informal interviews, observations made in the course of household visits, village walks, and otherwise engaging with villagers as they went about their daily activities, and focus group discussions.

The mixed method approach enabled me to answer my principal questions: what are the current challenges faced by Muong in securing a livelihood? How effective are government policies in promoting economic development? How do they respond to government policies? What role does education play in Muong socioeconomic development? The

content of both the quantitative and qualitative data collected was summarized in a format acceptable to SPSS, analyzed and subjected to critical analysis.

Understanding what indigenous Muong need is truly important for both scholars and policy makers in Thanh Hoa province as well as Vietnam as a whole. This study found that human capital is the most significant factor in improving sustainable livelihoods. It concluded that the case for improving human resources in remote mountainous areas is paramount and that the government and local people should do more to make the best of education. Integration into the national economy and mainstream life of the nation is inevitable and education has the capacity to make a major contribution to easing this process.

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### THANH HOA MAP

The map displays the following districts and towns within Thanh Hoa province:

- Districts:** MUONG LAT, MUONG KHE, QUAN HOA, QUAN SON, LANG CHANH, NGOC LAC, CAM THUY, THACH THANH, VINH LOC, HA TRUNG, NGU SON, THUAN XUAN, THO XUAN, TRIEU SON, THUAN XUAN, YEN CANH, NHU THANH, NHU XUAN, YEN CANH, NGU SON, HOANG HOA, QUANG XUONG, TINH GIA.
- Towns:** BA THUOC, CAM THUY, KIM TAN, VINH LOC, HA TRUNG, NGU SON, THUAN XUAN, THO XUAN, TRIEU SON, THUAN XUAN, YEN CANH, NHU THANH, NHU XUAN, YEN CANH, NGU SON, HOANG HOA, QUANG XUONG, TINH GIA.

**Legend:**

- Industrial Zone
- National Road
- Provincial Road
- Railway
- Boundary of Nation
- Boundary of Province
- Boundary of District
- River, Spring
- River Port
- Sea Port
- Air Port
- Train Station
- Border Gate
- Administrative Center

**Scale:** 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120 130 140 150 160 170 180 190 200 210 220 230 240 250 260 270 280 290 300 310 320 330 340 350 360 370 380 390 400 410 420 430 440 450 460 470 480 490 500 510 520 530 540 550 560 570 580 590 600 610 620 630 640 650 660 670 680 690 700 710 720 730 740 750 760 770 780 790 800 810 820 830 840 850 860 870 880 890 900 910 920 930 940 950 960 970 980 990 1000 1010 1020 1030 1040 1050 1060 1070 1080 1090 1100 1110 1120 1130 1140 1150 1160 1170 1180 1190 1200 1210 1220 1230 1240 1250 1260 1270 1280 1290 1300 1310 1320 1330 1340 1350 1360 1370 1380 1390 1400 1410 1420 1430 1440 1450 1460 1470 1480 1490 1500 1510 1520 1530 1540 1550 1560 1570 1580 1590 1600 1610 1620 1630 1640 1650 1660 1670 1680 1690 1700 1710 1720 1730 1740 1750 1760 1770 1780 1790 1800 1810 1820 1830 1840 1850 1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2020 2030 2040 2050 2060 2070 2080 2090 2100 2110 2120 2130 2140 2150 2160 2170 2180 2190 2200 2210 2220 2230 2240 2250 2260 2270 2280 2290 2300 2310 2320 2330 2340 2350 2360 2370 2380 2390 2400 2410 2420 2430 2440 2450 2460 2470 2480 2490 2500 2510 2520 2530 2540 2550 2560 2570 2580 2590 2600 2610 2620 2630 2640 2650 2660 2670 2680 2690 2700 2710 2720 2730 2740 2750 2760 2770 2780 2790 2800 2810 2820 2830 2840 2850 2860 2870 2880 2890 2900 2910 2920 2930 2940 2950 2960 2970 2980 2990 3000 3010 3020 3030 3040 3050 3060 3070 3080 3090 3100 3110 3120 3130 3140 3150 3160 3170 3180 3190 3200 3210 3220 3230 3240 3250 3260 3270 3280 3290 3300 3310 3320 3330 3340 3350 3360 3370 3380 3390 3400 3410 3420 3430 3440 3450 3460 3470 3480 3490 3500 3510 3520 3530 3540 3550 3560 3570 3580 3590 3600 3610 3620 3630 3640 3650 3660 3670 3680 3690 3700 3710 3720 3730 3740 3750 3760 3770 3780 3790 3800 3810 3820 3830 3840 3850 3860 3870 3880 3890 3900 3910 3920 3930 3940 3950 3960 3970 3980 3990 4000 4010 4020 4030 4040 4050 4060 4070 4080 4090 4100 4110 4120 4130 4140 4150 4160 4170 4180 4190 4200 4210 4220 4230 4240 4250 4260 4270 4280 4290 4300 4310 4320 4330 4340 4350 4360 4370 4380 4390 4400 4410 4420 4430 4440 4450 4460 4470 4480 4490 4500 4510 4520 4530 4540 4550 4560 4570 4580 4590 4600 4610 4620 4630 4640 4650 4660 4670 4680 4690 4700 4710 4720 4730 4740 4750 4760 4770 4780 4790 4800 4810 4820 4830 4840 4850 4860 4870 4880 4890 4900 4910 4920 4930 4940 4950 4960 4970 4980 4990 5000 5010 5020 5030 5040 5050 5060 5070 5080 5090 5100 5110 5120 5130 5140 5150 5160 5170 5180 5190 5200 5210 5220 5230 5240 5250 5260 5270 5280 5290 5300 5310 5320 5330 5340 5350 5360 5370 5380 5390 5400 5410 5420 5430 5440 5450 5460 5470 5480 5490 5500 5510 5520 5530 5540 5550 5560 5570 5580 5590 5600 5610 5620 5630 5640 5650 5660 5670 5680 5690 5700 5710 5720 5730 5740 5750 5760 5770 5780 5790 5800 5810 5820 5830 5840 5850 5860 5870 5880 5890 5900 5910 5920 5930 5940 5950 5960 5970 5980 5990 6000 6010 6020 6030 6040 6050 6060 6070 6080 6090 6100 6110 6120 6130 6140 6150 6160 6170 6180 6190 6200 6210 6220 6230 6240 6250 6260 6270 6280 6290 6300 6310 6320 6330 6340 6350 6360 6370 6380 6390 6400 6410 6420 6430 6440 6450 6460 6470 6480 6490 6500 6510 6520 6530 6540 6550 6560 6570 6580 6590 6600 6610 6620 6630 6640 6650 6660 6670 6680 6690 6700 6710 6720 6730 6740 6750 6760 6770 6780 6790 6800 6810 6820 6830 6840 6850 6860 6870 6880 6890 6900 6910 6920 6930 6940 6950 6960 6970 6980 6990 7000 7010 7020 7030 7040 7050 7060 7070 7080 7090 7100 7110 7120 7130 7140 7150 7160 7170 7180 7190 7200 7210 7220 7230 7240 7250 7260 7270 7280 7290 7300 7310 7320 7330 7340 7350 7360 7370 7380 7390 7400 7410 7420 7430 7440 7450 7460 7470 7480 7490 7500 7510 7520 7530 7

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN THIS THESIS

ABE	Adult Basic Education
ADP	Area Development Program
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CEMA	Committee of Ethnicity and Mountainous Areas
DFID	Department for International Development
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
FSC	Fixed Settlement and Cultivation
FM	Forest Management
FPD	Forest Protection Department
FLA	Forestry Land Allocation
GSOV	General Statistics Office of Vietnam
GO	Government Officer
HLS	Household Livelihood Security
HEPAP	Hunger Eradication and Poverty Alleviation Programme
IDS	Institute of Development Studies, based in UK
LSA	Livelihood Security Assessments
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs
NEZs	New Economic Zones
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PLAR	Participatory Learning and Action Research
SD	Sustainable Development
SL	Sustainable Livelihoods
SLF	Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
SLA	Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches
SPSS	A software program used to analyze fieldwork data
SRL	Sustainable Rural Livelihoods
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

UNDES	United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VND	Vietnam Dong
VHLSS	Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey
VNM	Vietnamese Minority
VAC	Vườn-Ao-Chuồng: A national project Garden-Pond-Cage
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WVV	World Vision Vietnam

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0. Introduction**

The terms Sustainable Development (SD), Sustainable Livelihoods (SL), and Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) have been discussed thoroughly in recent academic and development debates (Carney, 2003). The significance of these debates has strongly influenced many people across a wide range of interest groups and prompted them to become activists (Chambers, 1988). Chambers has argued that in the past the debate on environment and development has been biased towards material objects rather than people, the rich rather than the poor, men rather than women, and issues of quantity rather than quality (Chambers, 1988, p.1). Meanwhile the gap between rich and poor and between first and third world is increasing (World Development Report, 2001). It is well documented that economic growth and the introduction of advanced technologies benefits neither every individual nor every nation. Developed countries continue to enjoy the most powerful positions in the world economic market and even though China has recently emerged as the second biggest economy in the world, the great majority of people in both developing and under-developed countries suffer from poverty and hunger (Firebaugh, 1999). The incidence of poverty not only differs from nation to nation but also within countries people from different classes, in different areas, belonging to different ethnic groups, also suffer from the socioeconomic shortfalls (Thorbecke & Charumilind, 2002). Unacceptable inequalities in the distribution of wealth, low living standards and inadequate access to social welfare remain the most visible and persistent characteristics of underdevelopment. As a typical developing country Vietnam faces the challenge of maintaining even-handed policies that ensure fair standards of equity (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001) and people like the minority Muong who live in relative isolation from the principal urban centres of production, distribution and exchange are often disadvantaged by structural constraints. The situation varies from case to case.

This research will not directly address the structural constraints that result in socioeconomic disparity, but focus on how a minority group in Vietnam can minimize the socioeconomic gap by enhancing their access to education and better manage and strengthen their livelihoods.

Vietnam has a large population of ethnic minorities who mostly inhabit upland and mountainous areas. Ethnic minority groups tend to have a higher poverty concentration than the majority Vietnamese who belong to the Kinh ethnolinguistic group (Baulch, Truong, Haughton, & Haughton, 2007). Even though the central government has recently updated rural and remote areas development policies, the peoples in remote areas have yet to profit from these changes (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001)<sup>1</sup>.

This research looks at the relevance and effectiveness of the way the Muong<sup>2</sup> manage their livelihoods, the roots of poverty, and the role education plays in the development of their sustainable livelihoods strategies. An interpretation is made of the way Muong people approach the use of their agricultural assets, and an assessment made of the potential profitability of these assets that might enable them to finance a pathway out of poverty.

Agriculture is the principal component of rural livelihoods development and improvements in production are some of the few ways minority people who inhabit remote rural highland

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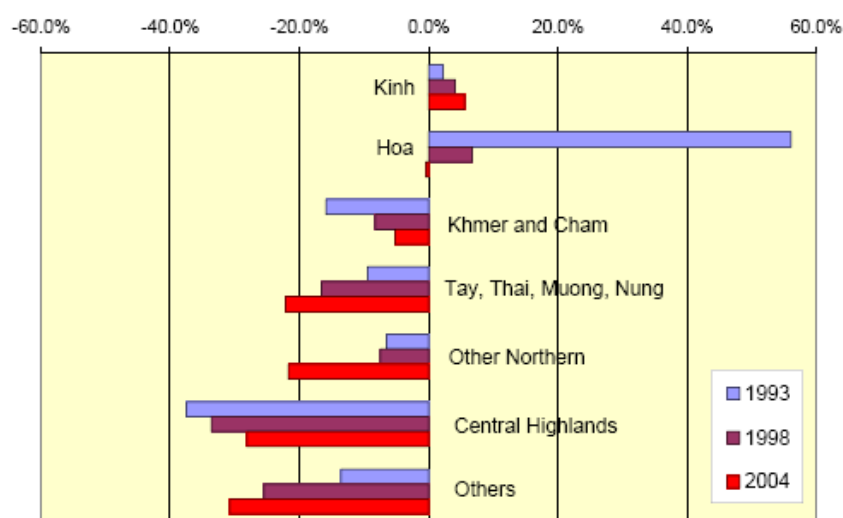
<sup>1</sup> There is sufficient evidence for socioeconomic disparities among central and remote area peoples provided in World Bank reports and national surveys.

<sup>2</sup> In formal Vietnamese the people I am calling Muong are called *Dân tộc Mông*. Their total population is about 1,137,515 and their communities are found principally in North-western provinces such as Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An. The Muong make up 1.3% of the Vietnamese population. Their settlements form an arc between the Vietnamese from Vinh Phu province to the west of Hoa Binh. Settlements are also found in the midlands of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa province. Muong live mainly off the land and tend to limit production to meet their own domestic needs. Source:  
<http://cema.gov.vn/modules.php?name=Content&mcid=1128> Reviewed on 15/09/2010

areas can improve their lot. They rely absolutely on the natural assets available in their immediate environment to eradicate hunger and reduce poverty. There is a huge gap to close before the differences in socioeconomic conditions between minority and majority groups in Vietnam can be eradicated (Baulch et al., 2007) and this closure will not be achieved unless the government is able to do more to implement local initiatives consistent with their support policies. The (IDS) Institute of Development Studies (2008) study documents the extent of the challenge. Their findings state that the gap between the Kinh (majority) and minority peoples' expenditures increased by 14.6% between 1993 and 2004. The national household living standard survey carried out by the General Statistics Office in 2004 showed that the Kinh majority have been the primary beneficiaries of the stimulous policies followed under "Doi moi". (See Figure 1.1)

Many researchers of Vietnam's ethnic minorities argue that the policies have had some positive affects on minority communities but the indigenous minority people do not benefit as much from those policies or programs as the majority Kinh (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001).

**Figure 1.1. Ethnic Welfare Differentials for Rural Vietnam 1993-2004**



Source: IDS, 2008 *"The economic development of Vietnamese ethnic minorities"*

In the main body of this thesis the following questions will be raised: Why do ethnic minority people not benefit from supportive programs to the same extent as Kinh? Is this because of the lower educational background of minority people? Do majority Kinh people have better knowledge, skills and other qualifications that enable them to more successfully participate in the national industrial economy? This study will also examine the role played by the national education system and syllabus and assess the relevance of what is offered to support Muong livelihoods. At a UNESCO conference held in 2008 it was agreed that “education is fundamental for just, peaceful, adaptable societies without poverty and that none of the international development goals can be achieved without education” (UNESCO, 2008, p.3). In this thesis it is also asked what positive contribution formal education makes to enhance the Muong management of their livelihood assets.

The central questions in this thesis are: Does education contribute to the Muong capability to earn more income and improve their standard of living? Are Muong satisfied with what they have or are they looking for change? In what ways can education possibly affect Muong socioeconomic behaviours and impact on their capability to provide inputs, achieve outputs and secure better outcomes?

The research was conducted in a Muong community village named Muot<sup>3</sup> with a population of 687 of whom 99% are Muong. They live separated from one another scattered over slopes of mountains. Muot village is six kilometres from the commune centre. Its remote location commits Muot villagers to the necessity of having to travel to complete daily activities. To go to school, visit the infirmary, purchase goods or sell

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<sup>3</sup> Muot village, in Vietnamese is Làng Muốt. It is one of nine villages in the Cam Thanh commune of Cam Thuy district, Thanh Hoa province. Muot village consists of 198 households with 687 citizens of whom 335 are female. 99.6 percent of villagers are Muong. Three Kinh married into the community. The village is about 95 kilometres from Thanh Hoa provincial city, and 170 kilometres from Ha Noi capital. Connecting Muot village and Thanh Hoa city is national road 45, and 217. This information is taken from data collected in the course of fieldwork conducted between May and November 2010.

produce at the commune market they must leave their homes and commit several hours to the journey.

In order to assess the small holder Muong household livelihood capabilities, methodologies, and performance this study uses a mix of methods that involves both collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data (Buber, Gadner, & Richards., 2004). The collection of this kind of data involves using closed-ended check lists of points against which the researcher checks the behaviours seen (Creswell, 2003) and opened-ended investigations in which the researcher gathers information through interviews with participants and focus groups. By merging and integrating the data sets, the researcher gains a better understanding of the problem. The reason I chose mixed methods research for this study is that mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weakness of both quantitative and qualitative methods. For example the quantitative method alone is weak in understanding the context in which people talk. In contrast, qualitative research used on its own is deficient because the personal interpretations made by the researcher may be too strongly biased to provide a balanced overall view.

## **1.1. The Significance of the Research**

### **1.1.1 Theoretical contribution**

#### ***Education and development***

Education has been identified as an essential instrument for achieving development (McKeown, Hopkins, Rizzi, & Chrystalbridge, 2002). It is fundamental to the establishment of setting up a prosperous, just and peaceful society. None of these developmental goals can be achieved without education (UNESCO, 2005). Critics of the contemporary global production system are of the opinion that in the long run unlimited industrial growth and rapid development is not sustainable. They argue that because humans are exploiting limited, non renewable natural resources current growth rates cannot be maintained. Within this context scholars such as Hopkins and McKeown have argued that only education and training can provide the pathway down which ideas for



sustainability can be delivered (McKeown et al., 2002). Many capable educational researchers have taken up this idea and identified how education can be used as an instrument to influence how people behave and modify how they see the contemporary world and the future. No attempt has been made to advance a single all embracing theory and the theorists themselves proceed in a much more cautious and pragmatic manner in which they argue for specificity. They argue that different economic and social milieu require different educational programs and criteria. Embedded in this thesis is the idea that poor minority peoples living in remote areas need special education to promote livelihoods and development; this must be precise and suitably focused within an educational program that may have to be different from that used in the mainstream of national life.

This is not my view. Given the limitations imposed by the Vietnamese government it is easier to secure more support for minority students to succeed within the existing system than attempt to change the system itself. My guiding principle is that in such a situation it is best to be pragmatic.

On the lowlands in the urban industrial society with which Kinh are familiar education is a means for people to learn and to act. It is a pathway to human capital formation. This thesis supports the principle that education plays an important role in developing human capital which is so important to socioeconomic sustainability. It also argues that the concrete situation of the Muong ethnic community requires a relevant response in which the specificity of their situations must be taken into account and given additional support so they can make better use of what the state offers in the way of education. According to Lawrence (2009) rapid changes are occurring in the work environment and basic literacy and numeracy have been transcended as basic requirements for obtaining formal sector employment (Lawrence, 2009).

### ***The interrelationships between education and minority livelihoods***

When considering livelihoods, employment and employability is a fundamental issue. However finding a job is mainly determined by education (Chambers, 1997). Many researchers have shown that education is supposed to prepare people for jobs; to equip

people with relevant knowledge, skills and capabilities that enable people to either handle or step out of poverty (Lawrence, 2009). In 1945 at the beginning of the new school academic year president Ho Chi Minh sent a letter addressed to every student in the country stating “*Whether or not Vietnam is a glorious country, whether or not Vietnam can match itself against the world’s super nations, depends on your capability to study*”. The appeal president Ho Chi Minh made at that time has been and will forever be engraved into each succeeding generation’s mind; however there can be no single measure of what constitutes successful study. In a large country with so many people belonging to different ethno-linguistic groups and facing different conditions each student needs in their own way, in their own place to demonstrate what it means to respond appropriately to Ho Chi Minh’s instruction. The living conditions faced by the majority of people on the central lowlands and those faced by the highland minority are too different for a single syllabus to meet the needs of all.

One of the principal arguments developed in this study will focus on how current education policy impacts poor minority ethnic people and their livelihoods, and will present information collected in the field from a specific community to contribute to the debate on whether changes need to be made to the delivery of education which directly impacts on their livelihoods. If poor people are to be put first in any development policy then promoting sustainable development may be the next important step in the right direction (Lawrence, 2009) but would this approach work in Vietnam? The findings presented in this thesis will reflect the viewpoint of the Muong on how important they consider education to be for the next generation and whether they consider education to be a vital tool if their young people are to achieve their career goals. This debate is also in line with the UNESCO Decade 2005-2014 campaign on “Education for Sustainable Development” highlighted at the UNESCO conference 2008. Steps were taken to encourage a dynamic and far-reaching adoption of the transformative power of education to serve this vision and engage policymakers, researchers and a range of institutions in reorienting education systems – from early childhood to higher education, in formal and non-formal settings – to promote equity, lifelong learning, innovation and sustainable development (Vare, 2007).

### **1.1.2. Practical contribution**

#### ***The socioeconomic disparity between majority and minority groups in Vietnam***

One of the main conclusions of the UNESCO conference (2008) was the startling observation that if societies are characterised by poverty, significant inequalities, discrimination and exclusion, they are on the wrong path to development and if education is characterized by inequality and discrimination it will increase socioeconomic disparities, and undermine sustainable livelihoods, the achievement of equality and sustainable development. As Vietnam is considered to be a country with a high rate of poverty, large inequalities and in which ethnic bias is common (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001) it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that something needs to be done to correct this. The matter has not been ignored. Within the last few decades, Vietnam has carried out a vigorous campaign to eradicate hunger and poverty by improving food security and increasing incomes. The national poverty rate called PI in Vietnam is worked out on the proportion of the population living under the standard poverty line and over the period 1993 to 1998 it fell by 21% and again from 1998 to 2002 by 8%. In November 2010, the Vietnamese government implemented a nationwide poverty household's survey “*Điều tra hộ nghèo*” designed to find out who and where the really poor households were and to follow this up by granting additional financial support to the affected households. As part of this initiative the government undertook to provide their children with the necessary support in order to make it possible for them to get access to higher education.

The efforts of the government to reduce poverty and eradicate hunger has helped many rural households. However many problems remain. Even though it might be ideal to have everyone at the same level of living conditions, this may not be achievable on a micro-scale. The reality is that on a macro scale the gap between households in minority mountainous areas and in central areas is constantly growing (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001; Baulch et al., 2007). These authors have argued that this has come about largely because the complex farming systems developed by minorities over the centuries is so strongly intermeshed with indigenous cultural practices and knowledge that unless

agricultural training programmes and the like are sociologically informed to address their challenges, investment in change is unlikely to work (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001). Researchers have shown that many interventions including training programs which offer advanced agricultural knowledge and agro-models are nearly always premised on Kinh lowland models and behaviours. Apart from the fact that some ethnic minorities do not speak Vietnamese (Kinh language) well, and government trainers do not use local dialects, the content of the courses is not always relevant. Too many agricultural extension courses fail to focus on mountain or upland crops and agro-economic systems and too often give pride of place to irrigated rice and monetised lowland economic systems (Walle & Gunewardena 2001). If little that is taught seems relevant and few innovations proposed by trainers are adopted, no positive gain is made. It goes without saying that if the capability of farmers to earn is not enhanced then income disparities will also continue to grow (Thorbecke & Charumilind, 2002). If sustainable development cannot be achieved and population continues to grow it will become increasingly likely that people will find it difficult to meet their basic needs. If socioeconomic disparities continue to grow, they will tend to undermine the strength and stability of the larger society. When such disparities come to be closely associated with socio-cultural identity the nation itself can become divided along ethnolinguistic lines and ‘popular’ if crass forms of racism can further place groups within a society at odds with each other. Vietnam as a peoples’ democracy cannot tolerate such discrimination (Baulch et al., 2007).

The researcher argues that the economic management choices and resource allocation strategies into which individuals enter in the course of securing a living are not only economic but are part of the wider socio-cultural fabric of their world (Carby-Samuels, 2006). Ethnic minority people have their own way of earning their living and this needs to be respected. Therefore this study does not attempt to define a strategy which people should follow if they are to transform their pathways or change their orientation, but simply to get alongside them, help them to better speak, read and write Kinh and make better use of current educational opportunities.

### ***Improvement of living standards for ethnic minorities in Thanh Hoa province.***

Thanh Hoa is a province with the third largest population in Vietnam (3.67 million people) following Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi the capital. The province is home to seven main ethnic groups. They are the Kinh, Muong, Thai, H'mong, Dao, Tho, and Hoa (Chinese). The Kinh form the the majority and live in the central lowlands and along the sea coast, while Muong, Thai, H'mong, Dao, Tho, Hoa live in remote and mountainous areas in the Northwest of the province<sup>4</sup>. With such a big population, however, Thanh Hoa's economy is growing but as has already been pointed out, as in other areas of Vietnam the people in rural and remote areas suffer from high rates of poverty and inadequate living conditions. Even though the Vietnamese government and provincial administration have introduced policies to assist poor and less developed communities in the northwest along the border with Lao PDR the gap between the Kinh and the mountainous minority remains high. There are many aspects of nature conservation and economic development that need to be researched. There is some controversy relating to the role to which Muong villagers have been assigned as custodians to manage and protect the reserve forest around their home-plots. There are many who believe they do not do this well enough and although this matter will be examined in the research, first consideration will be given throughout the study to the people themselves, how they view their position and how they manage resources and finally to how they might achieve sustainable development. The approach will lend itself to give Muong villagers the opportunity to speak, provide an opportunity for them to lay down their own procedures and objectives and give them a fair chance to say how they see the way ahead: how they might improve their economic living conditions and social expectations.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: The information is achieved on December 10, 2010 from the main provincial official website <http://www.thanhhoa.gov.vn/web/guest/home>

## **1.2. Aims and Objectives**

It is an honour for anyone concerned with education and the alleviation of poverty, especially for one working in the educational system to be given the opportunity to work with the Muong. It is therefore not my purpose to treat the Muong as either objects or subjects of my research but partners to enable them to articulate their view of their world, their situation, ideas and plans for the future and report on the understanding gained.

This study is not likely to force to change the national policies regarding supports for poor minority people but my primary objective is to raise awareness among policy makers, government organizations, scholars and other agencies of the importance of education to rural development, especially remote poor communities. This awareness may lead to action researches conducted by the government during which local people should be considered as the centre of the concern. Local people should be able to participate in and play important role in any study about them. The participants normally understand their situation best, therefore they should be the one to decide what should be done, what is suitable and what is not. This objective is partly from my intention that top-down authority and centre-management should be limited when conducting development research in Vietnam. This awareness may also lead to increase funds for rural studies and development projects in rural remote communities.

The second objective of this study is to identify the root causes of poverty and establish whether livelihood assets were managed poorly and unproductively in the study area in which 99% of households share a Muong ethnic identity. I would humbly construct and explain the role played by education in the management of livelihood assets and the development of sustainable livelihoods in mountainous and remote areas. This is my intention to present the Muong villagers' view of what they are experiencing; what they expect to change and what they want to remain. The researcher listened to and encouraged villagers to talk freely about how they perceive the world around them. The necessity for them to take into account formal considerations relating to local rules and government policies was as much as possible entirely suspended.

Thirdly, this study is a great opportunity for me to gain knowledge and experiences of conducting independent research through my teaching career. This research becomes more important to me in the context that “research environment” in Vietnam has inherently influenced by top-down hierarchy of management and centralized power. It is time to decentralize and empower local people to decide what they really need and what is not suitable for them.

Last but not least, as a lecturer at Hong Duc university, a public university of Thanh Hoa province, my underpinned motivation to conduct this research is to hope that more and more minority students from poor and remote areas have better chances to gain higher education. The opportunity of achieving education should be equal to everyone.

### **1.3. Geography of Research Location**

#### **1.3.1. Geographical location and topography**

The field research is conducted in Muot village, in Cam Thuy district, a north-western district of Thanh Hoa province. Thanh Hoa province is in the mid-north of Vietnam which is 150 kilometres to the south of Ha Noi and 1,560 kilometres to the north of Ho Chi Minh City. The area is bordered in the north by three provinces: Son La, Hoa Binh, and Ninh Binh. In the south it borders on Nghe An province. The western border is formed by the international border with Lao DPR and in the east by the sea. Thanh Hoa province’s topography plays an important role in Vietnam socioeconomic development as it connects the north and the south. All important overland routes from Ha Noi to Ho Chi Minh City have to pass through Thanh Hoa province. This includes the Ho Chi Minh road, National Roads 1A, 10, 45, 217. Thanh Hoa province also maintains a seaport through which imports and exports are shipped.

The province has a diverse terrain which becomes steeper as you move west away from the coast. There are three clearly different regions. The region to the west is mountainous and includes uplands and intermontane valleys which occupy 75.44% of the total land area. The average altitude of this region is 600 – 700 metres above sea level. Most minority people

live in the mountainous and upland areas on slopes that exceed 25 degrees, or the midland and intermontane land including slopes up to 15-20 degrees.

The second region forms the plain and deltas and covers 162,341 hectares. It is good agricultural land with naturally fertile soil. This region occupies 14.61% of the total land area and was formed as a flood plain of the Ma, Yen, and Hoat rivers over thousands of years. Irrigated rice is the principal crop closely followed by annual crops such as corn, cassava, and potatoes. Bananas are also grown for sale. The average altitude of this area is 5-15 metres and the mainly flat land is interrupted with huge limestone outcrops. The Ma river delta is the third largest in the country after that of the Mekong and Red Rivers.

The third region is the economically significant coast stretching 120 kilometres from north to south. This important tourism and aquaculture region encompasses an area of 110,655 hectares which makes up 9.95% of the total land in the province. This is a tropical monsoon area. The average annual rainfall ranges from 1600-2300mm depending on the terrain, there are about 90-130 sunny days and the relative humidity hovers between 85% and 87%. Conditions make Thanh Hoa province a good place for agriculture, silviculture, and aquaculture.

### **1.3.2. Land use**

The total area of Thanh Hoa province is approximately 1,112,033 hectares of which 245,367 hectares is used for agriculture; 553,999 hectares for silviculture; 10,157 hectares for aquatic production and 153,520 hectares is not used directly for economic activity, being mostly forest.

Natural and managed forests cover approximately 484,246 hectares and make an important contribution to the province's economy. Valuable timbers as well as special varieties of bamboo are managed in a sustainable manner. The forest also provides a home for a wide range of animals and reptiles.



## **1.4. Structure of the Thesis**

The dissertation consists of eight chapters.

Chapter One provides both an introduction to the issues under examination and a sketch of the specific research location.

Chapter Two presents the result of a review of the literature relating to education for sustainable development and the sustainable livelihoods framework. In this chapter, the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable rural livelihoods, livelihood resource management, minority livelihoods, and education for sustainable livelihoods development will be discussed and clarified. The differences between the concept of education for sustainable development (ESD) and education on sustainable development (SD) are discussed. The research does not attempt to extend established views but places an emphasis on the vital role that can be played by academic education and vocational training in enhancing livelihood outcomes and livelihood assets. The challenge of providing the necessary intellectual tools to improve the management of resources in remote and mountainous communities cannot be underestimated. This view forms the philosophical foundation of the research and the framework for the investigation. A special case is made for the livelihood challenges facing people in remote mountainous minority communities and what education can do to strengthen their position. The answer to the question:

If the Muong expect to achieve the same standard of living as their peers on the lowlands what do they need to do? This issue will be addressed in chapter five and six.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical framework drawn from the literature on education for sustainable rural development. General theory from this field however does not entirely serve the purpose of this specific study in which the emphasis is placed on collecting empirical, socio-cultural detail of relevance to the general approach to education in remote and mountainous communities where the management of livelihood assets is a challenge. The chapter reviews the literature on Sustainable Rural Development and Sustainable Rural Livelihood Development in relation to general education and vocational training. This is

the foundation on which the analytical framework is built and in which education is considered to be one of the most vital instruments through which the transfer of livelihood knowledge assembled by the government from scientific research can be passed to local minority farmers. Another philosophical bias underlying the research is the argument that if sustainable development is to be achieved, we have to ensure that the socio-cultural identity and quality of life of the people must be protected: human well-being should be given priority. Education should play a role that celebrates Muong labour, enriches their skills, scientific knowledge, and self esteem and establishes their rights as full citizens of Vietnam. Education should serve all citizens equally well and make it possible for people from any background to realise their potential, pursue their ambitions and secure their future.

In Chapter Three the methodology employed in the research is detailed including the steps and methods used to collect and process the data. A high trust relationship was formed between the researcher and participants and as a consequence increased attention was given to participant observation which eased the process and made for a high degree of effectiveness. The people of Muot village have a good and longstanding relationship with staff and researchers based at Hong Duc University and I was able to build on this. Villagers were particularly interested in what education might offer to their children and as most parents want to improve their children's access to higher education as well as enhance their livelihoods I was given a particularly warm welcome by the villagers. Their interest greatly motivated my wish to do a good job with the research.

I first planned to use only Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR) tools but while in the field I resorted to a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, a mixed methods approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). I found this to be more reliable and enable me to better document and build my understanding. The principal qualitative methods used included informal conversations and interviews conducted with individuals as the opportunity arose, a planned observation schedule, and focus group interviews that often snowballed into subsequent discussions with specific participants. Villagers enjoyed the discussions which gave them a chance to express their opinions and demonstrate their

knowledge. The process enabled me to correct errors before data was written into the data base. Group discussion also provided an opportunity for me to engage in open discussion with local villagers and for everybody to share their ideas and experiences with each other. I even joined a group of teenagers playing billiards, snooker and pool to learn that most of them were of secondary or high school age, and that they spent at least two hours a day in the late evening amusing themselves rather than studying at home or helping their parents. The quantitative data was collected from my personal survey and Thanh Hoa government survey in which I was fortunately allowed to participate as a team member.

Chapter Four reviews the situation of Vietnamese minorities in general and Muong in particular. The chapter outlines the current situation of the 53 official minority ethnolinguistic groups in Vietnam who share full citizenship with the Kinh majority who make up 84% of the total population (Baulch et al., 2007). Data was collected that would enable me to build up a comparative socioeconomic profile to show the similarities and disparities between them. The educational performance of minority children was given special consideration.

In this chapter government policies and programs designed to assist ethnic minority communities are also presented and discussed. This involves a review of the results of these programs and a discussion of whether any progress has been made. I also discuss expected performance, achievements, approaches and inputs that may well have a positive impact on minority peoples welfare. The situation of minorities is a sensitive political matter and how to enhance their living conditions and livelihood outcomes is not an easy matter to discuss. In this research I try to avoid broad political issues and focus on a more specialised matter: what a more pragmatic and sociologically informed approach to education could have on livelihood inputs and outcomes. I will discuss among other matters the government policy of assigning forestland to households for them to protect but not harvest. The consequences of this policy are carried over to Chapter 6 where they are critically analyzed and alternatives discussed.

This chapter also reviews the role played by NGOs in remote and poor rural communities and what their engagement is in the attempt to improve the quality of life and enhance the educational achievement of children. The NGO focus on health, education, and the environment are assessed and an attempt made to measure the significance of what they have achieved.

Chapter Five presents the results of the fieldwork exercises, analysis, and what was learnt about how the Muong of Muot village secure a livelihood. The fieldwork was carried out between June and November 2010. Over this period the local Muong villagers planted two crops: irrigated rice and winter farm produce. During the principal cultivation season Muong small holder farmers also cut firewood and collected bamboo to split and weave into mats. Over my six months in the field I had the chance to live alongside Muong and had numerous personal talks with them, organize exercises in which they participated, and to form lasting friendships in which my awareness of any significant social distance became imperceptible. In the course of drinking parties conducted in the private space of each others homes I formed friendships that allowed for frank and free exchange. In this chapter all the details relating to these activities is presented and an analysis of the information collected carried out.

In addition to the information obtained from PLA exercises, I also collected reliable statistical data from a national/provincial poverty survey, which was carried out when I was in residence and in which I participated as an enumerator. This quantitative data nicely complemented my own more qualitative information and I was able to triangulate material from a very objective position. The text of this chapter focuses mainly on information relating to Muong household livelihoods. The relationship between education and how it is likely to bear on the future of the children of today is also discussed. The research reviews the attitudes held by parents towards education and what it means to their children. Information was collected from a wide range of people besides parents and included householders and family members who were interested in taking part in discussions and sharing their experiences.

Chapter Six presents the results of fieldwork exercises, analysis, and findings which focused on the educational backgrounds and performance of Muong children. These fieldwork exercises were less complex than those targeting livelihoods. An attempt was made to explore the attitudes of Muong minority children toward schooling, education and student plans. Seventy students from 11 to 18 years old, attending grades 6 to 12 took part. The group ranged from secondary school to high school in Vietnam's educational system. Of the seventy five participating, some had already left school. The reason I chose a focus group between 11 and 18 is that at this age young Vietnamese start thinking carefully about what they can do with their lives and have already developed a deeper understanding of the factors that can influence their futures. The NGO World Vision, also works in the area and has an office in Cam Thuy district town. I conducted interviews with staff to find out what programs they and other civil society groups have initiated with Muong and how successful these programs have been.

Chapter Seven presents my discussion of the findings from the fieldwork. The practical issues facing Muong are brought together and I discuss their vulnerability context and the relationship between income and level of education.

Chapter Eight is divided into two parts. The first provides a summary of findings. These are evaluated with reference to the principal hypothesis of the thesis that education could play a much more significant role in enabling Muong to secure better livelihoods. I will argue the case for this with reference to the information collected in the course of the research. The second part is the recommendations. They are divided into two categories: one addresses the issue of general education and the other education for sustainable livelihoods. The recommendations for general education in this research does not focus on the content and syllabus of the existing educational system but presents an argument for ways in which both students and parents can be encouraged to develop more positive attitudes toward education and how to achieve better results. The recommendation includes strategies that poor households could follow to overcome financial difficulties and enable their children to complete basic education and earn access to higher education. Financial shortfalls should

not be an obstacle to higher education which would provide them with a way to build stronger future.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW: EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS**

### **2.0. Introduction**

In the past three decades, numerous researchers, governments and non-government organizations have worked with and debated the concept of sustainable development. Education has come to be considered a fundamental part of this concept for many (Chircop, 1996). This chapter presents the basic concepts referred to in this text: sustainable development, sustainable livelihoods, rural livelihoods, shifting cultivation, education for sustainable development, and education for rural livelihoods; and indicates how they are relevant to this thesis. Modernization accompanied by rapid economic growth and technological development has resulted in an increasingly wide gap emerging between rich and poor often within countries just as much as, if not more than, between them. These disparities impact negatively on world social, economic and political stability and the current situation is not sustainable.

A province such as Thanh Hoa in Vietnam provides a good example of contemporary development. The provincial centre is the hub of trade, finance, economic, transportation, and politics where a relatively wealthy group enjoy reasonable incomes and a high standard of living. In remote areas of the province the opposite applies. People rarely have a chance to achieve a level of comfort that makes their life relatively easy. Faced with the serious issues that are embedded in the disparities between rich and poor, researchers and activists have searched for solutions and repeatedly asked: what can be done for poor, remote, rural communities if positive livelihood development is to be achieved? In the last few decades, human resource development has been given priority (Chircop, 1996). This author also argues that the need for competent human resources is more evident than ever and education as an essential tool for human resource development must be given more attention if sustainable development is to be achieved (McKeown et al., 2002). At the 1992

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Rio Summit or Rio Conference, sustainability was adopted as the fundamental principle to support the development of humankind at all levels. Furthermore, at the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 Conference in 2002 education was identified as being a “fundamental component in developing a just, peaceful, adaptable society free of poverty” (UNESCO, 2008, p.3). Clearly no international development goals can be achieved without education. The UNESCO World Conference on “Education for Sustainable Development – Moving into the Second Half of the United Nations Decade” in Bonn 2009 affirmed that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is relevant to all types, levels and settings in which education is offered, and all approaches to teaching and learning should be consistent with the underlying ideals and principles of sustainability. This Conference also declared that “ESD helps society to address different priorities and issues: water, energy, climate change, disaster mitigation and risk reduction, loss of biodiversity, food crises, health risks, social vulnerability and insecurity. It is critical for the development of new economic thinking” (UNESCO, 2008, p.12).

## **2.1. Sustainable Development**

### **2.1.1. The concept of Sustainable Development**

The concept of sustainable development has become popular in both academic and socio-political debates. There is, of course, more than one way to interpret this concept. However, the most common definition of sustainable development is provided by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987: “Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p5). This definition has attracted criticism because it is too general. Costanza and Patten (1995), for example questioned what subsystems or characteristics of systems persist, and for how long the “future generation” could be defined. Critics have also argued that the concept is “useless because it cannot be adequately defined” (Costanza & Patten, 1995, p.12). Similarly, Graaf, Musters and Keurs (1996) posed questions such as: what must be developed in a sustainable way? Is



this the world, the earth, humankind, a country, a society, or sectors such as agriculture or transport? How long must a development be sustained? “How can today’s decision makers take the needs of future generations into account?” (Graaf et al., 1996, p.206).

Many politicians and scientists have tried to answer these questions but no clear answer has been forthcoming (Attfield, Hattingh, & Matshabaphala, 2004; Costanza and Patten, 1995; Graaf et al., 1996). Following this concept, many subcategories have been discussed and defined in order to come to a clearer view of sustainable development and to find ways to achieve it. These authors argue that most people use the phrase “sustainable development” interchangeably with “ecologically sustainable development”. In other words, this critique refers to environmental or ecological sustainability (Lélé, 1991). In Daly’s (1991) discussion of the importance of sustainable development, he states a central question what criteria should be used to test for the sustainable use of natural resources? In Daly’s discussion, the term sustainable development and sustainable growth are distinguished though people frequently confuse the two terms. An economy can grow without developing, or develop without growing, or do both or neither (Daly, 1991). Sustainable development is sometimes interpreted as sustainable growth or simply successful development (Lélé, 1991). In many arguments of sustainable development, the trend and quality of development becomes the central concern. This involves the objectives of the development process and the means to achieve these objectives. However in the last four decades development objectives and their means frequently do not act in ways which are consistent with sustainability (Costanza & Patten, 1995; Lélé, 1991; Pearce, Markandya, & Barbier, 1990; Sathiendrakumar, 1996; Willers, 1994). “Development” and “growth” are not the same. Growth can be understood as the increase in per capita consumption of certain basic goods, and development refers to the more fundamental changes required to ensure that improvement in human welfare is achieved and continued. What constitutes development depends on what social goals are being advocated (Pearce et al., 1990) by the government, development agencies or policy makers. According to Pearce et al. (1990), no matter how development is defined, it should be considered as a desirable social objective that tries to achieve the following elements:

- Increased real income per capita
- Improvement in health and nutritional status
- Educational achievement
- Access to resources
- A fairer distribution of income
- Increase in basic freedom (Pearce et al., 1990, pp. 3-4)

Pearce's work has had a strong influence on broadening the meaning of sustainable development and the guidelines to achieve it. Neoclassical economists, however, define development as a sustained increase in social welfare.

Sustainable development is normally interpreted as ecological sustainability in the context of renewable resources such as energy, forests, minerals, fisheries (Daly, 1991; L    , 1991). These different ideologies present opposite views on development. This means that the fundamental difference between economic development and ecological sustainability has remained unsolved (Sathiendrakumar, 1996). If the economy grows with more materials being consumed and outputs increasing, then environmental quality and natural capital will diminish (Pearce et al., 1989).

Sustainable development is mapped in different approaches by different schools of thought (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005). The primary concern of ecologists is the environment, "with the emphasis on the intrinsic value and needs of nature and the environment, while human needs come very much second" (Hopwood et al., 2005, p.42). However sustainable development should be considered to be a human-centred view in harmony with the interrelationship between environmental, social and economic issues. On the other hand, other writers with a social focus consider sustainable development as a key means to overcome social and economic disparity.

With such a set of different views regarding objectives, it is not surprising that there is considerable debate over the means to achieve sustainable development (Conroy & Berke, 2004).

Sustainable development is a concept which presents “the latest step in a long evolution of public concerns with respect both to natural resources and environment” (Batie, 1989, p.1087). This concept plays an important role in dealing with economic, social and environmental inter-relationships. The literature on sustainable development suggests that people now admit that human activities are reducing the long term capability of the natural environment and resources to provide goods and services for human economic well-being. However, at the same time governments, social activists, and development policy makers accept that poverty is devastating the lives of millions of people around the world (Lélé, 1991). Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable development goals, we need to incorporate all three factors: society, environment, and economy. Few doubt that successful adoption of sustainable development planning requires the support of the local community (Conroy & Berke, 2004).

### **2.1.2. Broad-based community participatory processes**

Within social perspectives regarding sustainable development, the literature shows that if the principles of sustainable development are to be followed, poor people should be given priority to create their own solutions to the problems they face. In order to create a process of learning and innovation, local people and institutions should be treated not as mere collaborators, but as actors in formal and informal research through which they can learn and identify problems by themselves and seek practical solutions (Mog, 2004). Sustainable development requires the participation of a diverse set of interests (Conroy & Berke, 2004). Local participants are the ones who experience and know best what situation they are in, and they can draw upon locally appropriate indigenous knowledge. Community-based participation allows researchers to engage in local participants’ activities and exercises, learning and sharing the experiences with local people (Conroy & Berke, 2004; McKinnon, 2010; Mog, 2004).

However Lélé (1991) argues that there are three issues involved in this process. First, participation and decentralization can be interchanged in some contexts and this can result in a situation where equity and social justice matters are not given adequate attention by government. Second, the manner in which participation is promoted can result in a narrow and quick-fix approach that simply does not work. Third, there is an assumption that participation will reinforce ecological sustainability but there may be little evidence for this (Lélé, 1991). On the other hand, Conroy et al. (2004) argue that “participation depth” means that participants do more than just simply show up to public meetings but that they are given the opportunity to determine the final policy outcome. This acknowledges the wide range of control afforded participants, stretching from feedback-only options (weak) to participant self-determination (strong). In a strong position people are equally empowered and fully informed to ensure that they can exert real influence on decisions that affect them (Conroy et al., 2004. p.1385). In this context equally empowered means acknowledging individuals to be of equal worth, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, or income. In order to do this programs should engage local agencies to help build “locally-controlled institutions which can eventually take over the roles of the program, and to create a sense of local investment” (Mog, 2004, p.2148).

### **2.1.3. The Role of Education in Sustainable Development: A human capital perspective**

The Rio Earth Summit of 1992 resulted in Agenda 21, the key agreement for action. Chapter 36 of the Agenda 21 agreed on the promotion of education awareness and training as:

Education, including formal education, public awareness and training should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues. (Agenda 21, chapter 36, p.3).

Many authors have recently argued that the trend of current economic development is not sustainable and that “public awareness, education and training are key to moving society toward sustainability” (Hopkins & McKeown, 2002, p.12) even though sustainable development is often ignored by traditional academic programs in schools (Rauch, 2002; Rauffet, Dupré, & Blanchard, 2009). The UN Decade for Sustainable Development (2008) highlighted the essential contribution of education for sustainable development and argued that education is fundamental for any society if it is to achieve national development goals. The UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development suggested that education for sustainable development is an approach to teaching and learning because it engages with key issues such as human rights, poverty eradication, sustainable livelihoods, climate change, gender equality, and corporate social responsibility. Indeed, education for sustainable development deals with the three key factors: environment, society and economy. The Bonn Conference’s declaration (2009) emphasizes several factors including: “reinforcing the educational response to sustainable development challenges; developing and building capacities for adapting to change; sharing knowledge and experiences; reinforcing synergies between different education and development initiatives” (WCESD, 2009, p.8). It focuses on creative and critical approaches, long term thinking to deal with uncertainty and complex problems. It suggests education for sustainable development helps societies to address different priorities and issues and make development stable and preserve social, economic and natural resources. Through education, people can achieve social equity and sustainable livelihoods and enhance their problem solving ability. In order to achieve sustainable development effectively, we not only need formal education but also informal and non-formal education (Hopkins & McKeown, 2002).

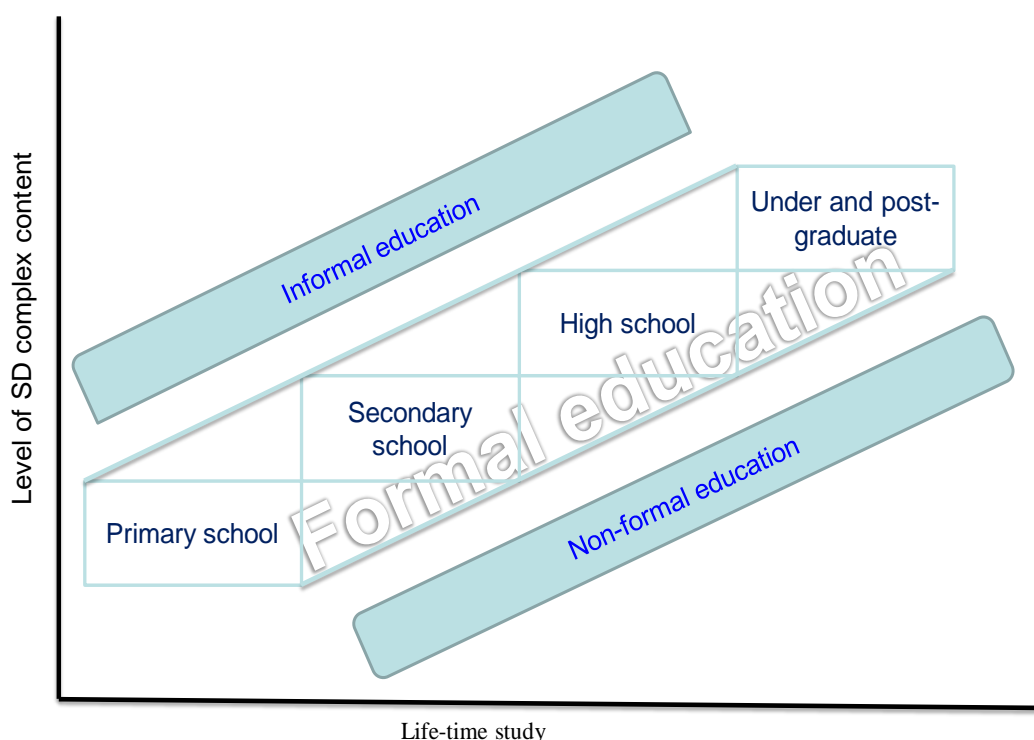
According to these authors formal education alone cannot carry the responsibility for sustainable development successfully. Therefore informal and non-formal education must work in tandem with the formal education sector to educate people in all generations and walks of life. While formal education works mostly with academic school students, non-formal education, which includes non-government organizations, environmental protection agencies, and health centres, can work with practically anyone.

Belle (1982) has defined three types of education: informal, nonformal and formal introduced by Coombs and Ahmed (1974) as follows:

Informal education is “the lifelong process by which every person requires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment” (p.161). Informal education does not necessarily include the objectives and subjects encompassed by the traditional curricula (Dib, 1988). This type of education does not necessarily require any degrees or diplomas.

Nonformal education is any “organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (ibib, p.162). Nonformal education is used to enhance religious or ethnic solidarity of children and youth because it focuses on the cognitive development of the individual as a participant in society (Eshach, 2007).

**Figure 2.1. Combination of informal, non-formal, and formal education**



Source: Adapted from the modes and characteristics of education (Belle, 1982)

Formal education is defined as the “institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured educational system, spanning lower primary school and upper reaches of the university” (ibid, p.161).

The threefold relationship of formal, non-formal and informal education for sustainable development could be described in Figure 2.1.

The diagram indicates that education for sustainable development is learnt throughout life. Each kind of education plays a different role and suits different individuals at different times. Sen (1997) considers education as a means to enhance human capital, while recent development studies prioritize a people-centre approach. Sen noted that if education makes a person more efficient in commodity production, then this is clearly an enhancement of human capital (Sen, 1997). Even with the same level of income, a person may profit from education through reading, communicating and debating. Sen concludes that the benefit of education exceeds its role as human capital in commodity production.

Research carried out by Swail et al (2003) led them to conclude that the importance of higher education to minority students has a great impact on the well-being of their societies. It determines not only their earning capability but also their quality of life. In terms of a generalized model of modernization a study by Mortenson (2002) provides a useful footnote. His work on the relationship between education and income documents the fact that those with higher educational qualifications earn higher incomes. The inclusive nature of modernization theory offers an adequate account of contemporary changes in Vietnam characterised by rapid economic growth and features of an advanced economy such as the USA then have something to say about what Vietnam is becoming.

In conclusion, education plays an important role in individual and community development not only in majority ethnic groups but also in minority communities. When indigenous people start to realize the importance of education for their children they become increasingly willing to invest as much as they can in their children’s education. Since a

people-centre approach has become a major principle of development studies, education has been considered as a crucial means to enhance human capital and capability.

## **2.2. Sustainable Livelihoods**

### **2.2.1. The concept of sustainable livelihoods**

The idea of sustainable livelihoods was first significantly introduced in the Brundtland Commission report in 1987. Initially, the concept of sustainable livelihoods was more focused on poverty eradication and low incomes (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003; Krantz, 2001). However, more recently policy makers and academics realized that sustainable livelihoods should also focus on various factors such as economy, ecology, healthcare, social services and so on. The WCED (1987) mainly discussed resource ownership, basic needs, and natural livelihood security, and in 1992 the UN Conference on Environment and Development broadened the sustainable livelihood as a means of linking socioeconomic and environmental concerns (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). Sustainable livelihoods, therefore, have become more and more important for rural poor people who are coping with poverty and environmental problems (Bebbington, 1999).

The sustainable livelihood security index consists of three components (Singh & Hiremath, 2010): security of ecology, efficient economy and equal society. Ecological security refers to quality of soil and water, forest preservation, air pollution, and other natural resources. Efficient economy refers to land and labour productivity, marketable surplus, input and output ratios. Equal society refers to the equal distribution of land, assets and income, people living above poverty lines and gender equality. A community's livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with the above components and deal with these matters successfully. As a result of work by DFID, Carney et al. (1999) investigated the sustainable livelihoods concept and its principles as a way of thinking about the objectives, scopes and priorities for development. It is to enhance the progress in poverty elimination. In this way sustainable livelihoods can help the poor to achieve lasting improvements against the indicators of poverty that they define (Carney & Ashley, 1999). According to Carney and Ashley's work sustainable livelihood's core components are the priority that people



identify, different strategies they adopt to suit their priorities, and access to five resources including human, social, financial, natural and physical capital

Bebbington (1993) has applied the sustainable livelihoods approach to peasant farming where reproduction and welfare depend on wider systems of social and economic relationships and natural ecosystems. The author argues that it is necessary for peasant farmers to retain and gain skills required to sustain the farm in a modern economic system. This is particularly applicable to rural and remote communities where people have less opportunity to achieve vocational training and formal education.

### **2.2.2. Sustainable livelihoods principles**

The concept of sustainable livelihoods has become increasingly important and controversial in the development of academic research. As the gap between rich and poor grows it is becoming even more important. As an increasing number of poor rural people come face to face with socioeconomic problems such as hunger and environmental degradation the challenge of what to do about it has also become more urgent. It is not surprising that the idea of sustainable livelihoods introduced by the Brundtland Commission linked the environment and development. The report became a rallying point for poverty eradication and the concept itself went through many reiterations until Conway and Chambers (1992) proposed a definition of sustainable livelihoods that would be acceptable to most. They proposed a view that:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for securing a living; a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; a sustainable livelihood is one which contributes benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term. (Conway & Chambers, 1992. p.5)

From this definition, there are many components that make up a livelihood including both tangible and intangible resources. Tangible resources include natural, financial and physical capital which people use to produce a livelihood. Intangible resources include social capital and the capabilities and skills people use to create and manage their tangible resources or livelihood capital. There are also diversified institutional arrangements which might include the availability of credit, technology, socio-economic support and extension training for the development of farmer management skills. Sustainable livelihood principles focus on sustainable poverty elimination that puts people at the centre of any consideration and assumes that human rights relating to freedom of choice will be respected. People rather than the resources, facilities or services they use are the primary concern (Carney, 2003). While many environmentalists put the ecosystem as the first priority in any sustainable development program (Broad, 1994), it has been shown recently that this is short sighted as humans play the most important factor in both sustainable development and sustainable livelihood development (Chambers, 1997).

Scoones (2009) recalls that in the 1980s arguments that advocated local knowledge and prioritization of sustainability issues did not have significant impact on economic reforms and policies of that period. Approaches to development that emphasise economic development and tangible capital still have their supporters but for the many Muong in remote and mountainous communities a people-centred principle must remain paramount. This does not mean that support for better resource management or good governance should be dropped, it means that the aim of fostering livelihoods should sit at the centre and determine the shape and purpose of action (Carney, 2003).

In Sustainable Livelihoods work carried out by the Institute of Development Studies, Ashley and Carney (1999) discuss very important principles associated with implementation of sustainable livelihood work which embraces a responsive and participatory methodology. In this work the authors suggest that poor people themselves play an important role in identifying and addressing livelihood priorities. Ashley et al also emphasise the need for outsiders to adopt a mode of engagement that enables them to listen and respond to the poor (Ashley & Carney, 1999).

According to Ashley and Carney's work carried out with DFID support (1999) another principle of sustainable livelihood is to focus on poverty elimination at multiple levels. Every community is internally differentiated into different socio-economic groups. Some issues affect everybody and some only specific families. In order to get an overview it is always necessary to work at several levels so that "micro-level activity informs the development of policy and macro-level structures and processes support people to build upon their own strengths" (Ashley & Carney, 1999, p.18). Development work informed by a sustainable livelihoods approach is, in fact, underpinned by a commitment to poverty eradication among poor rural peasants and its goals are to increase and diversify local income sources as well as foster stronger farmer organizations, through which they can pressure the state for services, improve rural living conditions and organize for the future (Bebbington, 1993). The results obtained following the sustainable livelihood principle of conducting a multi-level enquiry should provide the researcher with a comprehensive list of the sources of rural livelihood income as well as the people's development priorities. Another important principle of sustainable livelihood emphasised by Ashley and Carney (1999) is the notion that no matter what we do, it must be sustainable. According to these authors, four key dimensions to sustainability are: economy, institution, society and environment.

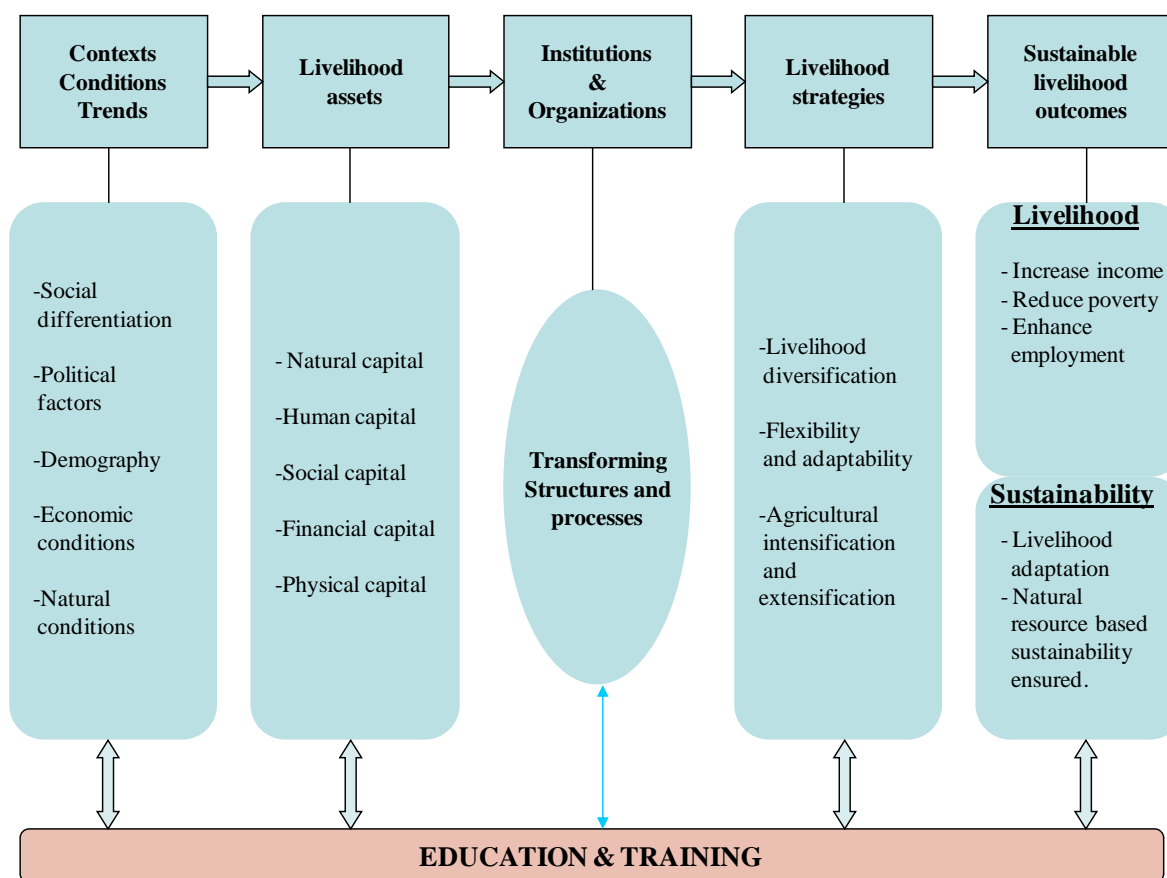
The principal components are: environmental sustainability which refers to the external impact of one livelihood on another, that is the way it impacts on local and global resources and other assets; and social sustainability which refers to the internal capability of a livelihood to cope with stress and shocks and retain a capacity to continue and improve over time (Krantz, 2001). The seminal paper by Carney and Ashley (1999) which discusses the principles of sustainable livelihood and its constituent parts has considerable merit but whether the government of Vietnam is prepared to focus on the special needs of minorities and adopt such an approach to development is another matter altogether.

### **2.2.3. Sustainable livelihoods framework**

According to Scoones (1998) the concept of Sustainable Livelihoods has become a focal topic in debates on rural development, poverty eradication and environment management. Within this debate the sustainable livelihood framework has become a vital tool for investigating livelihoods perspectives and sustainable rural livelihoods. Unlike the comprehensive sustainable livelihoods approach to development the framework as shown in Figure 3 below sets itself a much less ambitious task by providing an extremely useful overview which places in juxtaposition columns that link from left to right: contexts, conditions and trends; livelihood assets or capital; institutions and organisations; livelihood strategies; and livelihood outcomes.

Context, conditions and trends differ from community to community, country to country, where both predictable states remain stable and unpredictable events constantly occur. The factors listed remind us of this individuality, the need to take into account the particular differences which visitors may not fully appreciate. The short term stay of the researcher provides a snapshot in time and space rather than an unchanging profile that holds against all the exigencies of daily life. The important contribution of the sustainable livelihood framework to this study is as a heuristic device. While it promotes an awareness of the dynamic nature daily conditions it also allows us to draw up a practical profile that we can work with, a diversified reality based on long term demographic, political and environmental trends with variable livelihood outcomes influenced by different factors in a particular community.

**Figure 2.2. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework**



Source: Adapted from Scoones, 1998

Each column lists features that should be taken into account thus ensuring that important factors are not neglected (Ashley & Carney, 1999).

Livelihood assets, the different forms of capital available within a community, form the second column. The sustainable livelihoods framework was one of the first comprehensive models of what a community needs to work including: what constitutes capital, not just money but other forms of capital. Included in this list of five assets are: natural capital, assets available in the surrounding environment such as water, soil, forest etc; human capital in the form of knowledge, skills and other such capabilities; social capital, institutional, family and other networks including how political decisions are made and by whom; financial capital in the form of savings, available credit and the like; and physical

capital, infrastructure including roads, communications, meeting places, housing and so forth.

The third column considers the ways in which conditions and assets work through transforming structures and processes and in the fourth column, what development strategies might be considered to get the livelihood system to work better for the people concerned. In the final column, what trade-off might be involved to get better outcomes. This framework can be used to identify a community's specific livelihood conditions, how people earn their living and what can be done to reduce their vulnerability to external shocks (Scoones, 2009). In this study the sustainable livelihood framework was used to analyze the real context of a minority ethnic village of 154 households located in a relatively isolated area in a mountainous district. I also made use of the input-output-outcome elements of the framework to analyse qualitative information collected in questionnaires.

Apart from this specific task it remains important to understand the elements of the sustainable livelihoods framework. First, the socio-economic context and conditions are the primary element taken into account in the framework for rural livelihood analysis. However, following Bebbington (1999), it is important to maintain a wide conception of exactly what is meant by resources. It must include not only the way in which people deal with poverty in a material sense, but also the ways in which their perception of well-being and poverty are related to livelihood choices and strategies and the capabilities they possess (*ibid.*). Assets are not simply the sources that people use to build up their livelihoods; they are assets that empower them, give them the capability to learn and to act. It is my understanding that people should be given capabilities to engage more fruitfully and meaningfully with their world, and to change that world so that it better serves their needs. These assets are not only the things that allow survival, adaptation and serve the ends of poverty alleviation; they are also the basic powers to act, to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources (*ibid.*) . Bebbington attempts to balance tangible and intangible assets, for example natural and social capital. Highlighting social capital helps us to understand how actors engage with other actors at

both state and civil society levels to gain access to resources. Moreover, social capital refers to the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions (Sundari, 2005).

The most valuable implication of what might otherwise look like an academic debate is to identify the practical/ political limits that might apply to a poor minority rural community. What do they need to secure a livelihood from resources (mainly forestland)? Is this acceptable to urban-based governors and citizens in the central trading and industrial areas who might view their agricultural practices in a negative manner? Minority agricultural practices might be judged as destroying the forest (through slash and burn agriculture). The resource use of mountainous minority villagers might be classified as inferior and expected to provide cheap products (rice, vegetables, firewood) to urban communities for a minimum return and worthy only of low wages. Poor people are always among the most vulnerable (Swift, 1989). This debate about the applicability of the sustainable livelihoods approach is particularly relevant as it places the people at the centre of the development program but a carefully designed programme for specific groups and situations may be a luxury in the case of Vietnam where so much needs to be done over a huge area. Practical issues take precedence. Tangible resources of rural farmers are at risk. Recent studies have shown that drought, animal or plant disease, urban bias, agricultural pricing policy and many other primary factors present threats to small holder farmers. It is necessary to consider farmer capability as a vital asset in livelihood resources if we want to improve human capital and sustain livelihood perspectives.

In the framework of sustainable livelihoods refined by Scoones (1998), institutions and organizations can still play an important role in deciding on which input-output-outcomes livelihood processes will work best. The analysis of institutional/organizational influences on access to livelihood resources helps actors draw guidelines for particular programs. Institutions may be formal or informal and usually subject to multiple interpretations by different actors (Scoones, 1998). They may be the one who mediates access to livelihood resources and sets up and affect the composition of livelihood strategies. This element is particularly important in the context of a society where power is strongly centralized and

policy makers have supreme privilege in planning and action. Scoones (1998) has made a significant contribution to understanding the institutional elements in the sustainable livelihoods framework by highlighting the importance and characteristics of institutions. Explaining why institutions really matter for policy and practice of sustainable livelihood development he wrote:

Understanding institutional processes allows the identification of restriction/barriers and opportunities to sustainable livelihoods. Since formal and informal institutions mediate access to livelihood resources and in turn affect the composition of portfolios of livelihood strategies, an understanding of institutions and organizations is therefore key to designing interventions which improve sustainable livelihood outcomes (Scoones, 1998 p. 12).

Appendini et al. (2001) studied how the institutional arrangements governing access to and manage natural resources (cropland, pastures, and forest) in Zapotec, a small indigenous community in Mexico with 500 inhabitants, in which institutional structures are very complex. Their study shows that the migrants' right of access to the natural resources was not flexible and up until recently the community has constantly re-created its organizational capacity in dynamic ways. For example migrants are counted as members of the community because they were born in the community and do not lose their rights of owning the property such as cropland, forest or pasture, even though they are absent. Moreover, these authors conclude that due to the change towards a market orientation, the forestry and livestock activities have been integrated into the regional and national markets, and for more than forty years now, the population has been strongly integrated into national and international labour markets (Appendini, Barrios & Tejera, 2001, pp. 93-102). From a commercial viewpoint, Ruben et al (2001) see rural social organizations, such as cooperatives, as providing better opportunities for the effective delivery of inputs, credit, and technological assistance services for farmers. Furthermore, peasant organizations help to maintain controls over membership and improve competitive positions in the market (Ruben, Rodríguez & Cortez, 2001).



#### **2.2.4. Livelihood strategies**

In order to move towards more sustainable livelihoods we have to take into account livelihood strategies, which are an important element in the sustainable livelihoods framework. Livelihood strategy is the combination of different factors and approaches. In Scoones's sustainable livelihoods framework (1998), there are three livelihood strategies: agricultural (ex)intensification, livelihood diversification and migration. Diversification is particularly worthy to note. Ellis (2000) defined rural livelihood diversification as the process by which rural households construct an increasingly diverse portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and to improve their standard of living. Hussein and Nelson (1998) refined livelihood diversification as follows:

Livelihood diversification refers to attempts by individuals and households to find new ways to raise incomes and reduce environmental risk, which differ sharply by the degree of freedom of choice (to diversify or not), and the reversibility of the outcome. Livelihood diversification includes both on- and off-farm activities which are undertaken to generate income in addition to what is produced as part of the main household agricultural activities, via the production of other agricultural and non-agricultural goods and services, the sale of waged labour, or self-employment. (Hussein & Nelson, 1998. p.3)

Livelihood diversification that comes with modernization is particularly important to peasant farmers whose incomes are earned mainly from cropland (Niehof, 2004). The rural poor lack resources and assets other than their own labour, and the rural peasants are normally barred from a more favourable labour market because of their low level of human capital. Job options become out-of-reach luxury things for small holder farmers in central areas where higher labour skills (the better-off, higher educational level, metropolitans, middle high class) earn their living. Niehof (2004) suggests both a negative and positive linear relationship between the non-farm income share and total household income and concludes that there is diversification for good and bad reasons (Ellis & Reardon, 2000). Diversification is good when it reflects the dynamism and capture of gains at the household

levels in growing rural economies. Diversification fails, however, in cases where poor people are coping with high risk incomes in stagnating rural economies. Niehof has also observed that his discussion of livelihood diversification is limited to the share of off-farm income, and on-farm diversification and other forms of diversification are not taken into account. The concept of livelihood diversification as a strategy in itself is also very general and broad. Livelihood diversification should be understood as diversification of natural and social resources. Natural rural livelihood diversification mainly refers to on-farm biodiversity and livestock-diversity which aim to cultivate a sufficient variety of plants to meet different objectives such as taste, duration of crops, fibre, disease resistance and so on (Niehof, 2004). Diversification of social resources is instrumental for diversified use of other resources. Moser (1996) concludes that the abilities of households to avoid or reduce vulnerability and to increase economic productivity depends not only on their initial assets, but also on their ability to transform those assets into income, food, or other basic necessities effectively (Moser, 1996).

Livelihood diversification is an important strategy by which rural people work to achieve sustainable livelihoods and it normally links with other strategies as well. One of these cooperating strategies is migration, which was noted above as one of the three livelihood strategies identified by Scoones (1998). Migration plays a vital and indispensable role in rural livelihood sustainability in two ways. First, it reduces unemployment. Second, it results in remittance flows to the home community (Siddiqui, 2003). In his case study of Bangladesh migration, Diddiqui noted that migration has kept the unemployment rate in Bangladesh virtually unchanged since the 1980s, although the growth rate of the labour force is almost twice that of population growth. This migration strategy is particularly important to the rural poor who find it difficult to make a living in their indigenous community.

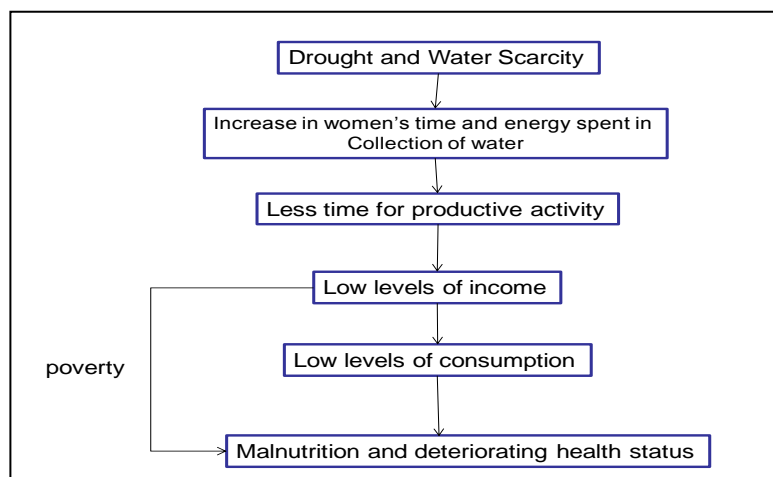
The study of migration by Sundari (2005) attempts to explain the reasons for migration. Migration is normally caused by economic, socio-cultural and environmental determinants. The migrants usually search for better opportunities of income and employment. In terms of socio-cultural reasons, the migrants attempt to break away from traditional constraints and

inequalities. Natural disasters such as droughts, floods and diseases that cause huge losses to small holder farmers may lead to large out-migrations. Poor and extremely poor people are more likely to migrate to other healthier parts of the country; and people from developing or underdeveloped countries are likely to be involved in labour export to more developed countries for remittances and foreign exchange (Siddiqui, 2003). Rafique et al. (2006) have studied the case of temporary migration in West Bengal, India. This phenomenon of temporary migration occurs frequently in rural poor communities where people face unemployment after the harvesting seasons (normally the break time between the two crops). The study of Rafique et al. (2006) also shows that in most cases of temporary migration husbands, brothers (of working age) tend to leave their homes to go to big cities in search of employment while their wives remain at home to take care of the younger children, livestock, or even their parents in-law who are no longer able to work. However, problems are likely to arise out of this situation. Managing livelihoods back home in the absence of the migrant, mainly males, is challenging because the person migrating is often the total household earner. The women staying at home without the husband may experience anxiety as well as health and security fears (Rafique et al., 2006). Although the authors admit the difficulties women face while their husbands are away are not easy to off-set, often there is no alternative.

However, another study by Sundari (2005) shows that not only do male labourers tend to migrate but the female members of poor families also go. Sundari paid attention to the questions: Why do women migrate? What are the push and the pull factors? Which age and social groups among women are more migratory? What is the pattern and nature of female migration? How are migration decisions arrived at? To what extent were women able to access social networks? Can migration eliminate poverty? More than 50 per cent of the women participating in Sundari's research were dependent on agriculture for survival, and agriculture is a seasonal occupation and often at risk because of natural disasters such as droughts and floods (Sundari, 2005). This study also found that the individual migration of unmarried girls has increased in recent times. This means the migration is getting more and more important to the rural poor people regardless of gender. In explaining the reasons that

lead poor rural household peasants to migrate, Sundari analyzed the migration decisions of rural poor female migrants in Figure 2.3.

**Figure: 2.3. Impact of drought on women**



Source: *Sundari, 1999.*

In many societies, equal status and responsibility between men and women is becoming more important and as it becomes more acceptable more women migrate to make a better contribution to total household incomes. However, in developing countries where social class and gender differences are wide, it is difficult for female migrants who come from rural communities to get a good job in central or urban cities. The study by Siddiqui (2003) shows that rural people initially try to relocate themselves within villages, then in neighbouring villages and they gradually have to move to urban areas when livelihood options become limited or unavailable in their rural surroundings. They first try to secure rural wage labour and other off-farm activities, but when they are in urban areas they search for different jobs in the informal sector. However, no matter what they do or earn, the studies concluded that migration is an indispensable strategy for the rural poor people when there are no more available livelihood options in their indigenous villages.

However, rural poverty is far more heterogeneous than commonly assumed (Zoomers, 2001), and it is not feasible to generate a fixed livelihood strategy. Zoomers points out several reasons for this as follows:

(1) Livelihood strategies arise in different geographic settings. The strategies form part of a specific context and are difficult to compare. For example in Vietnam, rural areas include coastal low land, middle flatland, highland, and high mountainous areas. Each region has its own geographic conditions which require different cultivation methods, and these differences generate different livelihood strategies.

(2) Each family has its own starting point. In any specific context, poor village households vary from each other. Poor households can be classified as very poor, medium poor, rich poor (people who used to be rich) and poor rich (people who used to be poor).

(3) The driving forces behind livelihood strategies vary considerably and are expressed by various goals. Some households attempt to increase their income while many others try to reduce their risks.

(4) Livelihood strategies depend upon the distribution of work within the families. Each household may set up its own typical strategies. For example some families may spread the work fairly equally between all members, while many others focus on work specialization.

(5) The results of livelihood strategies are multidimensional.

A good understanding of livelihood strategies is essential to the present research and while in the field I paid attention to it. I kept in mind the idea that the livelihood strategies of Muong minority people could cover a very wide range and that variety, rather than conformity to a single strategy, was most likely. What also struck me quite strongly was the importance of off-farm sources of income which has more to do with gross national economic development than what was specifically happening in my study area. A sustainable livelihoods approach which focused exclusively on local conditions and local people could provide neither an adequate response to local development challenges nor meet local expectations.

The last element in the sustainable livelihoods framework is livelihood outcomes on which we analyze the outcomes and trade-off of livelihoods. Scoones (1998) recommends that analysis of livelihood outcomes should involve (1) Increased numbers of working days

created, (2) Poverty reduced, (3) Well-being and capabilities improved. Livelihoods are sustainable when they can meet livelihood needs and reduce vulnerability. Moreover, in the process natural resources must be sustained.

Carney (2003) strongly argues that sustainable livelihood analysis should take account of the multiple roles that individuals and private sector organizations play. The market is also important to livelihoods and an understanding of how it works for better or worse depending on the number of buyers and sellers can make all the difference (Carney, 2003). In fact, people who benefit from trading services are normally wealthier than those who must depend on agrarian activities.

### **2.2.5. Sustainable livelihoods approaches**

Over the past 20 years sustainable livelihoods approaches have become firmly embedded in development. In some respects, we can speak of “sustainable livelihoods” as an objective: something that should ensure the continued well-being of poor people. However, it is important to note that the sustainable development literature mainly focuses on it as an approach to understanding: a conceptual framework for analysing the assets, capabilities and constraints of people in a wide variety of circumstances. Thus it is essentially a way of organizing data and analysis, through which to view development interventions. Moreover, it can be used by both policy makers and project conductors to create new poverty reduction activities or modify existing activities to improve livelihood outcomes (Carney, 2003). Sustainable livelihoods approach is based upon evolving thinking about poverty reduction and the way the poor live their lives (Ashley & Carney, 1999). This study uses the sustainable livelihoods approach as its fundamental theoretical framework as a heuristic device deployed to both configure a research structure and provide an analytical tool. At the back of my mind, without completely following through, I followed the four steps suggested by Carney (2003) that individuals or organizations should follow to develop a livelihood analysis.

Step 1: Analyse how people thrive, survive, and identify key opportunities/leverage points used to achieve these objectives.

Step 2: Attain agreement among key stakeholders on the desired outcome – the development prize. This prize is identified because livelihoods analysis focuses on ways of achieving an institutionalised reduction in the transaction costs involved in deriving a sustainable livelihood.

Step 3: Clarify the operational context and development factors that determine what is feasible (the scope, scale, size and risk of intervention) and help identify the best entry points. This context and process may include a commitment to poverty eradication, dissatisfaction with the performance of present institutions, sound decentralization policy, moves toward cross sectoral working, strong economic growth and so forth.

Step 4: Decide on the nature of the intervention. Action to reduce transaction costs can take place at all levels. Therefore, there is no typical sustainable livelihood program or project that arises from the use of a sustainable livelihood approach. Because of the infinite variety of livelihoods and the infinite variability in the operating context, sustainable livelihood interventions can take any shape or form.

Livelihoods perspectives start with how different people in different places live and “being focused on understanding complex, local realities livelihoods approaches are an ideal entry point for participatory approaches to inquiry, with negotiated learning between local people and outsiders” (Scoones, 2009, p.178). Agreeing with this idea Krantz (2001) adds that poor people themselves understand their situations and needs, therefore they should be engaged in the design of policies and plans. In explaining the core aspects of the sustainable livelihoods approach, Krantz also argues there is not always an automatic relationship between economic growth and poverty eradication even though economic growth may bring some benefits to the poor and improve their incomes (Krantz, 2001). The sustainable livelihoods approach is, therefore, to help rural poor people improve their living standards and become better off. Many studies have shown that poor people all over the world do not benefit from economic growth (Barrett & Bruce, 2002), and in contrast economic growth may create a wider gap between the rich and the poor and drive the poor to worse situations. The DFID team used the sustainable livelihoods framework to guide agencies to

work effectively on poverty reduction using two main principles. The first principle, as mentioned earlier puts “people” at the centre of poverty-focused development activities. Poverty reduction activities must be carried out in responsive and participatory ways. The local people should play a significant role in policy formation or any plan for change because they are the ones who know their situations best. Participation at multi-levels is also a part of the first sustainable livelihood approach’s principle since there are always various situations and levels of the poor in the same or different communities. The second principle is to apply a holistic perspective in the programming of support activities to ensure that these correspond to issues or areas of direct relevance for improving poor people’s livelihoods (Krantz, 2001). The sustainable livelihoods approach is a vital tool for rural livelihood development focusing on poverty reduction. In reality, rural livelihoods depend on the way families respond to change, resulting in reallocation of land, labour, and capital resources, and in order to reduce rural poverty successfully, we must focus on the whole rural society and economy, not just the agricultural sector (Zoomers, 2001). The sustainable livelihoods focus on poverty reduction does not just mean an intention to just increase the income of the poor, it is also necessary to enhance the people’s capabilities to create and manage their livelihood inputs, outputs and outcomes (Bebbington, 1999). Krantz (2001) compares sustainable livelihood approaches interpreted by UNDP, DFID, and CARE to show how the sustainable livelihoods approach works in these agencies. The three agencies use the sustainable livelihoods approach as a way of achieving poverty reduction though they each use different strategies. The following comparison is based on the work of Krantz (2001) and Brocklesby and Fisher (2003).



**Table 2.1** Interpretation of sustainable livelihood approaches by UNDP,DFID and CARE

	Ways to interpret sustainable livelihoods	Methodology
UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cope with and recover from shocks and stresses through adaptive and coping strategies.</li> <li>• Work economically effectively.</li> <li>• Ensure that livelihood activities do not irreversibly degrade natural resources within a given ecosystem.</li> <li>• Promotion of livelihood opportunities for one group should not foreclose options for other groups, either now or in the future.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A participatory assessment is carried out of the risks, assets, and indigenous knowledge base found in a particular community as reflected in the coping and adaptive strategies pursued by men and women.</li> <li>2. Analyze the micro, macro, and sectoral policies that influence people's livelihood strategies.</li> <li>3. Assess and determine the potential contributions of modern science and technology that complement indigenous knowledge systems in order to improve livelihoods.</li> <li>4. Identify social and economic investment mechanisms that help existing livelihood strategies.</li> <li>5. Assure that the first four stages are integrated in real time, so that this process is part of overall programs of development, rather than a series of isolated events.</li> </ol>

DFID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People-centred: To eliminate poverty, one should focus on what matters to people, understand the difference between groups of people, work with them in tandem with current livelihood strategies, social environment, and ability to adapt.</li> <li>• Responsive and participatory: Outsiders need to listen and respond to the poor in a way that poor people must be the ones who identify and address their livelihood strategies.</li> <li>• Multi-level: Poverty elimination can only be achieved if programs are carried out at different levels.</li> <li>• Conducted in partnership: sustainable livelihoods approach always needs corporate social responsibility including public and private sectors.</li> <li>• Sustainable: There are four dimensions to sustainability: economic, institutional, social and environmental responsibility.</li> <li>• Dynamic: external support must recognize the dynamic nature of livelihood strategies, respond</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Start with an analysis of how poor people thrive and survive by carrying out interviews, preparing a literature review.</li> <li>2. Go to the community to look at the reality.</li> <li>3. Meet with stakeholders to triangulate the messages from the micro level, see how they explain the gaps identified at community level, and see what issues are facing the institutions at higher levels in attempting to deliver their mandates.</li> <li>4. Bring the findings to policy makers and see how they respond to the issues.</li> </ol> <p><i>(DFID team used this methodology in Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa and Uganda)</i></p>
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DFID (cont')	flexibly to changes in people's situation, and develop longer-term commitments.	
CARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on personal empowerment, which refers to enhancing people's confidence and skills to overcome constraints.</li> <li>• Focus on social empowerment, which refers to establishment and strengthening of existing, representative, community-based organizations to build up the capacity for community members to plan and implement priority development activities.</li> <li>• Improve targeting on/for poor households.</li> <li>• Ensure programs address livelihood security.</li> <li>• Improve synergy between programs.</li> <li>• Emphasize learning and change management.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify potential geographic areas using secondary data to find where poverty is concentrated.</li> <li>2. Identify vulnerable groups and the livelihood constraints that they face</li> <li>3. Collect analytical data, taking note of trends over time and identifying the indicators that will be monitored.</li> <li>4. Select the set of communities for program interventions.</li> </ol>

Source: *Krantz (2001), Brocklesby and Fisher, (2003).*

CARE started to use a sustainable livelihoods approach in the mid to late 1990s at the same time as DFID, so a process of mutual influence might have taken place (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). It is also difficult to see the significant differences between these three

agencies' sustainable livelihoods approaches (Krantz, 2001). They all use the sustainable livelihoods approach for rural poverty reduction. They also use similar definitions of sustainable livelihoods and share the same view that livelihood resources should be conceptualized broadly. The methodology used by these three agencies also follow a participatory approach in which local participants play significant roles in deciding what critical matters should be addressed and how to frame these in a locally significant manner. The sustainable livelihoods approach also promotes a decentralized clearing house for information and emphasises a dynamic learning process rather than a fragmented snapshot assessment (Carney, 2003).

Scoones (1998) presents some operational implications of the sustainable livelihoods approach. The author introduces three methodologies for field investigation, intervention options and planning approaches. The first approach is to investigate each element in the framework from specific contexts through livelihood resources to livelihood strategies and from strategies to outcomes. The elements in the framework should be connected together logically. The range of conventional survey tools can work in tandem using qualitative methodology and participatory rural appraisal tools. Second, supportive interventions should be able to identify the institutional and organizational setting to determine the major trade-offs for different groups of people and across a variety of sites and scales. The framework for sustainable livelihood analysis also suggests focusing on both livelihood resources and outcomes with multiple entry points. Third, planning for implementing a sustainable livelihoods approach is important. The planning process requires the active participation of all the different interested parties because objectives, identifying options, analysis and decision-making should be done together.

The framework of sustainable livelihoods for analysis introduced by Scoones (1998) and sustainable livelihoods approaches used by DFID, CARE, and UNDP have contributed significantly to both academic and practical debates on sustainable rural livelihood studies even though the sustainable livelihoods approach itself has some shortcomings. There are problems with sustainable livelihoods approaches when people employ it to achieve rural poverty reduction. First, agencies may use the sustainable livelihoods approach to justify

existing development activities rather than use it as part of a process of working with poor people to identify their strengths and weakness (Carney, 2003). Second, the sustainable livelihoods approach aims to achieve rural poverty reduction. However, it is sometimes difficult to identify who are the poor and what constitutes poverty (Krantz, 2001) because poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and it varies from context to context.

#### **2.2.6. Value of the sustainable livelihoods approach for the case study of Muong minority**

Each theoretical framework has its own significant contribution to make to its related study area. Like other approaches the sustainable livelihoods framework plays an important role in helping researchers and practitioners to organize their data and provides a wider range of activities that poor people can use to make their living. This dissertation aims to investigate the way Muong ethnic minority people, who live in a remote and mountainous area, secure their livelihoods. A team that conducted an assessment of the use of the sustainable livelihoods framework made up of twelve case studies concludes that it was worthwhile because the results were more likely than not to be used as the basis for development intervention<sup>5</sup> (Neely, Sutherland, & Johnson, 2004). The sustainable livelihoods framework and approach is applicable to my Muong minority case study for the following reasons:

- The sustainable livelihoods framework helps to identify the specific focus groups in need (Carney, 2003) and participants must play a key role in identifying problems and decision-making. Unlike other theoretical frameworks, the sustainable livelihoods approach puts poor people in the centre of the assessment and opens up opportunities for them to discuss what needs to be done.

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<sup>5</sup> The LSP Working Paper 16 presented research conducted on the impact of sustainable livelihood approaches in twelve countries: Honduras, Nepal, Yemen, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Pakistan, and Zambia. The study shows evidence of positive impact of sustainable livelihood approaches on rural poor development.

- The sustainable livelihoods framework provides a realistic model that links available livelihood resources to strategies and outcomes. The framework helps researchers to account for socio-economic conditions and trends; livelihood resources; institutions' and organizations' influences on access to livelihood resources; livelihood strategies and outcomes. In this study, I will focus on the role of education and human resources by using the framework of sustainable livelihoods as a heuristic device to help me make sense of the complexities of Muong daily life.
- The sustainable livelihoods approach was consistent with my original research methodology of Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR) and was flexible enough to allow for the changes I had to make to accommodate local needs<sup>6</sup>. My wish for this study was to learn from and share experiences with the Muong minority people to find out how they think, act, and make a living.

#### **2.2.7. Highland livelihoods and ethnicities**

Recent studies have suggested that highland people in socialist countries face a lack of rights and have limited access to information about their history and culture (Forsyth & Michaud, 2011). Development agencies have tried to introduce modern technology to improve their health, education and agricultural practices. However, the effectiveness of these programs depends on the attitude of the host governments. Forsyth and Michaud argue that the Vietnamese government still considers dangerous political resistance from some ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands and elsewhere (Muller & Zeller,

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<sup>6</sup> The local commune administration was happy to allow me to conduct my research exercises in Muot village such as household visit, doing survey, participating in villagers daily work, interview with individuals. However they did not allow me to organize big group meeting of villagers. After I had organized a meeting with 75 students in which I shared studying experiences and learnt from students ideas, the department of culture of the Cam Thanh commune warned me and required me to sign in a written form that I must not organize any big group meeting regardless of whether they were of villagers or students.

2002). This awareness has remained a significant barrier to the work of NGOs and development agencies who have been prevented from conducting their own research.

The upland and mountainous ethnicities in Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries have their own traditional ways of making a living. The common image of upland livelihoods is of subsistence shifting cultivation supplemented by cash cropping. Their agricultural system includes the cultivation of upland dry rice on steep slopes, growing vegetables and maize and raising pigs and poultry. Farmers also gather forest products in the high mountains and forests which surround them.

For local people the forest plays an important role in their daily lives as a source of essential food, fuel, medicine, as well as materials with which to build houses. Jin (2002) argues that indigenous people develop two kinds of dependency on the forest. The first is income dependency, referring to the total income they gain from selling forest products. The second dependency is what the forest contributes to their livelihoods, as measured by the different kinds of forest products that are a part of their daily consumption. For some ethnic groups, the forest is not just a simple source of resources, it is also a sacred place where people meditate and seek divine guidance.

#### **2.2.8. Shifting cultivation in mountainous communities: An overview**

There are different schools of thoughts on shifting/swidden cultivation. The following discussion aims to address the argument around how sustainable livelihoods are with or without slash and burn cultivation. Is shifting cultivation necessary for indigenous farmers? If it has a negative impact on the environment what could possibly replace it and keep indigenous people's livelihoods sustainable enough to eradicate hunger and poverty? The central issue is how to conserve natural resources without compromising local households' ability to secure a livelihood.

Shifting cultivation refers to a type of farming in which farmers fell the primary or secondary forests, burn the dried vegetation and cultivate the clear fields for a few years before moving to a new area. Other terms used to describe this process is "pioneer

swiddening”. However, today most people use a cyclical mode and return to land cleared in previous years. Because of increased both population density and competition for land in most areas of Vietnam the forest does not have time to recover (Jakobsen, Rasmussen, Leisz, Folving, & Nguyen, 2007). These authors also acknowledge that shifting [swidden] cultivators are often blamed by the Vietnamese government as being the major contributors to deforestation. Swiddeners are seen by the government as not only leading a precarious existence but also damaging the nations watersheds.

Some studies highlight the last mention point, how shifting cultivation causes soil erosion in the upland areas and floods in lower areas (Castella, Boissau, Thanh, & Novosad, 2004). They consider customary cultivation destroys the forests and its fauna. However, Forsyth et al, citing the argument of Conklin (1961) and Boulet (1975), claim that shifting cultivation, in locales with low population density and without interference from the state or rival communities is sustainable for upland societies. A resolution of the different stands taken is difficult to resolve.

A study of highland agriculture in Thailand by Sutthi (1985) takes a comprehensive look at shifting cultivation and describes two different types of swidden cultivation: pioneer swiddening and cyclical swiddening. Pioneer swiddening refers to a process during which farmers fell and burn the biomass and grow crops on land cleared from primary forests as long as possible before the effort of clearing the garden of weeds becomes too difficult. After an extended period the cultivated land becomes invaded by imperata grass, and highlanders have to move to a new area to clear the land and start all over again. Cyclical swiddening refers to a range of activities: secondary forest cultivation, continuing cultivation, bush and land fallow rotation, and recurrent cultivation. Unlike pioneer swiddening, this method enables people to have a fixed settlement. This second method of swidden cultivation has become more popular and is even supported by some governments. Despite this shifting cultivation in highland areas appears to be on the decline, often because it is criticized by local and central governments as being responsible for environmental destruction. This activity is largely prohibited in Vietnam (Fox et al., 2000).



Now we can consider the questions: Why do poor families on the mountainous areas have to use shifting cultivation as their primary method of securing a livelihood? Why does this issue only happen in developing countries? Is there a relationship between poverty and shifting cultivation?

Balsdon asserts that shifting cultivation involves “remaining soil requiring a longer period of regeneration before the land is again suitable for cultivation” (Balsdon, 2007, p.334). Balsdon also cites the statement from the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) that poverty is the main factor polluting the environment. The poor and hungry often destroy their natural environment in order to survive. They fell forest trees, their livestock overgraze the grasslands and they overuse marginal land. For this reason, national governments in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines often blame shifting cultivators, usually members of poor ethnic minorities, for the rapid loss of forest and slow regeneration (Fox et al., 2000). The negative attitude of governments toward swidden cultivation has led to new forestland use policies which directly or indirectly impact on vulnerable ethnic minorities.

Contrary to this official argument, many scholars view shifting cultivation as a “rotational production strategy” and a labour minimizing cultivation strategy (Jepsen et al., 2006). These authors point out two ways which differentiate shifting cultivation and permanent agriculture. The first is by allowing nutrients to build up in the fallow biomass for subsequent release to the soil. Given enough time shifting cultivation allows soil fertility to recover. The second is that fallow vegetation also has an impact on weeds. If weeds can be crowded out, less labour needs to be used for cultivation. Despite government criticism of shifting cultivators as “forest destroyers”, recent studies such as that by Nguyen Duy Khiem and Paul Van der Poel (1993) found no correlation between the occurrence of shifting cultivation and the extent of deforestation. Fox et al (2000) draw on the study of the Da River watershed in Vietnam by Nguyen Duy Khiem to show that in those districts having the greatest extent of shifting cultivation (12-36% of total area), the percentage of land under forest cover ranged from 6% to 48%, whereas in those districts having almost no shifting cultivation (less than 6% of the total area), the forest cover ranged from 8% to

48%. Kesmanee (1989) points out that the areas in which shifting cultivators are present have more forest than areas in which they are not present.

Recent studies also argue that shifting cultivation mainly occurs in bush-land and grasslands where local indigenous people find it easy to cultivate. In some cases the loss of forests is attributed to logging rather than shifting cultivation. Indeed, logging activities in Vietnam are carried out by Kinh people from urban areas. Valuable trees are cut down for furniture and domestic uses (Fox et al., 2000). The authors assert that shifting cultivation may be a good livelihood strategy if the farmers can decide when and where to cultivate; if there is no interference from external forces; if production is not market-driven; and there is sufficient food for cultivators. In this discussion, I focus on one of the factors that Fox et al. (2000) and other authors from the same school of thought propose: there is minimal external interference and local farmers have the capability to cultivate in their customary ways. In fact, these conditional factors are unlikely for two reasons:

Firstly, the government fails to understand the nature of shifting cultivation and considers it a cause of deforestation. They have instituted forestland tenure reform to allocate land to individual households.

Secondly, the integration of ethnic groups into the majority Kinh population has severely impacted on traditional livelihood behaviours.

Sutthi (1989) also argues that although traditional shifting cultivation is often called “backward” or even destructive of natural resource base, the system is well adjusted to the environment and covers a wide range of activities and their accumulated skills is still pertinent to the contemporary conditions. In the past, highlanders, especially pioneer swiddeners, relied on their accumulated experiences, simple technologies, and natural factors to prepare lands and plants. Sutthi also concludes that indigenous highlanders “know how to conserve their energy” (Sutthi, 1989, p. 133) and that their agricultural system is reasonably efficient when measured against energy inputs under permanent cultivation on the lowlands.

### **2.2.9. Government land-use policy and its impacts on minority livelihoods in Vietnam**

This sector of the literature review focuses on what and how the actual and potential contribution of forest land use policy is to poverty reduction and local livelihoods.

A study of government policy in Thailand on highland ethnic minorities by Bhruksasri (1989) traces the historical changes when the government imposed different policies on hill tribes. Initially the Thai government tried to leave their hill tribes alone as long as they did not cause any trouble. However, this non-interference policy had to change because they believed that the methods of cultivation of the tribes had been steadily “despoiling the land of the region” (Bhruksasri, 1989. p.13). According to the Thai Hill Tribe Welfare Committee (HTWC), the removal of the forest cover was seen to not only have depleted timber resources but adversely interfered with the watershed, adding silt to the rivers which irrigate the rice plains on which the economy of the nation depends. Policies of interference were instituted.

The Vietnamese government held the same view to this issue in which they blamed ethnic minorities in the highland areas for the destruction of the environment and the loss of forests. The Vietnamese government started to carry out nationwide economic reform called “*Đổi mới*” in 1986 to alter the ways of accessing land and other natural resources. This policy has had a direct impact on the remote and mountainous minority households’ access to livelihood opportunities (Tugault-Lafleur & Turner, 2009). Hirsch (2002), under ADB report (2002), argued that after the Doi Moi inception, there have been more than 90 decrees and official documents passed by central government. Among those policies and programs, the policies of land and forest tenure and sedentarization have been specifically designed for ethnic minorities and have reshaped the image of rural and agricultural production and consumption in Vietnam. In 1993, Vietnam’s National Assembly passed a new land law to widen land use right under which land holders not only have the right to use their land, but also to dispose of its product, to exclude others from using the land, to use their land rights as bank collateral, to pass them on to one’s heirs, and to alienate the rights to third parties (Sikor, 2006). The law of land allocation has included the

demarcation of plots in the field, their registration in a cadastral database, and the certification of land rights by the state in “land use right certificates”. Among the 90 decisions and decrees mentioned above, there were 28 decisions and decrees which were specifically designed for ethnic minorities in order to improve the quality of life, enhance forest protection and afforestation. Two programs are particularly relevant to this case study. One is Forestry Land Allocation (FLA) decree introduced in 1993 and the other is the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Alleviation Program that began in 1998 (Decision 133/1998/TTg). FLA has directly impacted on local institutions by fixing new rules of forest and land ownership, access and use. According to the Forest Protection Department figures in 2006, although 61% of the land has been allocated officially, only 10% has actually been allocated to households and communities (Clement & Amezaga, 2009). The objectives of this program include:

- Protection of forest and forestry land with an intended use for water sources and soil protection;
- Nature conservation and landscape protection;
- Protection of forests with the purpose of controlling commercial activities: exploitation of timber or non-timber forest products.

With new rules set up in this policy, farmers living around the forest areas have no authority to collect forest products such as firewood, timber and other flora and fauna that might contribute to their daily incomes (Nguyen, 2006). The forestland is assigned to households in the community to plant and protect. However they are not allowed to harvest anything without permission from the local administration (Jakobsen et al., 2007).

An ADB report (2005) concluded that ethnic minority communities have for generations used the forest as a primary source of livelihood. Since control of forest was passed to State Forest Enterprises, access for these communities to their traditional livelihood systems has been reduced; and many of them have been unable to develop adequate alternative sources of income. Moreover poor people in remote rural areas reside in poor quality dwellings that

in most cases are not entirely weatherproof, even when constructed using government welfare assistance. They often do not have adequate sanitation and the educational levels of household heads and their spouses in poor households tends to be low.

Considering the term “backwardness” and poverty of ethnic minorities in remote mountainous areas as a significant national concern, the government has carried out many policies to support and help the indigenous people improve their quality of life and reduce poverty. The policies aim to provide healthcare services, socioeconomic development and infrastructure in extremely poor and difficult regions. However, many recent studies have shown that there is low efficiency and a huge gap between intention and outcomes. There are many reasons leading to inefficiency in the government programs. The ADB’s report (2002) states that most government programs use a top-down approach and do not fully address the needs of local ethnic minorities. Moreover, most of the programs focus on construction of buildings and roads while paying little attention to building skills, human resource development, and developing legal frameworks. Its report in 2005 also suggests that Vietnamese government policies of forest conservation have failed for the following reasons:

- Control of forest resources has been dominated by the state which has limited management capacity, and community involvement has not been encouraged. There has been little recognition of local community’s potential for forest management.
- The forest protection department was mandated to protect and control forest utilization, but this has not been effective, due to central control, vested interests and inadequate resources.
- Forestry activities were mainly restricted to unsustainable forest exploitation, with little re-investment in protection or replenishment of the resource.
- Forest communities have perceived that the forest is no longer theirs and have therefore lost interest in controlling access to it. Forestland was effectively taken

away from communities and passed to state enterprises for management, exploitation, and control. (ADB Report, 2005)

Many questions around the effectiveness of Vietnamese government policies towards forests and minorities in the highland areas remain unanswered. Chapter 5 in this study will provide a more comprehensive investigation of how indigenous Muong have reacted to these programs.

#### **2.2.10. The sustainable livelihoods approach: Links to the case study of Muong in Muot village**

A sustainable livelihoods approach is essentially a way of organizing data and analysis, or a lens through which to view development interventions. Taking a holistic view of a project, it provides a coherent framework and structure for analysis, identifies gaps and ensures that links are made between different issues and activities. The aim is to help stakeholders engage in debate about the many factors that affect livelihoods, their relative importance, the way in which they interact and the most effective means of promoting more sustainable livelihoods. (DFID, Guidance Note 10, 2007, p. 117).

DFID's strategy papers endorse the sustainable livelihoods approach as a means of analyzing development problems and informing the design of policies and programs intended to meet the overarching goal of poverty reduction (Sen, 1997).

During the period of the 1980s and 1990s, while environmental sustainability retained central importance, there was a strong and developing poverty focus. It has become more important for sustainable livelihoods approaches to have a central mission to deal with poverty and issues related to the poor. From this perspective, it requires a holistic and participatory appraisal of the range of livelihood activities (Sen, 1997) and assets available to the poor in implementing their livelihood strategies and overcoming their vulnerability.

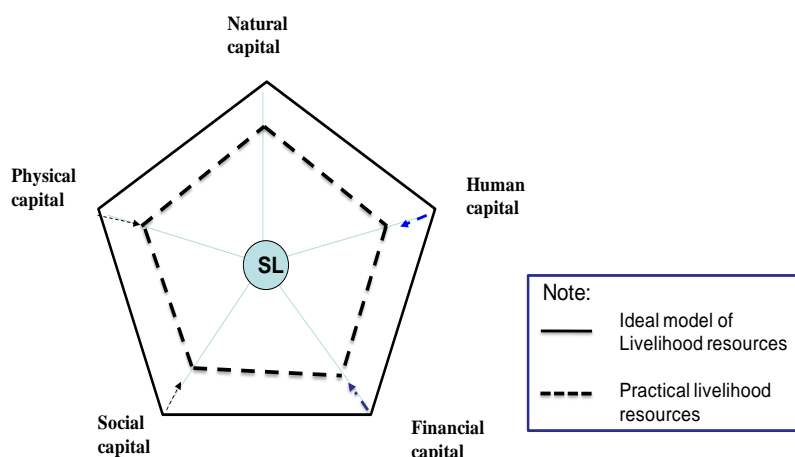
There is no single or fixed sustainable livelihoods approach. However the basic elements of this approach (concept, frameworks, and principles) remain similar. The differences are taken into account in what is a multidimensional understanding of people's lives, which recognizes the different assets and the way people make their living (Toner, 2003). However, Toner also claims that sustainable livelihoods approaches have far-reaching implications for how development interventions are designed, implemented and evaluated. As its principles state, the sustainable livelihoods approach is designed for community development including a set of ideas, assumptions and methodologies that orients policy makers and practitioners to address specific development problems (Arce, 2003). Once we have considered it as a means for community development, we should be able to assess the vulnerability contexts of the households in the community. Points of concern are how geographically large the community is and what criteria of vulnerability of the community should be prioritized? In Vietnam and other developing countries, community development is essential especially in rural and remote areas. However, the term "community" could be understood as a village, a commune, a district or a region. Each community also has various living conditions, different livelihood assets and strategies. It is, therefore, important to prioritize their vulnerability contexts. For example, until relatively recently Muong ethnic groups resided in communities scattered in mountainous forestlands for thousands of years with their own ways of life. They ran their own affairs. Recent studies on Vietnam's ethnic minorities have argued that the vulnerability of the indigenous minority follows the loss of cultural confidence due to the economic integration and outside intervention which has undermined their ability to run their lives (Tugault-Lafleur & Turner, 2009; Wandel, 1997).

The following is my interpretation of components of the framework for sustainable livelihoods that are relevant to the indigenous Muong minority in this study. The following section draws on the literature on sustainable livelihoods and emphasises five key elements: Natural, human, financial, physical, and social resources. The purpose here is to present a preliminary framework, identifying important elements of relevance to Muong, that will form the basis of debate and analysis in later chapters.

### 2.2.11. Household livelihood resources

Bebbington (1999) noted that it is very important to bring a wide conception of resources to a study of what people need to access as part of their process of composing a livelihood. It is not only the natural resources or materials people use to make their livelihoods but also the capabilities they have to help them learn and act. This wide conception of livelihood assets and management has recently been thoroughly debated (Bebbington, 1993, 1999; Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003; Krantz, 2001; Scoones, 2009) as an important approach to reducing rural poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods development.

**Figure 2.4. Livelihood resources**



Source: *The household's livelihoods assets pentagon adapted from DFID*

Natural resources include soil, water, air and other attributes of the natural environment that people use to survive and make a livelihood (Scoones, 2009). Natural resources (or natural capital) are important for any type of livelihood especially rural communities where people rely on environmental resources to generate income. Natural resources may vary from region to region, even from community to community in the same region. The particular geographic conditions perhaps offer a range of poor to fruitful resources. Therefore, the term natural resources when evoked in the context of a rural community should be



understood broadly. For example in Vietnam, the term “rural” includes low flatland and mountainous upland areas (Baulch et al., 2007) and there are many different natural resource conditions between these two extremes. In mountainous upland communities farmers’ livelihood and income depends mostly on the forests and rain-fed cultivation areas while farmers on the lowlands rely on irrigated alluvial soils for rice cultivation and short term crops. The key natural resources for the Muong in this study cover cultivated land, forest products, and water sources. Like other rural mountainous communities, natural assets have played a critical role in Muong’s social and economic development during their long history because they rely on nature. Later I investigate how available and valuable the forests are in contributing to their daily income and consumption; how people use their land and forests to generate income and how available and clean the water sources are.

The second livelihoods resource is human capital. Among the five livelihoods resource assets, human capital accounts for the knowledge and skills people bring to their work which influences community development in a very direct manner. Recent development studies have paid more attention to developing human capital as a key element: “putting people at the centre of the development process” (Carney, 2003, p.29) and responding to people’s needs rather than just providing resources or services without asking them. Sen (1997) and Bebbington (1999) took a comprehensive look at the human capital and human capability. They suggested that human capital not only means people can produce more and make a better earning, it also provides them with capabilities to manage and cope with their vulnerability. Sen argued that we must see human capital broadly to cover both present and potential capabilities. Another important thing that Sen (1997) noted is the benefit of education to human capital in commodity production. This thesis addresses the quality of human capital of Muong in Muot village by assessing the skills and knowledge of people and adopts a particular focus on education.

Thirdly, financial capital comprises the financial resources that people use to achieve their livelihood objectives. It consists of cash, credit and savings that enable people to adopt different livelihood strategies. There are two sources of financial capital: available stocks and regular inflow of money. Among the five categories of assets, financial capital is seen

as vital because people seek money as a means to achieve desired livelihood objectives. Access to financial capital is the asset that is most lacking. For this reason, most poor households in rural remote highlands face an endless challenge as they lack both stocks and inflow of money to pay for education and pursue wider livelihood strategies and objectives. This study attempts to evaluate how Muong manage their financial resources and how they use what they can get hold of.

The fourth category of livelihood assets is physical resources. Physical capital denotes the basic infrastructure and producer goods needed to support livelihoods, such as affordable transport, buildings, adequate water supply systems, and access to information. Public infrastructure directly impacts healthcare service, education, trade, and other social services. In remote rural highland areas, poor minority people often face poor public services because of limited infrastructure. Some communities reside on the steep slopes of mountains and are isolated from main transportation systems. Children find it difficult to go to schools and villagers face severe difficulties in both marketing their produce and accessing healthcare services.

The last component of livelihood assets is social capital. Social capitals are those invisible assets including networks, rules, norms and values in which people create trust and cooperate with each other to secure good livelihood outcomes. The discussion of social capital in this study tends to focus on conservation of Muong indigenous culture and how it affects their perception of education and livelihoods.

#### **2.2.12. The role of institutions in livelihoods**

Institutions, organizations, and policies are of central importance because they shape and operate at all levels of any livelihood system by setting up the rules which determine access, terms of exchange between different types of capital and strategies (Scoones, 1998). DFID (2000) describes this structure as private and public organizations that set and implement policy and legislate, deliver services, trade and perform all functions that affect livelihoods. In the context of highlanders' livelihoods in Vietnam, both local and central institutions impose development policies that influence local ecological and economic

conditions. For example, the land reform policy of the late 1970s and the policy of forest conservation have contributed to a shift in highlander livelihoods from shifting cultivation to fixed settlement and cyclical cultivation. The forest protection policy also prohibits minority people from gathering and trading forest products which used to be their main source of income. These policies have driven people into a less flexible context and a situation of high vulnerability.

### **2.2.13. Livelihood strategies**

Livelihood strategies comprise the range and set of activities (Figure 2.3) that people undertake to achieve their livelihood objectives. Different livelihood assets and political structures require different livelihood strategies. Rural and urban people have different choices. For example urban and rural lowland people tend to have better schooling and vocational training than those living in highland and remote areas. The sustainable livelihoods approach, however, largely focuses on rural development. Therefore, livelihood strategy in this framework consists of agricultural intensification, livelihood diversification, and migration. In this case study Muong people also face many difficulties in setting up and performing their livelihood strategies because of limited education, lack of some livelihood assets, and forest conservation policies imposed by the government. However, indigenous people have their own knowledge, thousands of years of experience to call on that they can use to shape their livelihood strategies in a way to suit their circumstances. There is still controversy and debate concerning what is the best livelihood strategy for indigenous highlanders in developing countries. This study cannot answer this question definitively. However, I will attempt to clarify which livelihood strategies Muong prefer to use and how effective they are. The research particularly focuses on migration and remittances as one of the focus strategies open to the poor in Muot village. Chapter Five will present the findings from fieldwork, which illustrates what part rural-urban migration plays and how education impacts on their ability to get well paid jobs.

### **2.3. Education for Sustainable Livelihoods Development**

As discussed in earlier sections, the sustainable livelihoods approach aims to achieve poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods principles prioritize people-centred rather than other resource based solutions in which the provision of facilities or services plays the larger part. It is important to note that the sustainable livelihoods approach is not just concerned with the way in which people deal with poverty in a material sense, but also the way in which poor people enhance their capabilities to live and to act (Bebbington, 1999). The evidence from the rural case study of Ayres and Simon (2003) indicates that education has the potential to enable people to enhance their capabilities and functioning and that this can contribute to the achievement of sustainable livelihoods. This study thoroughly documents the close and complex relationship between education and poverty in Muot village, Thanh Hoa province. On the basis of their findings it is clear that education must play a significant role in achieving sustainable livelihoods. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 affirms “Education is fundamental for just, peaceful, adaptable societies without poverty and that none of the international development goals can be achieved without education” (UNESCO, 2008, p.3).

Although sustainable development and sustainable livelihoods share common thinking in terms of “sustainability”, they have different perspectives and mandates. While the principles of sustainable development mainly reflect environmental issues in economic growth, sustainable livelihood principles put poor people first and emphasise poverty reduction and within this education plays an extremely important role. Education systems are expected to prepare people for jobs (Lawrence, 2009), and capabilities to cope with and adapt to livelihood changes. A World Bank research team that prepared a historical perspective on the relationship between livelihoods and literacy affirmed that without ability of reading, writing, and calculation, learners find it difficult to enhance their knowledge, skills, and capabilities (Oxenham, Diallo, Katahoire, Mwangi, & Sall, 2002). Knowledge, skills and capabilities are what Bebbington (1999) considers to be the most important features of livelihood assets. This emphasis is valuable to my case study in which a large number of householders are not able to read or write.

The term “limited advantage” noted by Oxenham et al. (2002) is a broad term, which is actually a barrier for illiterate people to achieve good results from training. DFID held a conference in Kathmandu in December 2000 which addressed the question of how literacy can help to reduce poverty and improve standards of living; how the provision of education can help the poor respond to their daily realities, needs and practices, hopes and aspirations. There are tensions between different paradigms of “literacy” linked to economic development (Betts, 2000). Lauglo (2002), who conducted research on: Adult Basic Education in Africa argues that ABE is a “means to good governance in keeping with poverty-reduction goals” (p.68) and empowerment, and is especially important for the development of a broadly based civil society. ABE programs are normally for people who have had no schooling or very limited schooling. However it is not easy for adults to learn.

Oxenham et al. (2002) argue that it is better to add literacy teaching to programs set up to teach practical livelihood skills. Adults with limited schooling seem to face more challenges and difficulties in getting good jobs especially in a society where educational degrees are highly valued. This is a challenge for rural poor people who choose migration as a livelihood strategy. In developing countries, rural poor people normally migrate to urban areas with a hope of getting a job and earning more money. Unfortunately, these migrants find it difficult to compete with urban citizens who have a better education, knowledge, and working skills. Illiteracy drives the poor into less favourable terms of employment. Chapter Five presents the details of challenges faced by illiterate Muong migrants. The Vietnamese government has implemented many programs to eradicate illiteracy and improve basic education but results have been disappointing. It appears there is no fixed formula about what should be taught in ABE programs. Illiterate adults already think they know enough, and what others think they need and what they actually want does not come together (Lauglo, 2002).

The Kathmandu conference outlined the potential benefit that literacy can contribute when linked to sustainable livelihood principles. First, literacy, communication needs and aspirations are closely linked with what they see as their livelihood opportunities and strategies. Second, people with no reading and writing skills have a relatively low social

standing compared to those who have some schooling, and literacy can to some extent correct this. Third, lives and context are dynamic. Lives and livelihoods are complex, shifting and fluid. Literacy programs need to be flexible and responsive to other livelihoods programs. Finally, literacy programs should respond to what and how people want to learn. Rogers et al. (2007) present some case studies from New Zealand, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Afghanistan that argue that in many livelihood activities, the use of literacy skills is already well advanced (Rogers, Hunter, & Uddin, 2007). Literacy for livelihood programs needs to start with the concerns of the learners, not with a pre-set agenda. The participants may come to appreciate that some literacy practices can be helpful to their livelihood activities, and they need to see this by themselves, not merely be told it by outsiders.

It is obvious that literacy and basic education are important to daily livelihood activities. Daily earning activities at least require people to read and write and understand numbers. For example, when a farmer chooses crop seeds at the market or small kiosks, they need to know how to read the name of the seed-product on the package. When farmers harvest the crops it is helpful to note the yield per hectare. It is important for illiterate adults to have “adult literacy” programs, but it is a lot more important to intervene earlier in people’s lives and provide education for their children. In Chapter Six and Seven of this dissertation I will discuss the positive impact of education on livelihoods strategies, and evaluate how children perceive the impact education is likely to have on their long term prospects.

Education has long been identified as a critical element in development. In the book “The Wealth of Nations” originally published in 1776, Adam Smith noted that education plays a determinative role in the development of human capability. Smith’s argument focused on the power of education and learning to make a person more efficient in commodity production by enhancing their human capital. Education is the only means to improve labour skills and knowledge. However, the level of education and the way people achieve education depends on conditions. For example, urban children have more opportunities to access to education, their background prepares them to better take advantage of the opportunity and they normally achieve a higher education than those in rural areas.

This thesis adopts a particular focus on education for development in the Muong communities studied. It sees education not as a stand-alone phenomenon nor simply a matter of curriculum development and better delivery. Rather it places education within the context of the sustainable livelihoods approach. It needs to be seen in the context of people assets, capabilities, desires, worldviews and culture. In this sense it is important to see how people themselves perceive the role of education and how they integrate it into their various livelihood strategies. It may be that people will see modern education as an imposed and inappropriate phenomenon that bears little relationship to their world and desire for their future. Or they may embrace it as a means of opening more livelihood options and a way of integrating into the outside world.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

This broad literature review of rural livelihoods addresses my principal concern for the indigenous highlanders of Vietnam. The review of the principles of sustainable development and the livelihood framework developed by Scoones (1998) and others provides a conceptual framework to apply to and analyze the data collected in the source of a case study of the Muong ethnic minority of Muot village, Thanh Hoa province. It is important to note that livelihood assets and strategies have no fixed formula as they vary from case to case. The current situation of Muot households requires a flexible approach in collecting and analyzing data. Putting people at the centre of the study, the data collection exercises have explored the role of education as a means to achieving better livelihoods and more sustainable development. Having established this conceptual framework, it is now necessary to explain how this affects the methodological approach of this thesis.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter aims to outline a methodological approach appropriate to the task of exploring my focus: the role education plays in the livelihoods of the rural poor in highland areas. Since education is a significant part of this study, a constructivist theory of learning is taken into account to see how local people react to different types of education. It is also important to note that this study does not attempt to examine or judge the effectiveness of the current curriculum of education in Vietnam, but to see how local people perceive and react to the way education is set up now.

This chapter is organised as follows. First, the theoretical framework for this study employs a sustainable livelihoods approach as its fundamental framework. This framework is used to build a profile of how livelihoods are configured by Muong households. Second, constructivism is briefly introduced as an approach to education to investigate how outside knowledge is transferred to local people and how local people themselves perceive their situation. Third, the research methods and techniques used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data are described.

#### **3.1. Sustainable Livelihoods Approach: A theoretical framework**

The sustainable livelihoods approach forms the conceptual framework used in this thesis to investigate the interrelationship between education and the livelihood strategies used by the inhabitants of a poor rural highland minority community in the Thanh Hoa province in northwest Vietnam. Sustainable livelihoods are well established in the development literature and has been used by development agencies and organizations for several decades (Bebbington, 1999; Bouahom, Douangsavanh, & Rigg, 2004; Carney, 2003) to guide community poverty reduction (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). The approach has changed development practitioners' perspectives on poverty, participatory approach and



sustainable development (Swift, 1989). There are several good reasons why this study should use sustainable livelihood as its theoretical framework.

First, the sustainable livelihoods approach is a practical concrete approach that lends itself to the examination of case study households. It enables the researcher to focus on whatever aspect of interest s/he considers to be of significance within a livelihood strategy that relies on the availability of natural resources and the limitations and associated risks. My particular interest is in the role played by education and how this might augment the availability of skills, especially the human resource capabilities available to minority children and the long-term contribution this might make to the sustainable livelihoods of Muong households in remote areas.

Second, the sustainable livelihoods approach is a community-based approach, which suits the empirical nature of the study. The framework provides a comprehensive overview within which the complexities of living and surviving in poor communities can be assembled in such a manner as to contextualise relationships rather than just list data as measures of income, consumption and employment (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). As has been pointed out by Carney (2003) the objectives, scope and priorities of the sustainable livelihoods approach more than adequately capture the perspectives of poor people at the community level.

Third, I consider the sustainable livelihoods approach to be essential to this study because it provides not only a holistic guide to the practical and operational aspect of the research undertaken here but also a philosophical statement that enables me to place people at the centre of this study and keep a human profile on matters that can otherwise be abstracted or generalised as social, economic and environmental issues. According to this principle:

Sustainable poverty elimination will be achieved only if external support focuses on what matters to people, understands the differences between groups of people and works with them in a way that is congruent with their current livelihood strategies, social environment and ability to adapt. Poor people themselves must be key actors in identifying and addressing

livelihood priorities. Outsiders need processes that enable them to listen and respond to the poor. (Carney & Ashley, 1999, p.7)

The sustainable livelihoods approach, theory and principles are relevant to this research in many fundamental ways. It provides a realistic and critical standpoint on which to build the research framework as well as a base which is consistent with related participatory methodology. Although the research is essentially of an academic nature, the sustainable livelihoods approach enables the researcher to use analytical and operational principles that focus attention on practical development matters relevant to how rural communities change and what needs to be done if poverty is to be reduced. The sustainable livelihoods framework can be applied to “a range of different scales – from individual to household”, to household clusters, to extended kin groupings, to villages, regions and so forth with “sustainable livelihood outcomes assessed at different levels” (Scoones, 1998, p.5). Together with sustainable livelihoods principles, the sustainable livelihoods approach enables researchers to assess and analyze the livelihood outcomes and its issues.

However, the sustainable livelihoods approach itself is not perfect. The literature on various versions does not discuss how to identify the poor who need assistance (Krantz, 2001), nor does it discuss the way resources and other livelihood opportunities are distributed locally and bound in place within informal structures of social dominance and power in the communities themselves or how to get around this. (Carney, 2003; Krantz, 2001).

### **3.2. Epistemology**

Epistemology is, first of all, a theory of knowledge, the critical study of its validity, methods, and scope (Hofer, 2001). It reflects how we know what we believe we know. The term “knowledge” itself is used in a variety of ways and there are different epistemologies. The most common epistemology is positivism and constructivism. Positivism was founded by Auguste Comte (Simon, 1965) who “declared false and senseless all problems, concepts

and propositions of traditional philosophy on being, substances and causes”<sup>7</sup> that do not lend themselves to resolution within the field of lived experience. On the other hand “Constructivism” is a type of learning theory that explains human learning as an active attempt to construct meaning about the world”<sup>8</sup>. This study uses constructivism as a way of bringing my experience and understanding to the interpretation of my field experience. Knowledge is socially constructed and relative to different people and the researcher is not neutral. In this thesis I was interested in how Muong people construct knowledge about their livelihoods. To do this I had to formulate a critical awareness of my experiences, worldviews, preconceptions, and values.

### **3.2.1. Constructivism**

“Constructivism is a theory of learning and an approach to education that lays emphasis on the ways that people create meaning of the world through a series of individual constructs”<sup>9</sup>. In other words, it refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves. It is a “theory of knowledge with roots in philosophy, psychology, and cybernetics” (von Glasersfeld, 1989, p.162). There are some basic principles of constructivism which are relevant to the argument of this study and its epistemology. First, learning is a social activity and an active process, which is associated with our interaction with other human beings and the social environment around us.

I was born and brought up in a socialist state, and adapted into this cultural and political context the idea of social evolution and progress (Max, Engels). This idea was later taken

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<sup>7</sup> “Positivism – Marxists Internet Archive.”

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/help/mach1.htm> (accessed November 12, 2012)

<sup>8</sup> “Distance Learning Powerpoint – EDD Steve 2011.” <https://sites.google.com/site/eddsteve2011/edd-7007-distance-learning/distance-learning-powerpoint> (Accessed November 12, 2012)

<sup>9</sup> “Constructivism (learning theory)” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism\\_%28learning\\_theory%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_%28learning_theory%29) (accessed November 12, 2012)

up in the West by Durkheim (1956) and picked up also by Rostow (1991). I was brought up believing that progress could be made through education. The words of Ho Chi Minh still encode in my mind *“Whether or not Vietnam is a glorious country, whether or not Vietnam can match itself against the world’s super nations, depends on your capability to study”*. As a Vietnamese I see myself as a pragmatist. People both unconsciously and actively decide what and how they want to learn depending on their culture. Different people develop different ways of thinking and different ways of seeing the world and as a Vietnamese this idea of modernization has become a characteristic of the way I think about the world and myself.

Not everybody thinks the same. For example, in the case study of Muong some householders may think that education can help improve their working skills, while some others believe that they may work well without education. Setting up training programs for local people, therefore, should be based on a participatory approach to learning so that people are helped to learn what they want to learn. Second, learning is contextual. People learn things in relation to other things they know. For example, local people learn about modern agricultural technology in relation to their traditional techniques of cultivation. They are already farmers who understand ecology. The new methods add to this knowledge rather than replace it.

### **3.2.2. Justification**

#### ***Evidence and Reliability***

Knowledge requires actual belief and what justifies beliefs is the central question of epistemology (Billett, 2009). The requirement that knowledge involves justification does not necessarily mean that knowledge requires absolute certainty. In other words, not all true beliefs constitute knowledge; only true beliefs arrived at in the right way can constitute knowledge (Hawkins, 1984) and a belief is justified if, and only if, it is acknowledged or experienced as reliable.

Evidence is collected and assembled to verify whether our belief is either true or false (Klein & Kunda 1992) and consists of valid perceptual, introspective, memorial, and intuitional experiences. In this study evidence involves the information and data collected during fieldwork. For example, when I visited a Muong family at around lunch time and I witnessed their lunch consisted of just rice and vegetable soup, it gave me evidence for believing that Muong people lack nutritious foods. However, that evidence might not be sufficient for a correct conclusion because the meal I witnessed may not have reflected all the meals of that household for the whole month or year. To make my observation more reliable I collected a wide range of data: information from conversations with villagers, answers provided in surveys, scenes from observations, fieldwork daily notes and so forth.

I carefully triangulated all the information I collected and feel justified in treating it with confidence as a reliable record of my experience. These epistemological issues affected the research design, theoretical framework and research methodology. To minimize bias and to justify my understanding that I handled the beliefs of Muong people about their livelihoods condition and education fairly, I used the combination of mixed methods to collect information and data. The qualitative and quantitative methods supported each other and enabled me to cover the shortfalls that each of them has.

### **3.2.3. Positionality**

In qualitative research it is vital to consider the positionality of the researcher because we are not neutral and objective in the research process. Our worldview, biases and experience all affect the way research is conducted. This issue is particularly important in this research. Firstly it is important because I am not an indigenous Muong and there are implications for the way outside researchers may misrepresent, distort or exploit indigenous others (Smith, 2012). Secondly, there are important issues of power in the way a researcher with both higher education and social status can work with poorer communities (Kobeyashi, 2003). Therefore it is important to reflect on our position as researchers and the following section presents a critical analysis of my positionality.

As a lecturer at Thanh Hoa provincial university and with a letter of recommendation from the president of Hong Duc University I entered the field area in the persona of a government officer. Because of the political system there is a real barrier for outside researchers to enter the field and approach participants. Local administrators and villagers are reluctant to disclose too much to outsiders because they wish to avoid trouble with the authorities. However, being a government officer gave me the authority to enter the community.

From then on it was important to establish trust with the community. In this regard I needed to draw on my own background and personality and rely less on my official status.

I was born and grew up in a poor family in a rural lowland area of Thanh Hoa province which is about 75 kilometres away from the fieldwork location. Like most of the participants in this research, my parents are farmers who spend most of their time in the fields. They work hard all year long, but their income is very low. Unlike farmers in developed countries, farmers in Vietnam are likely to depend on a limited fixed area of wetland for rice and food crop cultivation. The difference is that farmers in Vietnam use simple technology and human labour to cultivate their land. For example, my parents use buffalo to plough and rake the land. I started helping my parents to do fieldwork when I was seven years old. I went to school in the morning, and helped my parents in the afternoon. Whenever I had a day off from school, I spent most of the time working in the field. There was no weekend for me. Other children whose parents were farmers also did the same thing. They worked hard though that did not help to improve the quality of life because of low productivity and low income.

There are 137 households in my home village and some of them are government officers who do not have to rely on wetland cultivation for their livelihood because they have a secure salary. I noticed, for example, the difference between the life of my parents and a teacher in the village. A farmer and a government officer also have a totally different social status. My dream was to change the current social status of my family and myself. I realized that only education could help me make that dream come true.

My parents and other Kinh rural farmers have many similarities with Muong farmers in highland areas. They share a similar livelihood that is mainly dependent on wetland cultivation. Muong and Kinh farmers cultivate two rice crops a year. The men are likely to be jobless after the sowing and harvesting seasons and they often then move to urban areas for temporary jobs.

These similarities meant that I could empathise with Muong even though they come from a different linguistic and cultural group. It also seemed that they could relate to me as someone with a rural background. I was able to integrate at least partly into the community.

However, as a lecturer at a government university, Muong villagers considered me to be in a different social class. There is often a big gap between lower and upper classes in Vietnam society. This was the reason why many Muong villagers did not want to talk to me when I met them the first time. However, they gradually felt more confident when we had conversations and they got to know me better. The friendliness and closeness lessened the gap and I felt less of an outsider.

The biggest difference between myself and the participants is that we are from different ethnic groups. I am one of the Kinh majority and my participants are part of the Muong minority. Though Muong people use Vietnamese as their official language, at home they speak their own language and they also have a different culture. Traditionally, Muong culture has a different set of values, norms, beliefs and customs. However, Muong people live close to Kinh and interaction is frequent.

### ***Implications for the study***

Working as an educator at the provincial university, I would expect the opportunity for education to be given equally to all children regardless of their ethnicity or social status. In fact minority students make up a very small percentage of the total intake each year at university level. This study is an attempt to call local state governors to give more attention to minority education. Education will help to provide indigenous people with the necessary

skills and knowledge to do well in life, and investment in education will make it more likely that sustainable development can be achieved.

### **3.3. Research methodology, design, and method**

#### **3.3.1. Research question**

As a lecturer at the provincial university, equal right of access to university by all students is my primary concern. I believe that entry to, and successful participation in, a good education can reduce the economic gap between rich and poor by improving peoples livelihood chances. The gap between rich and poor and the different living conditions between rural and urban areas has increased over recent years (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001). Poverty is so widespread in rural areas that rural livelihood studies automatically adopt the exploration of poverty as a major theme of their research in which the challenge becomes both how to assess resources and measure incomes.

This study was set up as an attempt to explore the possible correlation between education and livelihood outcomes. To do this I collected details on income and livelihoods, and the educational achievements of the Muong in Muot village. My aim was to answer the following questions:

- What are the advantages and challenges of Muong livelihoods?
- How effective are government policies in encouraging Muong economic development?
- How do the Muong respond to government policies?
- What are the advantages and challenges facing Muong education?
- What role does education play in Muong livelihood development?
- What do the Muong expect from their livelihoods?

#### **3.3.2. Methodological approach**

I initially planned to use Participatory Learning and Action research tools to collect data in the field. However limited time, a tight budget, and lack of helpers made it impractical. I



then turned to a mixed method approach for data collection and analysis using both qualitative and quantitative tools that I could use to cross reference each other.

According to Creswell (2005), a mixed methods design refers to “a procedure for collecting, analyzing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data to understand a research problem” (ibid, p. 510). I decided that this comprehensive approach would provide more satisfactory answers to the research questions posed above (Creswell, 2005).

My research was then carried out in two phases. The first phase used a quantitative approach in which the use of questionnaires played a large part. This was followed by the use of qualitative methods in which participant observation played the major part. This enabled me to gain a more personal perspectives on Muong experience and an enhanced insight documented with case studies. This design matched that recommended by Creswell (2005) and included open-ended questions posed in informal conversational interviews. Participants volunteered stories that nicely complemented issues raised in personally designed questionnaires. Moreover, I also used participant observation to see how people organized their daily activities and invited them to focus group discussions in which issues emerging out of daily observations or conversations were explored. I recorded the actual words, phrases used or actions people took to gather the different perspectives people had on the challenges of earning a living and supporting their childrens education. This gave me access to what Cresswell aptly describes as a more colorful picture of the situation (Creswell, 2005). As acknowledged by many writers, qualitative data can provide “richly descriptive” information (Merriam, 1998, p. 11).

Although I have written that the second phase of this research used principally qualitative methods, from the very beginning of fieldwork I maintained an observation schedule. This helped me design the questionnaire run over this period as well as learn about emerging issues that I would follow up in the second phase of the research.

### **3.3.3. Research design**

The questionnaires used in phase one were designed principally to collect hard data, measurements and the like, but included some open-ended questions that required a sentence or two in response. In phase two these sentences were used to launch informal conversations with villagers. During these ‘interviews’ I took notes which I added to my field diary in which I also wrote retrospective observations on the many activities in which I joined villagers such as walking to the forest, working in the rice fields, having lunch with some families and organizing focus group discussions. How successful I was is discussed in the final chapter.

Challenges of the mixed methods design are numerous and must be faced from the very beginning of the research journey. Creswell (2005) points out some challenges such as coping with an extensive data collection, the intensive nature of analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, the data being both number and text and so on. Mixed methods design can take the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative designs so that it requires the researcher to use both types of data analysis to synthesize the findings of the study. This thesis addresses and reports on all of these challenges.

The first phase of quantitative data collection was designed as an exploratory engagement in which I could find out how people responded to this approach and what sort of information they were willing to provide. I designed the questionnaires and also collected household socioeconomic information. The questionnaire had closed and open-ended questions. Most open-ended questions provided participants with the opportunity to express their own ideas in response to a “why”, “what” or “how” question (Appendix 2).

During my fieldwork period the provincial government also conducted an official poverty household survey. I was allowed, even encouraged, to take part as a member of the survey team. I was also given permission to use the data collected in that survey for my own research. The government survey asked for more detailed information on each of the following: the total annual income, living standards, livelihood history over one year and

the physical condition of the household as well as the neighborhood in which the household was located. The data made a major contribution to my quantitative research results file.

The second phase of qualitative data collection focused on household case studies. My principal guidelines were drawn from Merriam (1998) who argues that “a qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p.21). The unit of the household defined the “boundary system” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). The household itself was defined as a family sharing a common hearth or kitchen.

As part of the second phase, to better explore the approach of both children and parents to education and securing a livelihood, I selected two sample groups drawn from each ‘side’ to explore the generational divide. The first sample group was made up of Muot parents/householders and the second a group of students, the children of these same householders. The data from the parents provided information about their livelihoods (economic development, livelihood development) and their perception of the role of education in their daily lives (livelihood and status in terms of sustainable economic development). The data from the children focused on their understanding of how their educational achievement would impact on their future. The results were compared to see to what extent they merged and diverged and what they revealed about the perceived importance of education. The quantitative data was supplemented and triangulated by qualitative approaches including the researchers observation schedule, informal interviews, focus group discussions and field notes. In qualitative research, the researcher as a participant in community life was the vehicle on which I travelled constantly to evaluate the data collected and analyze incoming information like a detective on a journey of discovery (Merriam, 1998).

### ***Setting and location of the research***

The research was conducted in Muot village in a remote mountainous district in northwest Thanh Hoa province. When I returned to Vietnam from New Zealand in May 2010 to undertake fieldwork, I was advised by Hong Duc University management board and the

Committee of Ethnicity and Mountainous Areas (CEMA) of Thanh Hoa province to conduct my research in Muot village of Cam Thanh Commune, Cam Thuy district. The reason given was that they were particularly interested in the situation of Muong minority people and as Muot village is quite a large village predominantly populated by Muong, it was for them an obvious research site. I had no objection. With 198 households and a population of 678 of whom 335 were female it looked reasonably representative of the wider Muong community and was not too big to get to know well within a relatively short time.

### ***Participants***

For practical considerations not all households could be included in the study but in one way or another I managed to include 153 of the 198 households in my survey work. Ages ranged from 20 to 70. Many of them were young parents and some were just married and yet to have children.

The young people included in my research, principally secondary and high school students, included those who had already quit school, and those still attending. The latter group included students from grade 6 (year 6) to grade 12 (year 12) and the age range stretched from 12 to 19 year olds.

Participants of group one were selected by using a convenient sampling technique. This technique allowed me to access participants who were “conveniently located” (Plowright, 2011, p. 43). I used this technique to select all of the householders/ parents who lived in Muot village. Because I wanted to understand the livelihood of ethnic minority people in a mountainous village I decided to recruit most of the householders who were living there with the aim that they could provide me with full information on their situation.

The student group was selected using a snowball sampling method (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) or viral sampling (Plowright, 2011). The size of the group had to be kept to manageable proportions so I invited a few villagers who I knew living close to the

headman's house and they in turn invited their friends to take part in my research. The students were all of secondary school and high school age<sup>10</sup>. I chose these students because I believed that at this stage they were capable of recognizing the role of education and they started thinking of their future career.

### **3.3.4. Research procedure**

#### ***Selecting participants (sampling).***

After my arrival and a meeting with the administrative chairman and some of the office staff, I was introduced to the head and secretary of Muot village. These two people took me to the village. I explained my research to them and from the outset they were happy to help.

In order to recruit participant households I asked the head of the village to call a village meeting. As on all similar occasions when a visiting mission arrives all householders were invited to come to the meeting hall where I was introduced to the villagers so they would know I was a researcher. After explaining in some detail the nature of my research, I invited those attending to become participants in my research. I read the consent form to them and asked if they had any questions or concerns. I told them that it was entirely up to them whether they participated or not and that I did not want to pressure them into taking part if they had any reservations. When further questions were asked about this I read out the part of the consent form that outlined the rights of participants. Many of them immediately agreed to take part and I told them that if they changed their minds after a few days they were welcome to withdraw. This appeared to enhance my credibility.

After the meeting, the head of the village showed me around, and over the next few days following the meeting, many farmers came to volunteer their participation. During the first month I recruited a total of 153 participants, representing 77.2% of the total number of households in Muot village. I also explained how they would participate in the research,

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<sup>10</sup> In Vietnam the school system has three levels before university which are primary, secondary and high school.

including filling in the survey form, and how I wanted to be able to join in and observe their daily activities. I asked if it would be acceptable for me to take part in some activities such as collection expeditions to the forest or working in the fields. They were very open to this request.

After the voluntary participant group of adults had been formed I held a meeting to get their oral consent concerning several protocols. I asked them about using pseudonyms instead of proper names but they preferred me to use their real names, and to show their age and other personal information. I explained that the aim of the research was to explore information about their socio-economic situation, their education and culture, but that no political issues would be raised. On this understanding they allowed me to use their real names in my writing. In that meeting, I also asked them to allow their children to take part in my study. I made a condition that until I got their completed and signed consent forms I would not start working with their children. Several of them agreed immediately to work with their children and wrote out the names of the individuals for me.

While in the field I stayed with the family of the secretary of the village. I had meals with them every day and spent the larger part of the day in their house after engaging in a wide variety of activities or visiting families in their homes. The children of the secretary and head of the village were studying at both secondary and high schools. Together with their children I held an informal meeting with other students whose parents had given them permission to take part. Fifteen students attended the first meeting and after reiterating that they were prepared to take part in my study, I asked them to introduce more students to me. When I had listed 75 students, I went to the homes of those whose parents had not yet given me permission so I could meet both the parents and students. Once I had both student and parental agreement I explained what I would be asking about in the questionnaire and how they could discuss the issues raised at a subsequent group discussion. All of them felt relaxed when I said we would talk about their schooling. I feel that it was on the basis of a good understanding that the 75 students agreed to participate in my study, which accounted for 98% of the total number of secondary and high school students in the village.

### **3.3.5. Methods of collecting data**

#### ***Observations***

I used participant observation to find out how Muong people organized their daily lives. As already mentioned, I occasionally followed farmers to the forest to gain an understanding of how they used it. I took photos, took notes and asked them questions about their investment in tree planting. I could see that big areas of forest had been destroyed and there were very few big timber trees left. Income was mostly derived from firewood and quick growing species such as bamboo, and low quality timbers such as eucalyptus. They could collect herbs to sell but there were no longer as many available as there had been in the past. They planted cassava and corn on cultivated uplands but because of a lack of water and investment in fertilizer, productivity was not high. I joined a group of young men to go hunting at night. Hunting is a long standing tradition for Muong people and may be one of the reasons why the number of wild animals has dropped so quickly. Another day, I went to catch frogs in an irrigated field with two men. It took us three hours after a heavy shower to catch enough to make the outing worthwhile. On that same day I talked with some women who were planting corn and listened to their stories about how hard their lives were. Several days later I participated in a group project in which neighbours and relatives were helping a family to build a pole house and repair the roof of another house. I learned how to build a water reticulation system that delivered water to a cluster of households using split bamboo pipes. I was shown how to select good bamboo stems and how to connect the pieces together to carry water from a common water tank to different houses. They also use plastic pipes but most households use bamboo because it is cheaper. Bamboo may not last as long but it is not too much trouble to replace them from time to time and their use eliminates another call on their cash. Medicinal herbs were also collected. I accompanied a family to the high forest to collect the leaves of a wild bush that is used by pregnant women. They showed me how to select the best leaves and when I asked them why they did not try to establish these plants closer to their houses to save time, they said it was not necessary as people always came to the forest to pick leaves whenever necessary. They also picked wild vegetables that I am unable to name. I gathered the impression that they rely very much on natural resources.

When I was in the field I experienced two peak work times. First, the main rice harvest in early September and the winter crop at the end of October, 2010. During the main harvest, all villagers went to the irrigated rice fields including those attending school. They worked in shifts, first to school each day and then to the fields. Husbands who had temporarily left the village in search of work in the cities returned to help their wives. Muot farmers do not have any harvesting machines to do the work for them and everything had to be done by hand. They used buffalos to carry the rice back from the fields to their homes. Sometimes they worked in groups but not often. Since land reform was introduced they have become comfortable with working just with family members. The crop that was taken in during my time in the field was not so productive owing to an infestation of insects. The productivity of each 500 m<sup>2</sup> of rice cultivating area was about 200 kilograms. Many people especially young householders had approximately 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> of cultivated area and harvested a total of about 800 kilograms of rice. This was what had to feed four people from late September until the second crop was harvested in May.

In fact, rice is not only considered as production for domestic supply but is also a cash crop. The villagers trade rice for other goods and services. Because they have such a limited range of produce to sell, if their rice crop fails to meet established expectations they face considerable difficulties. Young householders especially have such a small area of forest, or some none at all, they have nothing to fall back on. Even those who have reasonable allocations face difficulties because of the serious limitations placed on what they can do. This was not the case in the past and villagers were quick to tell me that these restrictions inhibit their ability to make a living. They are forced to rely on rice cultivation and whatever they can earn between harvests. The husbands must go in search of jobs, which are normally low paid; a few may be available locally or they may have to search further a field.

After harvesting the main crop, some households immediately start preparations for their winter crop which is grown in the residual moisture. They prefer to cultivate fields close to the village. When I followed my Mout friends to their winter crop fields I saw just corn. They said they only grew corn because they did not know what other vegetable or cereal



crops could be grown. In the winter, wild vegetables are not so readily available and as a consequence the amount of vegetable in their daily diet drops away. I observed and learnt that farmers used only raw muck to fertilize their fields. They told me they had no money to buy industrial fertilizer to enhance the growth of their winter crop. They considered two rice harvests as the main crops were enough to meet their needs and the winter crop was treated as an extra option.

Over the fieldwork period I was given the chance to attend village celebrations. I was fortunate to be invited to two weddings and joined the feasting that accompanied them. These days guests bring gifts of money rather than the alcohol and sticky rice that was brought in the old days. The bride and groom now no longer dress in traditional wedding costumes but wear the same clothes as city people. However, some features of the traditional wedding ceremony have survived for example the Muong retain four steps in a wedding: the marriage proposal (in Muong language: *Ti kháo thiếng*), gift presenting (*Ti nòm*), groom introduction (*ti cháu*), and picking up the bride (*Xưóc du*). I also attended the funeral of an old man. The way a funeral is conducted is more in keeping with the old customs of Muong culture.

I shared meals with Muong families. The basic meal is very simple and is marked by the lack of protein. I also joined a group of teenagers playing billiards. I saw teenage boys spent a lot of time and money playing. Some of them played billiards or pool, some played cards and not just for fun. Whoever lost the game had to pay for any expenses involved such as the cost of hiring the table. According to my observations boys spent an average of three hours per night. One boy had to pay at least 10,000 VND (50 cents USD) and some paid more. Many of them were enrolled students and some had left school. They gathered to play nearly every night.

I worked in the fields during the rainy season. Whenever it rained, the roads quickly became soft with mud. Only the main road to the commune centre was paved and remained free of dirt. Small children had to stay at home because their parents could not take them to school either by bicycle or motorbike. It was very hard for me to get from one place to

another because the road became so muddy and slippery. Normally, it took people only five minutes to pass this stretch of road I used most days, but on rainy days it took 30 minutes and it was not unusual to fall down many times.

After nearly six months in the field I felt familiar with most of the activities that took up the time in the Muot villagers daily lives. After each day I wrote up notes on what I had seen, heard and done. I took photos of people and places around the village and painted some pictures of what I saw and experienced. I also took my wife and two year old son to visit some of the families I had befriended.

### ***Informal conversational interviews***

When I visited houses with my research schedule I also conducted informal conversational interviews with both adult householders and students. I grouped the households into 12 clusters and visited cluster by cluster. The day before I planned to visit, I sent a message ahead of me to say when I would be there and if they could arrange for either the wife or husband to be at home to talk with me. Most of the time this worked but sometimes just the children or elderly grandparents were at home. In order to talk with people in a natural setting, I did not prepare written questions but worked to a notional check list and allowed the conversation to develop along lines arising out of the interaction. I didn't go empty handed but first checked information collected from a survey schedule and other observations. I asked questions about matters which they had an interest in and would add to my understanding. For example I asked about cultivating home plots, raising cattle, and children's schooling. The participants felt free to tell me tangential stories in response to open-ended questions and I let them run to see where they would end up. I did not use a digital recorder. I took notes and later reconstructed useful conversations from memory. The topics I asked householders about focused on three matters relating to livelihood strategies: investment in agriculture, afforestation, and children's schooling. For example:

- Would you please talk about cultivating your forestland?
- Please tell me about your children's schooling and job prospects?
- Please tell me about your experience in raising cattle?

- Can you share with me your ideas about investing in childrens' education?

I visited each cluster of families over a period of two or three days. Sometimes they took me round their houses and out to their forest allocation while sharing with me their concerns about current issues or telling me about their property. Some showed me where to pick wild vegetables. In general, they talked a lot about their lack of financial capital; they simply do not have enough money to invest in forestry and agriculture or their childrens' higher education. They were aware that some of their traditional livelihood strategies are no longer suitable and are either reluctant to change or do not know how to make things work better.

### ***Focus group discussions***

I followed up survey and informal conversational interviews with focus group discussions. Both householders/parents and students were invited separately to take part.

With each group of householders:

- I followed up matters raised earlier, such as issues raised in the questionnaire, especially open ended questions where some respondents had indicated that they had more to say than could easily be written.
- I invited participants to raise issues of their own relating to economic development such as technological innovation, capital investment and investment in human capital (childrens' education).

Students discussed their perceptions of the role education might play in their future and specifically in their choice of career.

The issues raised in discussion are available in Appendix 1 and 2. The content of the discussions was summarized and recorded in note form.

### ***Field notes***

Field notes on my thinking over the six month period of living with the Muot were shared with selected people. Sometimes I drew pictures; sometimes I used pictures and photos as my prompts. I found myself writing especially about the thoughtful people who welcomed

me very warmly and were willing to discuss issues. Most of my field notes were written after sharing a meal or participating with people on occasions when they expressed themselves freely. I was especially interested in their greetings and talk with neighbors and myself. I also learned some Moun spoken language. The children called me “Uncle” and other people called me by names appropriate to their own language. I felt very comfortable and this is reflected in my field notes. A sample of my field notes is presented in the appendix.

### *Doing the survey*

As stated earlier I used two questionnaires. Both are available in Vietnamese and English.

The first was designed for use with householder/parent participants. To allow for consistency this questionnaire was based on the Standard of Living Household Survey Form (LHSS) used by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, especially the LHSS in 2008. I learnt that the provincial government would do a household poverty survey in October, 2010, and asked for permission to take part in that survey. The Commune committee agreed and allowed me to participate. A survey enumerator visited each household to deliver a questionnaire and help people to fill them in. I deliberately designed my own survey schedule to explore data different from the LHSS questionnaire. My questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions concerning advantages and challenges of livelihoods and education of the Muong. The provincial poverty survey questionnaire focused on income and expenses from different livelihood sources. In my meetings with the voluntary participants, I explained the purpose of the questionnaire, the content of the questions and the way to fill in the questionnaire. I delivered a total of 198 copies of the questionnaire and after two weeks collected 165 copies of which 153 copies were filled in correctly. Some of the participants did not return their questionnaires and explained that they were unable to do so because they were illiterate and did not want to ask others to help. I was happy with 165 respondents which covered 83% of the households in the village.

The second questionnaire was designed for student participants. This questionnaire also included closed and open-ended questions. With the permission of most parents, students were encouraged to participate in the meeting and discussion organized in the village hall. I also had to ask for permission from Muot village leaders to use the questionnaire to work with students. Students were informed and invited to attend two weeks in advance, so they were all able to prepare for it. I also prepared plenty of sweets, fruit, and soft drinks to make the meeting attractive for the students.

The meeting started with my introduction of why I was there and how important the role of education was in career development. Students were encouraged to interrupt me to ask any questions they wanted. I then handed over 75 copies and got the students to fill them in and return them to me directly at the meeting hall where I set up an “office”. All of the questionnaires were returned to me.

The provincial government survey was conducted between the middle of October, 2010, and the middle of November, 2010. In Muot village, there were two survey teams. One team consisted of the head of the village with two village members and a commune officer. I joined the other group with the Party Secretary, one commune officer and the chair person of Muot Women’s Association. The overall leader of the Mout survey team was the head of the village. After delivering the questionnaires and showing people how to record their responses, the people answered the questions. The questionnaires were then collected and checked to see if there was any missing information and the head of the village signed each questionnaire.

### **3.3.6. Methods of analyzing the data**

The questionnaires were collected and the research questions were coded according to the themes of livelihood such as natural, human, natural, physical and social capital, annual incomes, level of education, and total land-use. The information relating to these themes from each questionnaire was then entered. After coding, the data was analyzed by the SPSS software program.

I found that there was a high correlation coefficient which supported the conclusion that there was a positive correlation between educational level and income. The student questionnaire was analyzed following the same process.

The field notes and the contents of informal conversational interviews and focus group discussions were coded in order to explore similar themes.

### **3.3.7. Validity and reliability**

This study is a mixed methods design so that the terms of validity refer to both the quantitative and qualitative method designs.

#### ***Validity of the survey or quantitative methods design***

In order to address the validity of the survey, I used external validity. The data was provided by 80% of Muot householders and 98% of students between the age of 12 and 19 so that the study results can be generalized to the whole population. The study results can also be generalized to other groups of Muong people in other areas, at least in Cam Thuy District. This term is understood as ecological validity.

#### ***Validity of the qualitative methods design.***

To address the validity of this study in terms of qualitative methods design, I used some strategies to promote validity or trustworthiness.

- Participant feedback: After collecting the questionnaires I selected five conversations to summarize the information provided by the participants. I focused on the important issues raised in their stories and wrote them up. I sent a copy of these to the participants for them to review my version of what they had said. The participants received only a summary of their own stories. I invited them to state whether they agreed or disagreed with my summary of their ideas. I invited their responses to my description of what they had told me.
- Low-inference descriptors: In my reflection and analysis I used the exact words and phrases used by the participants from the field notes. I tried to keep the style of expression as close as possible to their original response.

- Triangulation methods: This is a mixed study and in terms of qualitative methods I used participant observation (naturalistic observation schedule) backed up by field notes, informal conversational interviews and focus group discussions; these tools helped me to investigate different perspectives and fill in information about the situation. Within the qualitative methods design, I played the role of detective and collected data in a “snowball” way allowing one question and answer to lead to the next step and so on. I participated in a wide range of activities with Muot people in the field in order to get the real feeling of what was taking place and so to reduce researcher bias.

As I have already stated I am not of Muong ethnicity but I understand very well the difficulties of their life because of my own upbringing and previous research work. I have often worked with ethnic minorities and know the hazards of doing research in remote areas. My experience helped me to avoid some of the pitfalls of living in quite a different community and communicating with Muot people.

### **3.3.8. Ethical considerations**

The ethical issues of a study give precedence to participant safety and protection (Walliman and Buckler, 2008). In this study participants were provided with enough information on the research project through both the briefing and an information sheet that was translated into Vietnamese. I myself answered many of their questions and concerns raised. The questionnaires were also prepared in both English and Vietnamese. I explained carefully about their involvement and their rights to withdraw or to refuse to answer any sensitive questions. They were well-informed of the steps, time and contents of all activities in which they participated. I also shared the observation schedule with them and asked them to allow me to visit their houses. I also asked them about using pseudonyms in interpreting and writing the thesis but they said I could use their real names. As a consequence in my thesis I used all the real names of participants when I quote their words. During the research, participants were respected and free to discuss with me any issues of concern. I believe they were very happy to work with me and took me in as a friend.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to address and discuss the methodology used to collect and analyze data designed to come to a good understanding of the concerns of Muong people about their livelihoods and education. The study used mixed research methods that involved constructivist philosophical assumptions to guide the direction, collection and analysis of data and both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the research process. There were two groups of participants, householders and students, from whom two types of data were collected relating to livelihoods and education. The combination of closed-ended and opened-ended techniques (Bazeley, 2004) worked well in the field. In this chapter I have also outlined the underlying the research methods. As stated earlier the purpose of this study was to learn how Muong people construct knowledge about their livelihoods and how they link matters relating to education and livelihoods. The study does not attempt to examine the content of the national educational curriculum and is restricted to the challenge of investigating how people perceive the role of general education and training.



# CHAPTER FOUR

## VIETNAMESE ETHNIC MINORITIES: AN OVERVIEW AND MUONG CASE STUDY

### 4.0. Introduction

This chapter presents a brief historical background of the development situation facing ethnic minorities in Vietnam. Ethnic minority issues and the position of minority people within the Vietnamese state present a long-standing challenge and have presented key problems to successive administrations. Within Vietnam, minorities are often referred to as *đồng bào dân tộc thiểu số* (ethnic minority compatriots), a general term for any ethnic minority. During the period of French colonisation and during the American war, minorities were named in French as *montagnard* (mountain dweller). In geographical terms, ethnic minorities reside mainly in mountainous and national border areas.

In this chapter I want to provide an overview of the key issues facing ethnic minorities, the mountainous areas they inhabit, and the main government programs intended to improve their quality of life in a sustainable manner. In a multi-ethnic country like Vietnam, challenges relating to ethnic minorities are inevitable. It was only after the withdrawal of the French that the government of Vietnam started to systematically identify ethnic minorities. There are now fifty-four officially recognized ethnic groups, of which the Kinh majority account for 87% of the total. The remaining 13% consists of fifty-three other groups, officially named ethnic minorities. They reside principally in isolated remote and mountainous areas.

The chapter is divided into three main sections as follows: the first section provides an overview and key issues facing ethnic minorities in Vietnam; the second part provides an outline of the case study with the Muong ethnic minority in Thanh Hoa province. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam's (GSOV) data in 2009, Thanh Hoa

province had nearly four million people, one of the biggest populations after Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi, of which a large number belong to ethnic minorities. The third section outlines the main government policy and programs as well as NGO activities undertaken to support and improve the living standard of minority and mountainous communities. As the gap between minority and majority groups widens (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001), I believe it is my duty as an educationalist to investigate the causes and effects of this socioeconomic disparity.

#### **4.1. Overview of indigenous minorities in Vietnam**

Vietnam is a country with a long history of war and colonialism. The diversity of the mountainous terrain of the interior provides natural boundaries between groups and over thousands of years differences between them were maintained. However, it was only after the colonial period that the government started to systematically classify and identify ethnic minorities. However, the plain question “Who are the ethnic minorities?” has no entirely satisfactory answer. Under the requirements of the government, a national program of ethnic classification was first conducted by ethnologists. The categories established at that time have been used until now for administration, development, and research purposes. Almost all minority groups live in the hills and mountains (Rambo & Jamieson, 2003). Only four ethnic groups traditionally live in the lowlands: the Kinh, Khme, Chinese, and Cham. The remaining fifty groups have all lived in the uplands and mountainous areas for centuries.

Most of the ethnic minorities live by practicing upland and paddy rice cultivation on the terrace cleared under one or another system of shifting cultivation. Land for wet rice is scarce. People cultivate rain fed crops like corn, sweet potato, sesame, bean, cassava and so on.

Recent studies have shown that the gap between the minority and majority is increasing constantly (Rambo & Jamieson, 2003; Walle & Gunewardena, 2001) and presents a real environmental and social crisis. Rambo et al. (2003) assert that it is increasingly difficult for millions of minority households in the mountains and uplands to meet their basic needs.

People in the uplands are much worse off than people on the lowlands. The gap between them is widening rather than narrowing.

**Table 4.1. Population of major ethnic groups of Vietnam in 2001**

Official name (Alternate names)	Population
Kinh (Viet)	65,795,718
Tay (Tho)	1,477,514
Thai	1,328,725
Muong	1,137,515
Kho-me (Khmer, Cambodian)	1,055,174
Hoa (Chinese)	852,371
Nung	856,412
H'mong (Mong, Meo)	787,604
Dao	620,538
Gia Rai	317,557
E De (Rhade)	270,843
Ba Na (Bahnar)	174,456
San Chay	147,315
Cham	132,873
Co-ho	128,723
San Diu	126,237
Hre	113,111

Source: *General Statistic Office of Vietnam, 2001.*

Many indigenous minority people suffer from food shortages, nutritional deficiencies, lower life expectancy, and poor educational levels. Most authors agree that the current situation is fairly grim, whether one is talking about poverty, the environment, or erosion of cultural identity. The Vietnam Living Standard Surveys (VLSS) carried out in 1993 and 1998, which covered multi-topic issues including education, health, employment, migration, housing, agricultural and non-agricultural activities, provides the evidence of the

growing gap between minority and majority groups in Vietnam (Baulch et al., 2007). According to the surveys, the living standards and expenditure levels of minority households are much lower than that of Kinh – majority households. Over the last decade the serious poverty of ethnic minorities in mountainous areas has attracted the attention of government and other organizations. However, minority people do not benefit much from the government's support programs. In contrast, the majority people who migrate into minority areas clearly benefit by doing so (Tugault-Lafleur & Turner, 2009; Walle & Gunewardena, 2001).

## 4.2. Key Issues in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas

### 4.2.1. Poverty

Recent studies have shown that the living standards of ethnic minorities in mountainous areas has improved. However, the poverty rate remains high (Baulch et al., 2007; Huynh, Duong, & Bui, 2002; Rambo & Jamieson, 2003; Walle & Gunewardena, 2001) and is much worse than in the lowlands. Although minorities constitute only 13% of the national population, the economic survey in 1998 shows they accounted for 28% of the total number of poor people. The Centre Institute for Economic Survey also predicts that this proportion will increase to 34% over the next ten years.

**Table 4.2. Percentage of people living in poverty in Vietnam, 1993-2002**

Groups	1993 (%)	1998 (%)	2002 (%)
All of Vietnam	58.1	37.4	28.9
Urban	25.1	9.2	6.6
Rural	66.4	45.5	35.6
Kinh and Hoa (Chinese)	53.9	31.1	23.1
Ethnic Minorities	86.4	75.2	69.3

Source: *Vietnam Development Report 2004. Data based pm VLSS of 1993, 1998 and VLSS of 2002*

Table 4.2 shows that even though the percentage of minority people living in poverty in the northern mountainous area and the central highlands has decreased over the decade 1993-2002 decade, it remains very high if we compare it to other groups. Over this period the average percentage of indigenous minority people living in poverty fell from 86.4% to 69.3%. According to a sample survey in 1999 in four ethnic minority communities in the northern mountain regions, the percentage of households falling under the food poverty line was 100% in Khe Nong (Dan Lai), 93% in Thai Phin Tung (H'mong), 43% in Tat (Da Tay Bac), and 22% in Ngoc Tan (Cao Lan).

**Table 4.3. Incidence of poverty by region in Vietnam (1993-2004)**

Region	1993	1998	2002	2004
Northern Mountainous areas	81.5	64.2	43.9	43.5
Red River Delta	62.7	29.3	22.4	21.1
North Central	74.5	48.1	43.9	41.4
South Central	47.2	34.5	25.2	21.3
Mekong Delta	47.1	36.9	23.4	19.5
South East	37.0	12.2	10.6	6.7
Central Highlands	70.0	52.4	51.8	32.7

Source: *General Statistics Offices of Vietnam, VHLSS 2004.*

The poverty situation is made much more apparent by visiting the regions concerned. The real question is: what makes up this poverty? The question of food security remains unanswered. The greatest challenge is to identify the most appropriate measurement of poverty. Are there significant disparities between people living in the same region but in widely different locations? For example, Cam Thanh commune is a mountainous minority community in northwest Thanh Hoa. The people in this commune are considered to be an ethnic minority but there is a significant difference in the standard of living between those

who live close to the centre of the commune and those living far away from it. At the centre of the commune can be found a normal range of public services such as a market, health centre, schools, and so on. People living in the centre of the commune are reasonably well off and compare well with the lowland Kinh (majority) who have taken up residence. Moreover most government paid officers who work in the public sector inhabit in the centre of the commune. The income of these people is mainly from government salaries and trading activities. The living standards of the commune or district centre's households are much higher than those living well away from the centre. The increasing investment in infrastructure has resulted in better facilities but these do not reach those minority peoples in remote areas. The beneficiaries are mainly those living in small towns, employed by the government, and other Kinh living in the centre (Huynh et al., 2002). According to a 1998 survey the expenditure per capita of minority households is much lower than that of Kinh households: (VND 1537/capita/day for former and VND2951/capita/day for the latter)<sup>11</sup>. As shown by the 2008 VHLSS the income of the majority Kinh was 1.91 times higher than that of the minority. However the VHLSS survey also showed that the income of poor households in minority, mountainous areas also increased substantially. Better quality and cheaper consumer goods are also available in "much greater abundance" than before; however very few people have become well-off (Rambo & Jamieson, 2003). The gap between the majority's and minority's income remains high and has increased constantly over past years (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001). The ratio of average monthly income per capita in urban (majority) and north-western mountainous provinces (minority) in 2008, 2006, and 2004 is 3, 2.86, and 2.63. The detailed figures for specific cases would be much higher than these general figures based on information that is not always reliable.

One of the most challenging questions for all activists and government policy makers is what actually are the causes of poverty among indigenous minority people in these remote mountainous areas? Forsyth and Michaud (2011) called the situation of indigenous people

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<sup>11</sup> The exchange rate in January 1998 was US\$1= VND12,290

poverty a “dilemma” and they also reviewed the key causes, which referred to poor livelihoods and development strategies. The term “dilemma” in this situation may refer to a difficult circumstance which indigenous people find impossible to solve and overcome. A common image of highland mountainous livelihoods is of scattered villages following customary ways with occasional roads and villagers engaged in a combination of subsistence agriculture, cash cropping, gathering of forest products, and subsidiary trade (Forsyth & Michaud, 2011). The cultivation of the steep upland slopes for dry rice, vegetables and maize is for feeding their households and poultry, and for making alcohol.

The recent study on poverty reduction among ethnic minorities conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) also showed that the rural poor are predominantly from indigenous groups. According to their figures, minority households suffer an average of 5.5 months food deficit compared to 3.3 months for Kinh groups. Moreover, indigenous people have a lower maximum educational attainment level, substantially poorer access to water resources and fewer benefits from remittances. The full story of indigenous minority poverty is still to be told.

#### **4.2.2. Environmental degradation**

Most research on the development of minority peoples takes the view that people living in mountainous areas are faced with serious environmental degradation. The pressure on the natural resources of the highlands is increasing owing to rapid population growth. Shifting cultivation has been blamed for many environmental problems including lowland flooding and upland erosion (Forsyth & Michaud, 2011). This traditional form of cultivation under which land is alternatively cleared and fallowed has been used by indigenous people throughout their history. The cultivation period in each field is usually very short, about two to three years; the field is then left for a few years to allow the land to recover. This traditional shifting cultivation requires large areas of land and low population density.

However, even under contemporary conditions Forsyth and Michaud (2011) argue that pursuant to recent hydrological research and literature studies in the field, the links between highland agriculture and the above mentioned environmental problems are “exaggerated”.

This school of thought maintains that the fluctuation in soil, rain, and water flows are complex and not always linked to agriculture. However, on the other side of the debate, the authors also admit that this argument does not mean that shifting cultivation in highland areas has no affect on the environment. Indigenous people cannot be blamed as being solely responsible for degrading their highland environment; there are other factors at work.

What is the main cause of environmental problems in the highland and mountainous areas? Since Vietnam introduced the renovation policy “*Đổi mới*” in the late 1980s, rural and highland subsistence agriculture has expanded into trading. The interference by majority people from the lowlands into highland minority areas began to increase. Kinh people started to seek valuable and rare products from remote mountainous areas to buy and sell. In this context, valuable products from the uplands and mountains included wild animals and timber taken from the natural forest. Over this period, a great deal of forest was destroyed for timber and other resources. Immediately after the war, natural forests still covered much of the uplands. However since the introduction of “*Đổi mới*”, the amount of forest cover has dropped everywhere in the country (Rambo & Jamieson, 2003). Most remaining forests are of poor quality with few trees of valuable timber left standing. There has been no difficulty in selling valuable timber to traders in major cities and overseas.

**Table 4.4. Viet Nam: Breakdown of forest types, 2010**

Type of forest	Forest area covered	% of forested area
Primary forest	80,000 hectares	1%
Naturally generated forest	10,205,000 hectares	74%
Planted forest	3,512,000 hectares	25%

Source: <http://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/2000/Vietnam.htm> (Viewed on 12/06/2011)



In the Six Party Congress of Vietnam in December 1986, the Party Secretary-General Truong Chinh raised the public concerns regarding *Doi Moi* policies: the past mistakes and the need for a major renovation in the progress of economic development:

Our Party's policies must proceed from the interests, desires and levels of our people. To evaluate our policies to decide whether they are right or wrong, good or bad, we should see whether our majority of our people enthusiastically approve and are eager to implement our policies or not. We should see whether our production has been boosted, our economy has developed, life has become stabilized and gradually improved, national defence and security has become steady and strong or not.... The peasants have a spirit of private ownership. That is true. To advance to socialism, it is necessary to get rid of that spirit. That is also true. Such as allegation cannot win the people's approval, and only alienates us further from the people. They cannot agree to our imposing on them things contrary to their legitimate interests and compelling them to obey our subjective will. (Truong Chinh: 8-18)

As a result, the central planning and top-down imposing concepts did not improve production and restricted development process. The reforms also had a strong influence on the people who live in remote mountainous areas. In fact, all ethnicities in Vietnam have benefited from the economic and political reforms, but the majority Kinh and those who live in lowland and urban areas had much more advantages than those who live in remote areas. The forestlands of highlanders have been narrowed down and restricted due to the integration of the Kinh from lowlands. This has apparent effects on the livelihoods of minority people who mostly rely on forests.

When the government acknowledged the importance of forests to environmental protection and realized the extent to which deforestation was becoming an issue they started to impose

policies to protect forests and replant deforested areas. A survey by the National Institute of Forestry in 2000 concluded that forest cover in Vietnam between 1995 and 2000 had increased from 28% to 33.2%. However Rambo et al. (2003) do not view this result as a favourable achievement because it is important to define exactly is meant by the term “forest”. While the Vietnamese government considers land areas covered by trees as forest, these authors argue that “what is being planted is mostly mono-cultural tree plantations, low value eucalyptus and pine, or stands of coffee, rubber, cashew, or fruit trees” (p.148). In fact, the rate of reforestation cannot keep up with the rate of logging. Old primary forests are the home of wild animals and valuable timbers, while the new plantation forests in highland and mountainous areas consist mainly of eucalyptus and fruit trees.

The high rate of deforestation has led to the extinction of many valuable species of plants and animals and increased soil erosion. Biodiversity is endangered. This has been caused by overexploitation and has resulted in the serious loss of habitat. Poor people in highland and mountainous areas, who rely on hunting and gathering forest products for food and to supplement their incomes, have been adversely affected. The degeneration of the forest means the loss of valuable plants and animals. The forest “no longer meets their needs” (Rambo et al., 2003. p. 148). A number of recent studies show that in highland and remote mountainous areas, ethnic minority groups now have limited access to timber to build their houses, even though they have been assigned to manage their forests. Agricultural land and forests, the basic components of a sustainable ecosystem for the indigenous people for thousands of years, has been seriously depleted (Huynh et al., 2002). In Chapter Five I will look at the cause and effect of land reform in reference to the case study of Muot village.

#### **4.2.3. Problems of land and forest ownership**

The 53 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam have for thousands of years used their own traditional rules and customs to regulate the use of land and forests. Each minority group has different ways of managing their land and forests with reference to different customs and beliefs; many scholars have pointed out that their traditional laws are harmonious and effective in mediating the relationship between communities and the ecosystem. Huynh et

al. (2002) demonstrate this with reference to some of the flexible characteristics of traditional land tenure contrasted with the rigid rules set in place following state intervention.

Indigenous people themselves did not have a concept of private landownership. In their view, land belongs to those who use it and it has no monetary value. People secure a livelihood and respect village rules. Their religious beliefs focus on good and bad spirits that have absolute control over all natural resources (Ibid: p.18). After the American war, when the North and South were reunited, the central government introduced new policies on land management and ownership. On the lowlands, private ownership was replaced by state ownership and land holdings were reorganized into collectives. Forests fell under state management and much of the infrastructure was in a damaged state. The most recent change, which has affected land use in upland areas occupied by indigenous minority communities, is government projects formed into New Economic Zones (NEZs - *vùng kinh tế mới*).

After the war ended in 1975, the Vietnam government implemented plans for countrywide reunification and resettlement. There were two major challenges:

- 1) Severe food shortages and an economy in recession. The country was suffering from an economic embargo imposed by the American government. These factors drove Vietnamese people into difficulty.

- 2) The second challenge at that time was how to resettle people displaced by the war. The NEZs projects involving Kinh settlers took longer to get underway and were supported by special policies. Up until the mid-twentieth century, the number of Kinh people in the highlands remained small, but by the end of the twentieth century this number had increased to 10 million. As a result, many indigenous communities in the highlands and mountainous areas were now faced with reduced living areas including their farmland and forest areas. The NEZ projects led to tremendous migration nationwide and conflicts over land use became inevitable. In the past, as mentioned earlier, indigenous minority people managed land according to their own customary laws, practicing a variety of rotational

agricultural activities. The NEZs sites on which state-owned farms (*nông trường*) were formed pushed many indigenous people off their traditional lands. A large number of these state-owned farms continue to operate up to now, although much of land was redistributed to villagers in the late 1980s when collective agriculture was dissolved. Many people remain landless. Most of the land from state farms was handed over to ex-employees instead of the people from whom the land had been taken. Thanh Hoa province retained state-owned farms such as the Yellow Star state farm (*Nông trường Sao Vàng*), and United State farm (*Nông trường Thống Nhất*), which are now basically plantations: tea, rubber, sugar cane and coffee.

The most recent government project opened in the highlands, in a minority area, is a bauxite mine in Đắk Nông province. The government has allowed a Chinese company to start mining some of the massive reserves of bauxite and this has provoked an unprecedented backlash from an unlikely assortment of critics.

The mine was developed under a plan proposed by Prime Minister, Nguyen Tan Dung who described it as “a major policy of the party and the state”. The government sought to attract an investment of USD15 billion or more to develop bauxite mining and aluminum refining projects by 2025. Critics say the large-scale bauxite mining in Dak Nong and Dak Lak province where people are currently growing coffee and other crops, will cause irreparable pollution to the environment and put the ethnic-minority groups who inhabit the Central Highlands in danger. “Bauxite is converted through a toxic process to alumina, the raw material for making aluminum”<sup>12</sup>. Known by environmentalists as “red sludge”, this waste, if not properly managed, can contaminate water supplies and choke vegetation.

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<sup>12</sup> “Vietnam and China: Bauxite bashers/ The Economist” <http://www.economist.com/node/13527969>  
(accessed September 10, 2012)

#### 4.2.4. Passivity and dependency

As part of its policy in recognizing the importance of ethnic minorities in long-term national development strategies, the government has paid more attention, and in some cases even given special priority, to matters affecting ethnic minorities.<sup>13</sup> However, promises are not always delivered. Rambo et al (2003) argue that the upland minorities are “enmeshed” in political, social, economic and cultural systems in which the real authority is extralocal. The vertical hierarchy of the administrative system in Vietnam places the village (*làng/bản/thôn/xóm*) at the bottom of the line of command. Every village, no matter where it is, has a village head (*trưởng thôn*) in charge of socioeconomic factors, and a secretary (*bí thư*) in charge of propaganda which supports the policies of the Communist Party. This person must be a Party member (*Đảng viên*). This hierarchical order is replicated in every village in each of the following: the associations of women, youth, veterans, old people, peasants and so forth. All of these organizations are “tightly linked to higher level organizational structures that may simply be a means of contesting the imposed stereotype of their identity as backwards” (Rambo et al., 2003. p. 153).

During the six months in which I conducted my fieldwork, I had a real chance to work closely with Muot villagers and I noticed that the heads of these village organizations had a stronger influence than those at a higher level in the administrative structure. The distance between ordinary villagers and these important people is quite considerable. This encourages indigenous minority people, especially those in remote villages, to play a very passive role and make few demands to claim democratic rights. People in remote areas tend to accept passively what they have been told rather than deciding for themselves which way they should go. Recent studies conducted by the Asian Development Bank (2002, 2005) have also shown that highland and mountainous indigenous communities are highly

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<sup>13</sup> “Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in a speech in August 2004” [www.dantri.com.vn](http://www.dantri.com.vn) (accessed September 10, 2012)

dependent on socioeconomic guidelines including cultural events which are often organized by majority Kinh and central government agents.

### **4.3. Muong Ethnic Minorities in Thanh Hoa Province: an overview.**

#### **4.3.1. Thanh Hoa province: an overview**

In chapter 1, I provided an introduction to Thanh Hoa province which is located in close proximity to the key economic regions of Tonkin, northern Lao provinces and the central key economic region.

According to the report of GSOV in 2005, the province was home to 3.67 million people, which included seven recognized ethnicities: Kinh, Muong (Mường), Thai (Thái), H'mong, Dao, Tay (Thổ), Chinese (Hoa). Of these the minority groups are Muong, Thai, H'mong, Dao (Yeo Mien), and Tho. Most of these people live in high mountainous districts close to the border with Laos. Thanh Hoa has a high ratio of working-aged labour that accounts for 2.12 million people. The skilled labour force accounts for 27% of total population and those who have a bachelor degree or college diploma account for 5.4%.

#### ***Natural resources:***

Thanh Hoa province has a land area of 1,112,033 hectares, of which 245,367 hectares is agricultural land suitable for food production, 553,999 hectares is forest land for aquaculture, 10,157 hectares is unused land, and 153,520 hectares of land is suitable for the development of mixed farming including food crops, forest trees and fruit trees.

#### ***Forest resources:***

Thanh Hoa has one of the largest forest areas in Vietnam: 484,246 hectare reserved for production of approximately 16.64 million m<sup>3</sup> of timber, of which annually 50,000 to 60,000 m<sup>3</sup> is taken out. Thanh Hoa's forests are mainly broad-leaf, with a diverse range of species. In the past, there were many rare precious woods but deforestation and logging has brought these to the edge of extinction. There are different types of bamboos in the forests

and people make handicrafts from neohouzeaua, bamboo, and cane. The re-planted forests in the northwest mountainous districts now consist mainly of eucalyptus, bamboos, and rubber plantations.

#### ***Marine resources:***

Thanh Hoa province has 102 kilometres of coastline and 17,000 square kilometres of territorial sea, beaches, fish, and shrimp ponds. The coastline has five large bays that offer protection for boats. This is also the centre of the province's fisheries. In the bays is alluvial sediment which covers thousands of hectares suitable for aquaculture. Sea-salt is also harvested along the coast.

#### ***Mineral resources:***

Thanh Hoa is one of the few provinces in Vietnam with abundant and varied mineral resources. The province has 296 mines from which is mined granite, marble (reserves 2 -3 billion m<sup>3</sup>), limestone for cement production (over 370 million tons), clay cement (85 tonnes), chromium (about 21 million tonnes), iron ore (two million tons), serpentine (15 million tonnes), and dolomite (4.7 million tons).

### **4.3.2. Overview of Muong ethnicity**

The Muong ethnic minority (*Dân tộc Mường*) makes up the fourth biggest population in Vietnam. With a population of 1,137,515 people, Muong rank next after the Kinh (majority), Tay (Tho), and Thai groups. Muong have a long history of independence following their own traditional customs and culture. This continued until recently when a policy of national socioeconomic integration commenced. Muong people have their own distinct unwritten language. The language is passed from generation to generation as their first language. Muong people also reside in Northern provinces but are concentrated in Hoa Binh province and the mountainous northwest districts of Thanh Hoa province.

***Livelihoods:***

Muong farmers practice permanent cultivation (*định canh định cư*) on terraces cut into the steep slopes of mountains close to major transportation routes. Wet rice has been the main food for Muong people for thousands of years.

The popular production tools of indigenous Muong are the wooden plough (*cày chìa vôi*) and the rake (*bừa đơn*) normally pulled by a buffalo or a bullock. Nowadays, when they can afford it, Muong people prefer to use hand held tractors, or “iron buffaloes”

**Figure 4.1. Wet-rice cultivation of Muong villagers**



Source: *Fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

However, in remote areas where the wet fields are steep and the terraces do not allow these “iron buffaloes” to operate, people still use draft animals.



Besides wet rice, the Muong also cultivate steep hill slopes and mountainous areas to plant cassava, corn, bean, and sesame. Most of these are stored as dried livestock feed or used to produce local alcohol. In the past, dried foods brought a significant income to Muong and other minority people but recently production has been reduced for several reasons.

Firstly, the government has recently assigned a limited area of land for households to plant trees and to protect the land. To meet their quota people often plant eucalyptus and bamboos. The eucalyptus trees grow fast and produce valuable wood. It has been estimated that eucalyptus can be harvested within nine to 12 years after planting. This shortens the turn around period farmers have to wait to be rewarded compared with local species.

**Figure 4.2. Cultivation method of Muong villagers**



Source: *Photos from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

Some households may plant thousands or tens of thousands of eucalyptus. Bamboo is a popular product and a symbol of the Muong people, especially those living in Thanh Hoa province. Bamboo is also easy to grow and can be harvested periodically in manageable quantities. Rural Vietnamese use bamboo in house construction, and in urban areas bamboo can be used in many kinds of ways for scaffolding or small products such as chopsticks. There is a chopstick export company located in Cam Thuy district, Thanh Hoa province, that uses a large amount of bamboo, most of which comes from the mountains. However, not every Muong households can take advantage of this opportunity because the land allocated may not be suitable.

**Figure 4.3 Traditional Textile Loom of the Muong**



Source: <http://thanhhoa.gov.vn/xa-hoi>

Secondly, Muong people have started to realize that dry crop cultivation on the hills and mountains is not very rewarding and young people are no longer willing to work the long

days on mountain slopes or in the forest. They prefer to do the things that rural lowland Kinh do, temporarily migrating to the cities (mainly to Ha Noi, and Ho Chi Minh City) to look for work and sending money home. More and more young ethnic minority people are moving to big cities nowadays and leaving the villages to children and old people.

Besides growing wet rice and planting forest plantations, Muong also weave textiles. In the past, Muong women wove their own fabric from which they made clothes. They also wove textiles to trade. However, this livelihood activity is now largely forgotten. The younger generation is no longer keen on sitting for hours beside a wooden loom, and home woven textiles are no longer used to make traditional dress. Also traditional dress is not so often worn these days. Young people prefer to wear jeans and modern clothes just like the Kinh. There are now few differences in dress between Muong and Kinh people.

#### **4.4. Location of Study, Muot Village**

##### **4.4.1. Geographical location**

Muot village is located in the extreme west of Cam Thanh commune in Cam Thuy district. Cam Thuy is a highland district located in the north-west of Thanh Hoa province 70 km from Thanh Hoa city. Cam Thuy has a total land area of 425.03 square kilometres. In the east is Vinh Loc District; in the north, Thach Thanh district; in the west, Ba Thuoc; and in the south, both Yen Dinh and Ngoc Lac districts.

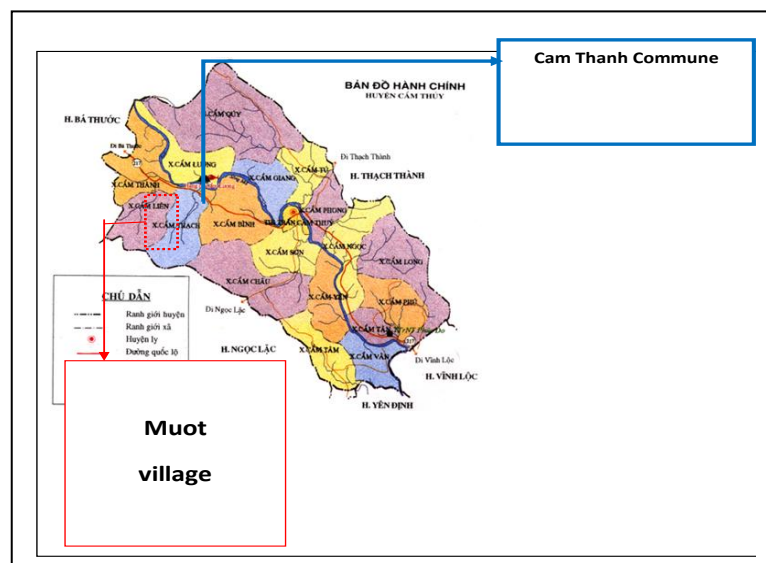
The district has 19 communes and one district town, including Cam Thanh<sup>14</sup>. There are 10 communes classified as upland and four communes, Cam Lien, Cam Luong, Cam Do, Cam

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<sup>14</sup> There are 19 communes in Cam Thuy district, and most of them are classified as upland are Cam Thach, Cam Lien, Cam Luong, Cam Binh, Cam Giang, Cam Tu, Cam Do, Cam Son, Cam Chau, Cam Phong, Ngoc Cam, Cam Long, Cam Phu, Cam Tam, Cam Yen, Cam Van, Cam Tan, Cam Phuc, and Cam Do.

Chau, acknowledged as facing special difficulties and receiving support from the government Program 135.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 4.4. Map of Cam Thuy district**



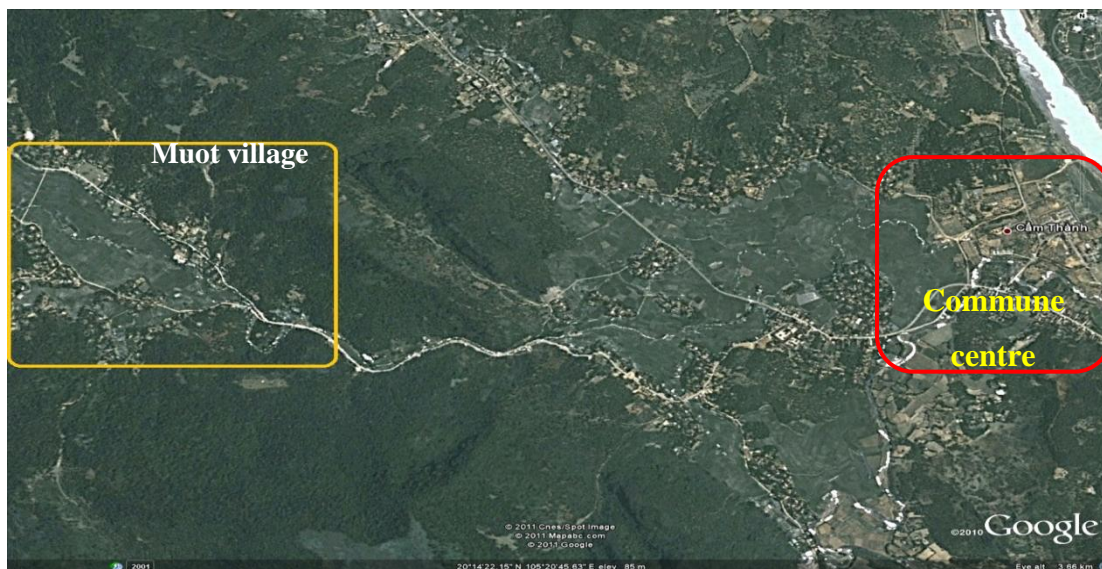
I chose Cam Thanh commune as a primary place to conduct fieldwork and collect data because more than 85% of its population is Muong and it is a typical, poor mountainous community. Muot is one of 11 villages in Cam Thanh commune.

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<sup>15</sup> Program 135 is one of the government campaigns to support the special communities. The fund mainly focuses on educational and healthcare sectors.



**Figure 4.5. Location of Muot village**



Source: *viewed from the googleearth.com, 20/06/2011*

Muot village is furthest from the centre of Cam Thanh commune. The total village land is quite large with scattered households on the slopes of the mountains.

The households closest to the commune centre are about two kilometres from the administration building, and the furthest ones are up to five kilometres away. The centre of the commune is where the schools, the People's Committee office, health centre, and trading services are located. People who live nearer the centre of course benefit more from those facilities than those who live further away. Many Muot villagers hardly go to the commune centre which they may not visit for weeks or even months on end.

#### **4.4.2. Demographic and socio-economic factors: an overview**

##### ***Culture***

Like other ethnic groups Muong has its own traditional culture and which has existed for hundreds of years. The preferred siting of houses is just below the ridge of the high steep mountains close to their gardens on which they largely depend for their food. Recently, big changes have occurred in Muong traditional customs and culture. For example, Muong

women no longer wear traditional skirts made from home woven textiles. They now prefer to wear clothes that are indistinguishable from those worn by Kinh. The format followed at weddings or funerals has also changed significantly. Muong people still speak and are proud of their own spoken language and use it in preference to Vietnamese (Kinh). Most people however, have no trouble speaking the Kinh language fluently because it is the lingua franca for education, trading, medical, and political life.

**Figure 4.6. Pole-house of Muong people**



Source: *Photo from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

### ***Housing***

Like the Muong in other parts of Vietnam, 95% of Muong families in Muot village live in pole-houses (*nhà sàn*). Pole-houses are a symbol of the Muong people and of other ethnic minorities in general.

Not all aspects of the construction are purely functional. The raised floor may allow for a cool flow of air over the hot dry season but in the winter when the temperature may fall to 2 degrees centigrade, they can be very cold.

Pole-houses are built with a number of stilts or piles which lift the house floor well off the ground. The walls and raised floor are made of split bamboo. The roof is normally made of palm leaves. The simple structure of the pole-house does not keep people warm during the cold winter. A wooden stair-case leads from the ground to the main entrance. Traditionally, inside the house is divided into three parts: a living room for the husband (the householder) to welcome guests; on one side there is a private room for the woman of the house who is not welcome to join conversations or share meals with visitors and the third room is a kitchen. In the past, Muong could get plenty of high value timber for building their houses. However, with the high rate of deforestation and illegal logging the government has introduced conservation policies, under which forestlands are assigned to each household for safe keeping to plant and protect, which includes strictures against felling. People are no longer able to cut trees for timbers to build their pole-houses.

### *Socio-economic factors*

Muong in other provinces of Vietnam have a long history of wet rice cultivation and shifting-cultivation. Their economy largely depends on the use of natural resources, domestic self-sufficiency supplemented by cash cropping and waged labour depending on the availability of natural resources.

Where possible there are two irrigated rice crops each year. Irrigated fields were divided equally between households resident in the village in the late 1970s when the regime of collective farming (*hợp tác xã*) was dissolved. At that time land was allocated according to the number of people in each household at the time. Under the government's Renovation Policy land was assigned to each resident born in the village. This has not served recent migrants well and those without the necessary birth right have been significantly disadvantaged.

In contrast, many of those who were born in the village but live far away retain their right of access to land. This is a very popular issue of discussion in Muot village. Many village born people who now live in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City retain usufruct rights over land in the village. These people normally let resident villagers use their land. There is no fixed price in such arrangements; this depends on the relationship between those who hold the land rights and those who use it.

**Figure 4.7. Planting corn in Muot village**



Source: *Fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

Muot villagers not only double crop irrigated rice, they also grow winter vegetables between September and December. The most popular vegetables are corn, peanuts, beans, sweet potatoes, and sesame.



Unlike rural peasants in lowland areas, Muong farmers, as well as other highlanders, depend totally on rainfall and streams for their agricultural water supply. They must wait for the rains and because of this can find themselves without a crop to harvest either because of too much or not enough rain. Drought and floods are common. Not only Muot villagers, but most Vietnamese farmers make significant incomes from winter crops. They also believe that it is the winter vegetable crop that keeps the soil soft and spongy. Winter crops also provide vegetable feed for breeding livestock.

Besides wet rice and rain fed cultivation, Muot villagers augment their livelihoods by raising livestock.

**Figure 4.8. Pig shed of the Muong household**



Source: *Fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

Muong people keep livestock in covered enclosures. Cows and buffalos are the principal animals but 95% of Muot families keep two to five pigs. Pigs are relatively easy to keep as farmers can feed them on home grown corn, cassava and sweet potatoes. Farmers use the pig waste as organic fertilizer which they carry to their fields. According to farmers, animal waste makes the soil soft and friable. They consider it to be better than chemical fertilizer and believe that recycling pig waste protects plants from diseases. Another reason why most farmers breed pigs is that it is a way of earning money. Each day they spend a small amount of money to feed their pigs, then when the pigs reach a weight of between 60-100 kilograms they are sold. The money earned enables farmers to purchase something they need for the family such as a TV, furniture, fixing their houses, or augmenting their savings to buy a motorbike.

Breeding poultry such as chickens and ducks is also an important activity. All Muot households would keep from ten to a hundred or more chickens. Most are bred for domestic consumption and provide a readily available source of protein. They are easily kept and left to roam around the yard and neighboring forest. Chickens mostly feed themselves on insects scratched out of the litter on the ground. This kind of chicken is rare in the cities and fetches a price that is double or three times that of battery hens. However the mortality rate is high; many are killed by snakes or lost in the forest. In Chapter Five I will analyze in detail the number of poultry and cattle in each household, calculating the financial contribution they make to household incomes.

**Figure 4.9. Muot villagers transport handicraft productions to commune centre**



Source: *Fieldwork in Muot village, 2010*.

Living as they do in the mountains and surrounded by forest, villagers supplement their income by gathering firewood and selling handicrafts. The old man in the photo (Figure 4.10) is taking two woven bamboo baskets to the commune centre to sell. The two women are taking firewood to the centre (Figure 4.10). Producing, collecting and selling such items has provided an additional income for people for years; however cutting firewood is now prohibited under forest protection laws. Chapter Five will more carefully document this activity and what it means for the people of Muot village.

#### **4.4.3. Education in Muot village**

Muot village has 156 students attending school and 26 school aged children who have already dropped out, 16% of the total cohort. This dropout rate is much higher than it is in low land and urban areas. There are many reasons why so many school aged youngsters drop out.

***Parents cannot afford it:*** The nine government officers (Công chức nhà nước) who account for 1.3% of the total population of 687 have more income with which to send their children to school. The rest of Muot villagers have to totally rely on returns from agriculture and this is not always good enough to cover their children's school expenses. Lack of money is the main reason for non attendance.

***Lack of infrastructure:*** There is one primary school (grade 1 to grade 5) and one secondary school (grade 6 to grade 9) in each commune. Both primary and secondary schools are located in the central commune where more people live and a wide range of services are available. It is a long way from Muot village to the commune centre and primary students are too young to make the long walk to school over rough steep roads. Not only primary but also secondary and high-school students have trouble making the journey. There are three high schools in Cam Thuy district and students in Muot village at this level have to travel more than 10 kilometres a day to school. Moreover most schools in mountainous

areas, are in poor condition and though the government has given a lot of attention to disadvantaged areas many problems remain.

## **4.5. Government programs and policies for ethnic minorities**

### **4.5.1. Programs and policies**

The government acknowledges the importance of ethnic minorities in national development, and has done much to improve living their standards, reduce poverty, eradicate hunger, and enhance environmental protection. This section will review some of the major programs [projects] undertaken and policies implemented by the government to support communities in remote areas.

#### ***Hunger eradication and poverty reduction***

The ADB's report (2002) reiterates the view that the Vietnamese government has been strongly pursuing a programme of poverty reduction in rural and mountainous areas over the past few decades. The main areas in which projects<sup>16</sup> have been established include:

- Improving public infrastructure including schools, health centres (at commune level).
- Subsidizing foods and livelihood skill training.
- Resettling migrants to new economic zones.
- Agricultural, forestry, and fishery extension work.
- Assistanting with health care and education.
- Job creation and production development.
- Capacity building and training for staff working to reduce poverty in poor communes.

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<sup>16</sup> The information is based on information drawn from the ADB report 2002 "Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and poverty reduction Vietnam", Manila.

### ***Support for ethnic minority communities facing unusual difficulties***

This program was started in 1994 and merged with the hunger eradication and poverty reduction programs designed especially for communities facing difficulties. The most difficult and most disadvantaged communities are located in the northwest and central highlands. There are two main activities in this program: support for agricultural production (seedlings, young animals, production tools, small irrigation projects); and other necessary forms of practical assistance. The programs have contributed greatly to easing the lives of ethnic minority groups, helping them to integrate with other groups in their areas.

### ***Development of healthcare systems, clean water and environmental hygiene***

This program started in 1996 following the decision of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai (Decision 138/TTg. 1996) to focus on improving commune infrastructure and health care facilities. The program also provided training services to medical staff at district and commune level, and provided free medicine to ethnic minority people. Work was also undertaken as part of this program to alleviate malnutrition, providing both health protection for mothers and babies, and family planning. The program also attempted to provide clean water especially in remote and disadvantaged areas.

### ***Land and forest policy***

Before and during the French colonial period, land ownership was concentrated in the hands of the rich called *Địa chủ*. Following the declaration of independence many landlords were arrested and even killed. The new policy of collective land ownership started in the early 1960s when private ownership of land was eliminated and was given to farmers to run as agricultural cooperatives owned by the state (Asian Development Bank, 2002). Because various forms of collective management failed to meet production targets the government changed the land ownership policy and assigned land to individual farmers to manage on their own. This policy resulted in changes being made in rural and mountain communities. In mountainous minority areas, the state government allocated both agricultural and forest

land to households. Large areas run by state organizations were transferred to household management.

This policy made a significant contribution to forest protection; however it also had a negative effect on livelihoods. This will be discussed in later sections.

### ***Development of education***

In the early 1990s, the state government started paying more attention to education for all, especially those in remote areas. In 1991, there were two major education programs devoted to ethnic minorities. Under Directive 1450/GD-DT a “program of consolidation and development of education [for people] in mountainous, remote, and difficult areas” was set up. This program encouraged university graduates to work for a time in remote and mountainous areas and has become obligatory in some areas such as Thanh Hoa province. Kinh graduate students from the city or lowlands are sent to remote areas to teach for three years on a higher than normal salary. After three years, they are allowed to return to a school on the lowlands closer to their homes. This rule is applied to all teaching staff. This program also provides better infrastructure and fee-free education. However, the quality of schooling available to minority students is far from standardized and is only available to those settled in places of fixed residence.

In their evaluation of the effectiveness of government programs for ethnic minorities the ADB report (2002) asserted that intervention has dramatically changed the social structure and the traditional cultures of ethnic minority communities (p.19). In February of 2001, several thousand ethnic minorities in the central highlands region of Vietnam took to the streets in provincial cities to demonstrate against the government<sup>17</sup> demanding that landownership and religious matters be reconsidered. Although many scholars admit that

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<sup>17</sup> This demonstration was reported by Reuters, in a text headed Vietnam Closes Off Strife-torn Highlands as it sends in the Army, 8 February 2001. The information used in this report was obtained from research commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (June, 2006).

programs of intervention and support have gradually improved the living standards and welfare of minority groups, the social gap between people living in mountainous areas and on the lowlands has increased (ADB Report, 2002). Those who benefit most are mainly the people living in or near commune centres, government staff, and Kinh who live in mountainous areas (Baulch et al., 2007). Rambo et al (2003) mount a strong argument that the position of minorities in the uplands is deteriorating because of the impact of resettlement, migration and land-reform policies. However, from another viewpoint, the Office of Fixed Settlement and Cultivation (FSC) in Kon Tum reported in 2000 that relocation to fixed settlements and cultivation had contributed to limiting deforestation, and the living standard of ethnic minorities had dramatically improved. According to this Office the resettlement policy presented an opportunity to utilise local natural resources in a more effective way and introduce ethnic minorities to new scientific methods of production. The more radical aspects of the policy divides extended households into nuclear units and helps them set up home gardens.

The Office of FSC may not be wrong or exaggerating their success. However, evidence for a bias in intervention programs which results in the greater benefit going to Kinh is difficult to refute. This is part of the reason why the socioeconomic gap between majority and minority groups is growing.

#### **4.5.2. Shortcomings of programs and policies for ethnic minorities**

Recent studies of the general situation and changes taking place in the upland ethnic minority areas show that state programs and policies have achieved some gains but at the same time still face many problems (Rambo & Jamieson, 2003; Walle & Gunewardena, 2001). This section will discuss the shortcomings of government development programs based on a literature study which relies a great deal on the ADB reports of 2002 and 2005. These reports document a case that shows that the Vietnamese government development programs have been implemented with insufficient resources, incorrect guidelines, poor management, and lack of long-term monitoring.

***Programs lack poor people's participation:*** Most of the programs and projects use a top-down approach through which money is assigned to projects with set goals and objectives. There has been neither participatory learning nor action research carried out to see what poor people really need. The top-down approach may distort the real needs of the people because of information that fails to take into account what may be acceptable to local people. The highest decision makers do not necessarily understand what people want and what will work for them. Unless they are asked, local authorities will not necessarily disclose their concerns. Most programs and projects have been implemented according to what the highest level of management assumes to be the case and information is usually provided by middle, low level managers, not by what local villagers say. The poor people know their situation best, and project implementers should listen to them. Doing development work in poor rural minority communities is not simply an opportunity to come as a life saver whose presence alone is enough to bring about a positive transformation. The project managers need to learn and be humble. For example, government officers carried out many projects to provide clean water to communities in the mountains. They did this without first finding out what Muong people do to get water using traditional methods which they had been using for a thousand years or more. In Muot village, I found that Muot households did not want to pay to use the government's clean water supply because although installation was free, they did not have enough money to do so. They also believed that the quality of the water they already sourced from the top of the mountains where no livestock could reach was clean and good enough to drink. It was difficult to disagree with them. This water supply is reliable year round, warm in winter and cool in summer. To secure this natural supply all Muot villagers needed to do was buy a length of plastic pipe that would last a lifetime. From this simple case study, we can see the sense of getting researchers and project managers to engage local people in the planning process and learn from them rather than arbitrarily imposing outside ideas. What outsiders think people need may not in



fact be needed at all and can result in a great waste of money and time while what they really need is ignored.

***Vietnamese language is always used as the medium of communication:*** Another barrier to the successful implementation of projects is language. Most of the projects use Vietnamese (Kinh language) as the lingua franca mainly because those engaged in implementation are Kinh. Spoken Vietnamese for the Muong ethnic minority is not a problem; all Muong can speak Kinh fluently but literacy is a challenge. Some 5.7% of Muot residents cannot read. The Muong dialect has no written characters. Many other minority groups in extremely remote areas have even higher rates of illiteracy, and many groups do not even speak Vietnamese fluently. In such cases the flow of information is distorted and work is not done properly. Figuratively speaking most programs give recipients fish rather than teaching them how to fish. In the absence of a participatory method the assistance is determined according to the assumptions of outsiders and does not address the practical concerns of the minority recipients. Projects focus on the construction of buildings, roads and the like and pay little attention to capacity building, human resource development and so forth. For example, they know it is important to let locals borrow money, but it is more important to train them how to use the loan effectively. Giving loans without back-up training in management skills encourages people into high risk ventures where they are likely to fail and lose their investment. If they build up a large debt they lose out altogether. Immediate relevance may be more important in some cases. In Muot village, national support programs have invested money in building schools and new roads to commune centres. This has greatly enhanced the connection of Muong communities to Thanh Hoa provincial cities, Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City. However, Muot villagers have not benefitted much from this development. New roads, new schools, and new medical healthcare centres are, of course, good for these remote communities but unless the people really value these changes and know how to use them to their advantages, what use are they? Training is always important, especially for women who are more likely to miss out on schooling. In the context where unfortunately

much indigenous knowledge is no longer relevant to modern life, ethnic minorities need to be given opportunities to learn about new technologies. Local people, again especially women, should be positively encouraged to engage with researchers and project managers to share their knowledge and gain access to training for skills required in the new world. Building human resources can be more beneficial and important than putting money into eye-catching construction.

***Funds used inappropriately:*** Another serious problem that occurs in the course of implementation is inappropriate use of funds. There are different ways of using funding and many ways of wasting money. In the top-down approach, a budget is allocated, assigned with targets and a time-frame. To reach its intended purpose money often has to pass through many layers of management. For numerous reasons along the way too much of this money is used for purposes other than those intended. By the time the fund reaches local villagers, its purpose may have changed. For example, the government often releases funds to support poor households. The head of the village decides who should get it then hands the names of the deserving households on to higher commune level management. However, it is not unusual for the names of the really poor not to be included and in their place to appear the names of friends or relatives of the village head. This would not happen if the process was managed in a more participatory and open method where local people played the greater part.

***Low sense of responsibility on the part of project implementers:*** Project implementers are under pressure to see that the project's goals are achieved as soon as possible. This pressure discourages project staff from doing more than absolutely necessary to meet their full responsibilities. They try to finish the job and get the report away very quickly. In fact, any well run project needs to be flexible in both time and funds to see that any substantial gains are made. If project staff want to get real information from the poor, they need to spend time with them and learn from them. Getting a general overview of the commune or village background may not provide a real picture of the situation. It is true that working

closely with the poorest people in the community is always time consuming but in the end it is more likely to be successful.

***Minority people themselves often present a passive face to outsiders, especially government officials:*** Minority people initially lack confidence and are reluctant to engage in open discussion with outsiders. However, given the opportunity, this can be turned around and once they have acquired the confidence they are happy to speak. This is easier said than done and there are many reasons for this. Basically Muong and other minority people share the belief that no matter what they say, it will not make sense to those in management positions. They feel their voice cannot be heard. Another reason to keep quiet is that they think speaking up places them at risk of being seen as critical of the state and Party which may result in trouble.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

A substantial amount of academic work on ethnic minorities has been done in Vietnam; however, most of the research focuses on specific groups in isolation from one other and the state. Moreover, both government and non-government organizations and activists give most of their attention to poverty reduction and environmental degradation, rather than the challenge of securing good livelihoods. In the following case study of Muot village I will focus on livelihoods and education. This chapter has provided a preliminary description. In the next chapter I go on to a more detailed analysis.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **LIVELIHOODS IN MUOT VILLAGE**

#### **5.0. Introduction and objectives**

This chapter presents data on the livelihood status of Muong people in Muot village where I conducted fieldwork over a six month period from June to November 2010. As discussed in Chapter Three the primary methods of data collection in Muot village were drawn from a range of tools. I lived in Muot village to observe and learn from them, share experiences, and evaluate issues in a manner consistent with their preferences. Limited time, local sensitivities to public meetings and budget did not allow me to use Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR) tools as fully as anticipated in the initial research plan. As a result, a combination of methods was used instead, including village transect walks, informal conversations, daily notes, observation, focus group interviews, and group discussions. I also conducted formal surveys and participated in the government official household poverty survey.

In this chapter I will describe the practical methods of production used by Muot households to secure a livelihood, including resource use, strategies, and outcomes, and outline the main problems faced by Muot villagers. In group discussions villagers were asked to discuss their views on education and the role it might play in their children's future. Fieldwork was designed to document how the sustainable livelihoods framework works for Muot villagers. I also wanted to learn what the practical applications of this might be on the development process.

This chapter is divided into three main parts: The first section provides an evaluation and overview of the principal livelihood factors including resources, strategies, and outcomes. Several case study interviews were conducted with those who had worked in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City to earn money. These people were very articulate and had a full understanding of the challenges involved. From June to November, 2010, I joined the Household Poverty Survey team with the understanding that they would share their data

with me. The results gave me invaluable information on Muot household incomes. The second section of this chapter describes and discusses the main challenges facing the people of Muot village. The focus is on the three problems of poverty, unemployment, and loss of cultural heritage. The third section reflects on the attitude of Muong villagers toward the education of their children. I argue that this is the single most important factor in development and will determine the progress the Muong make in entering the wider life and economy of the nation. In Vietnam, parents play an important role in children's schooling no matter what level of education their children undertake and interviews were used to document this. There is a focus on the attitudes of the parents and the influence this has on their children's performance. I establish what villagers think of education, including both vocational training skills and academic knowledge. Information was collected on both their education and that of their children. This chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter's findings.

### **5.1. Livelihood resources of Muot households: The vulnerability context**

Devereux (2001) argues that the vulnerability context is the external environment which people must cope with to exist or thrive, and their vulnerability is directly related to their assets. The vulnerability context consists of trends in demography, resources, and governance. It also includes shocks and seasonality. Shocks refer to unexpected occurrences such as natural hazards as well as economic or social disturbances. Seasonality refers to the seasonal changes of products and employment opportunities. This chapter discusses this vulnerability context in Muot village based on the experience of six months of fieldwork exercises. Livelihoods assets vary greatly between different socioeconomic contexts in which people earn their livings. In any development debate, livelihood resources are primary concerns. These resources are created, changed, developed or become exhausted depending on the government's policies and the people who use the resources. The six months of fieldwork in Muot village using participant observation, participatory action research methods, making field observations, focus group interviews and several household surveys resulted in a reliable overview of the livelihood status of the people.

### **5.1.1. Natural capital of Muong households**

Natural capital refers to any natural resources including soil, land, and water from which resource flows and services useful for livelihoods are derived. In this case study, the natural capital of the Muong was identified as mainly land based resources such as cultivatable land, forestland, and home plots.

#### ***Land ownership and use-rights***

Socialist property rights over land can usefully be described as a hierarchy of overlapping rights (Sikor, 2006). Post-socialist land reforms put in place a set of rights which include the right to enjoy the fruits of production within certain limits, modify the land, and to transfer rights to the land. A land holding consists of estates of production and estates of administration (Ibid, p.681). An estate of production includes the right to enjoy particular fruits of the land, but this goes beyond simple usufruct by allowing estate holders to transfer these rights to others. Each level of administration has a different level of authority. Land held under a socialist political system includes which are imposed by the central government on the local villagers.

Muong share the same land use rights as other ethnic groups in Vietnam. In order to legally use the land, each household is issued a land-use-right certificate (*Chứng nhận quyền sử dụng đất*) in which the ways in which the land can be used are clearly specified. Basically there are two forms of land-use: land for residence (*Đất thổ cư*) and land for cultivation (*Đất canh tác*). Like other mountainous minorities, Muong households are allocated large areas of forestland. Pursuant to land reform in the late 1970s and the later campaign of afforestation, each household in remote mountainous areas is obliged to plant and protect forest land. The households “own” land and forestland. Such land ownership typically refers to usufruct rights over a home plot on which they may construct a permanent house or sell the land to others. The rights over land for cultivation or forestland are for production purposes and then only for a limited period of time. That cannot be bought or sold.

### *Home-garden plots*

Muot village has 198 households spread along two sides of forested mountains in Cam Thanh commune. Like other Muong villages in highland areas, Muot has a long history of occupation. According to elderly villagers, the Muong have been living in harmony with nature and relying on natural resources for their daily incomes and domestic consumption for hundreds of years. Natural resources in forested mountainous areas are various and rich. The total land area of Muot village is estimated at between 30 and 35 square kilometres: 85% of which is mountainous.

When I went to the village in early June, 2010, I noticed that almost all Muot households had large home plots, most of which were left fallow. Although the land is suitable for growing vegetables and fruit, most of the plots were covered with wild grass and bushes. This was the first difference I noted between Muong and the Kinh lowlanders: Kinh invariably cultivate all available land.

On that first day I visited the village, I was invited for lunch by Mr Cao The Hanh, the Party secretary of Muot village. He also invited some “officers” to the meal. I call them officers but in fact they were people responsible for village security, the treasurer, the village patriarch and the head of the village. All of these people work under the village secretary who is the head of the Communist Party in the village. In answer to my question “Why do you and other householders leave the home gardens fallow?” Mr Secretary said “We have plenty of vegetables up in the forest-mountain “*đồi*”, that we can use and is never exhausted”. When I asked “Why don’t you use home plots to plant vegetables for trading?” he replied, “Villagers here do not have a routine of trading vegetables from home garden because they only collected forest products for sale”. I continued the conversation with a further question, “Have Muot villagers heard about and are they encouraged to join the government VAC project<sup>18</sup>?” The secretary said, “Yes, we have heard about it and have

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<sup>18</sup> VAC stands for *Vườn-Ao-Chuồng* project (Garden-Pond-Cage) promoted by central government after the land reform was carried in the early 1990s to encourage rural livelihoods diversity.

been encouraged to apply that livelihood model to our case. However it did not work because we did not have enough financial investment and technical know-how”. Indeed, rural development studies have indicated that home garden plots can play many roles. A study by Mitchell and Hanstad (2004) indicated that home gardens can provide a number of benefits to families, ranging from improved nutrition to providing a source of additional household income, and even enhancing the status of women in the household. Potential environmental benefits of home gardens may be important not only for the households themselves, but for the broader society as well.

**Figure 5.1. Temporary/insolid house of the Muong in Muot village**



Source: *Photo of fieldwork in Muong communit, 2010.*



Muot households have an average of between 1500 to 3000 square metres available for a home garden. It is difficult to grow vegetables as most gardens are steep and the water supply is limited.

In response to my many question concerning the unused home gardens, the Party Secretary advised me to meet Mr Cao Van Hang, who is considered to be the village patriarch and is very knowledgeable about Muong culture and customs. The next day I visited his house and had a talk with him. As I expected he was very hospitable and gave me a warm welcome. He told me that the village needed more scientific researchers to figure out the problems and seek possible solutions.

In Box 5.1 is part of an informal conversation I had with Mr Cao Van Hang in Muot village.

**Box 5.1 The views of a Muot village patriarch**

I have been living here for 75 years and I have not seen any households cultivating their home gardens for food or trade. Our people normally depend on forests. We have large forest areas and we can get daily vegetables from the forest. I do not think people here could use their home plot to plant vegetables or fruit for their own consumption or trade because most gardens are not flat and it is too difficult to water. Moreover, women in our village are too busy all year round working in the forest. I do not think they have time to work on their gardens. Another reason is that home plots are not as fertile as the forests. If we cultivated our home plots we would have to invest a lot of money in fertilizers. As well as this, Muong women are generally not very good at trading. Therefore if they can get enough vegetables for daily consumption, that is enough. They'd rather collect firewood from the forest for sale than cultivate their home garden and wait a long time for harvests. Our people used to get training for the VAC projects; however we did not have enough money to invest in it nor the skills to apply it successfully.

*Mr Bui Van H, 75 years old, retired, is one of the oldest people in Muot village and used to work in the Cultural Department of Cam Thuy district.*

According to this Muot villager, there may be enough wild vegetables and fruit to collect in the forests; however cultivating home gardens would enable villagers to be more proactive rather than relying on what they can find and gather in the forests.

Muot households do not construct fences or hedges around their home plots as rural lowland householders do and it would be very difficult to keep domestic chickens, ducks, and pigs out of their gardens. Chickens roost in the trees at night time. Muong people find it easier to let their chickens run free and find their own food rather than provide all their feed. Poultry are raised for domestic consumption, not for sale. This domestic economy is one of self sufficiency. Mitchell and Hanstad (2004) argue that the livelihood benefits of a home garden could go well beyond those related to nutrition and subsistence because “the sale of products produced on home gardens significantly improves the family’s financial status” but this strategy is not favoured by Muot villagers.

There are many ways in which Muong livelihoods could be enhanced. Self sufficiency may not be the best strategy when the national economy is growing fast and there are many opportunities to make money, especially when Muot households complain that they are always short of financial resources. Home gardens could contribute to household income in several ways. The household might sell home plot produce such as fruit, vegetables, poultry, ducks and pork (Marsh, 1998). Any increase in cash income from the home garden might be used to enhance their diet by enabling them to purchase additional food for household consumption.

**Table 5.1. Average land-use of home plots in Muot village**

Average land of home garden plot per household	1520 m <sup>2</sup>
Average land of garden used for vegetables and fruit	150 m <sup>2</sup> = 9.8%
Average land of garden used for livestock (cages, ponds)	95 m <sup>2</sup> = 6.2%

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

A study in Cambodia by Vasey (1985) showed that 65% of income derived from the sale of poultry raised on home gardens was used to buy other foods, while other proceeds were used to invest in farm production, education, saving and other purposes. Thus, home gardens could provide households with more livelihood options by which they can set up livelihood strategy and achieve their livelihood objectives. Each household could decide for itself what combination of trade or consumption of home garden product would best fit its livelihood strategy (Mitchell & Hanstad, 2004).

Another benefit of home gardens is to strengthen the role of women. This does not mean that home gardening should be a primarily female activity. The role of women in home gardening may be socially determined as women decide what to plant, when to harvest, how to exploit home garden resources, and to make decisions for the sale of produce (Finerman & Sackett, 2003). Such practices would significantly extend the role of Muong women who at the moment play a limited role in the economy due to the nature of their traditional culture. Muong women in Muot village often perform the same tasks as men such as harvesting bamboo, cultivating the forestland (*làm đòì*), requiring the same strength and energy but not directing or managing this work. If Muot women could be encouraged to take care of home gardens instead of contributing to forest work this would make better use of their labour, resulting in higher productivity and enabling them to play a stronger role in family life.

My survey of 153 householders in Muot village in which they were asked about the natural resource endowment; revealed that 56.8% agree they have good natural resources, 16% raised this to very good and only 2.6% consider their endowment to be poor.

**Table 5.2. Muot households evaluation of their natural resources**

Status of natural resources	Number of Responses	Percentage
Poor	4	2.6
Standard	37	24.0
Good	87	56.5
Very good	25	16.2
Total	153	99.4
Invalid data	1	0.6
Total household	154	100.0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

This evaluation was based on three criteria: availability, access to the source, and potential for income generation. I noted that most Muot villagers conceptualize natural resources as including forest, forestland, home garden plot, and modified wetlands (for rice and crop cultivation). When I asked villagers if water and fresh air were natural resources, they all said no because they think air and water are available everywhere and have no special bearing on income generation.

### ***Water for drinking***

The findings on Muot households' water sources are included in this discussion because they are an important part of local life. Due to its isolation, Muot village like other remote rural villages in mountainous areas has no government provided water supply. However, 153 householders, who were asked if the drinking water source they use is safe, affirmed that they were confident the water they drank was clean.

**Figure 5.2. Source of drinking water of the Muong in Muot village**



Source: *Photo of the fieldwork in Muong community, 2010.*

There are two kinds of water sources: drinking water and water for agricultural cultivation. The drinking water of Muot households is sourced from the higher slopes. Some Muot villagers build shared holding tanks to provide water for clusters of households. Each household has to engineer and pay for its connection.

I questioned whether water originating from the higher elevations would contain a variety of bacteria because of dead leaves, plants, and animal waste. However, again Muot villagers reported that their livestock did not graze close to the spring and the water was carried safely past any contamination in suspended split bamboo conduits. My survey of drinking water shows Muot households are happy with the drinking water. Of the 153

households in the survey, two thirds use water from mountain springs. The rest use water from wells dug on their home plots. However, not every household can dig such a well. Only those who live in lower lying areas where the water table is high are able to do so. It is largely for this reason that households come together in clusters where water is available.

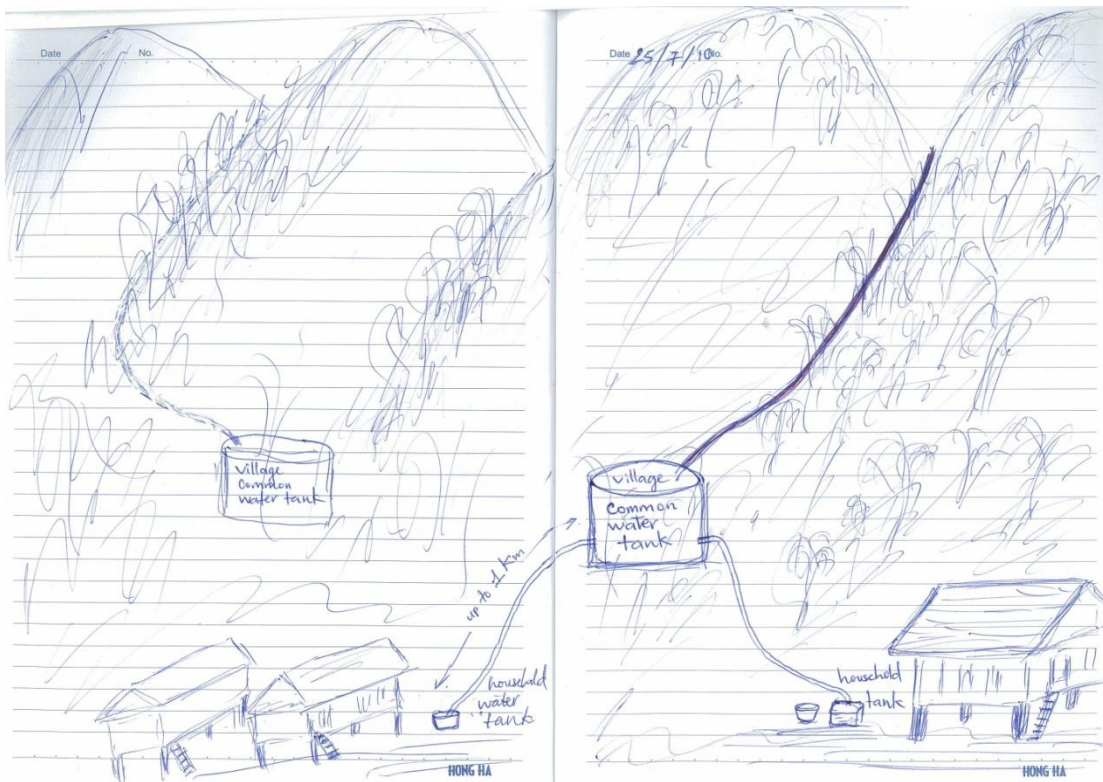
**Table 5.3. Sanitation of Muong’s drinking water**

Evaluation of Muot villager of their drinking water		
Water Sanitation	Number of response	Percentage
Clean drinking water	153	99.4%
Unclean drinking water	1	0.6%
Total	154	100%

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

Muong households are happy with how their drinking water is sourced. They have had access to spring water for as long as they can remember and have had no problem with water borne diseases. The Muong may have little of knowledge of the “clean and safe water” standard set up by Ministry of Healthcare but they clearly understand the concept of what is safe or not.

**Figure 5.3. Common water tank of Muong households in Muot village**



Source: Sketch by author drawn in the course of fieldwork, 2010.

### ***Water for agricultural production***

Unlike rural lowland farmers, Muot villagers have no irrigation supply and rely on seasonal rain for cultivation. However, Muong farmers have a long history of rain fed cultivation and growing vegetables on upland areas. As shown in Figure 5.3 Muot villagers' use of their natural resources is good. The forest is their main natural asset. Most (56.9%) reported the status of these resources as being "good", 16.3% "very good", 24.4% standard, 2.4% "poor", and no one evaluated their natural assets as "very poor".

It is important to categorize the different natural resources when conducting research in different geographical locations. For example, in coastal areas the main natural resource is marine production and in mountainous highlands the natural resource is forest production.

In the highland areas Muong consider the forest to be their principal resource and their major assets.

In the past, management of land and forestland was regulated by a system based on highly effective customary laws. There were cultural traditions and customs that were highly respected and reinforced by strong beliefs relating to spiritual beings that inhabited the forest and had absolute control over the forest. However, since the early 1960s, the government has asserted a different structure of ownership and land use more in keeping with normal socialist principles. Land and forests have been managed by state agencies, state owned collective farms or agricultural cooperatives. Under these reforms both agricultural land and sections of forest have been either allotted or transferred to individuals or groups of households. Now many indigenous communities in mountainous areas find themselves having to make do with less; their access to farm land has been reduced and use of the forest has been subject to restrictions. Under forestland ownership reforms, households have been assigned certain areas of forest to plant and protect, but are not allowed to harvest the fruit of their labour.

**Box 5.2. Views of a Muong villager regarding forest use**

Five years ago I got married. My parents gave us a piece of land split from my parent's home plot to build a house so that my wife and I could live independently from our parents. As my parents and I did not have enough money to buy bricks, cement, lime-mortar, and other materials for building a permanent house, I decided to build a temporary stilt-house. We had a lot of bamboo in our forests and I just needed some trees for stilts. One night some of my neighbours and I went to the forest to cut down a few trees for stilts. Unfortunately, the forest management officers caught us and I was fined 6.5 million VND. I insisted that those trees were from our family's forest and I just needed them to make a stilt-house, not to trade. Finally, my parents had to sell a buffalo and two pigs to get the money to pay the fine. Now I have my own house but it is built of bamboo and some eucalyptus.

Source: *Mr. Truong Cong T.a Muot villager*



Box 5.2 records the story I was told by Mr Bui Khac D, one of Muot villagers, about this matter. The story documents the difficult situation faced by indigenous people who live within protected forest areas who are often accused of destroying forests. Indeed, Muong are more likely to live in harmony with their forests while deforestation is usually caused by people from urban and lowland areas.

Illegal harvesting only becomes known when things go wrong, as in the truly sad story published under the headline called “Government forest management officers kill 10 timber porters”. This event took place on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, 2011, in Tuong Duong district, a neighboring mountainous area in Nghe An province where most Muong and Thai live.

**Figure 5.4. Accident of illegal loggers**



Source: <http://vnexpress.net/gl/phap-luat/2011/12/hat-truong-kiem-lam-bi-bat-vi-buon-lau-go/>, viewed on 25/12/2011.

In this accident 10 people were killed. An investigation found that Mr Trinh Thanh L, Vice-Director of the Forest Management Agency of National Forest Pù Huống (in Nghe An

province) was illegally engaged in transporting a truck fully loaded with timber from a mountainous commune to Quy Hop town. In order to avoid the police, he hired 10 local villagers to load the timber in the night of 5/12/2011. As soon as the truck was fully loaded, he assigned a member of his staff; Dao Cong T, to escort the truck to Quy Hop town. Ten timber porters were sitting on the top of the timber. When the truck was a third of the way to its destination, owing to poor driving, it suddenly turned upside down. The ten workers sitting on the top of the truck fell and were crushed by the heavy timber. They were all killed in the accident.

Forestry staff accompanying the truck did not die because they were sitting in the cabin when the truck capsized. As a consequence several forestry management officers were fired. However we need to note that but for the accident, the misconduct of this particularly powerful forest management officer would not have been revealed.

It is not possible to produce a reliable number, but it is possible that hundreds, if not thousands of trucks illegally carry timber out of the forests for Forest Management (FM) officers. Yet it is the FM force that prohibits local indigenous people from logging. Their job is to encourage indigenous minority people to plant and protect forests; however it is difficult to avoid coming to the conclusion that dishonest staff are the main perpetrators of deforestation.

It is grossly unfair to accuse indigenous people as the sole destroyers of the forest because they practice swiddening cultivation. The charge is not new and over the years this issue has come up and been refuted again and again (Gilmour, Bonell, & Cassells, 1987).

The fact is that indigenous Muong have been living with forests for thousands of years and forests have provided them with resources for their daily needs but government reforms have interrupted this stewardship. Nowadays Muong people still rely on forests to secure a livelihood even though this is now prohibited by central government.

The decline in the moral and ethical behaviour of forestry officers is a matter of deep concern. The new regulations relating to forest protection appear to bring more benefit to forest management officers than to the forest or the health of the watershed.

**Figure 5.5. Muong villagers carry firewood to trade in the commune**



Source: *Photo from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

The restriction on forest use has put considerable pressure on Muot villagers to seek seasonal off-farm employment in urban areas. Now, like many rural lowland peasants, men are likely to leave their homes temporarily and migrate to the cities to earn extra money while crops are growing and then return home to help their families with the harvest. The venture is much more difficult for highlanders. Men usually go unaccompanied and leave the women to tend the crops and seek extra income by illegally collecting forest products. During this time, Muong women spend long days in the forest collecting firewood for sale

in district towns or commune centres where people have limited access to the forest areas and earn a living from commercial trading or government salaries.

Muong cultivate two wet rice crops during the rainy season and over the dry cool season plant a winter crop (*vụ đông*). After sowing either the wet rice or the winter crop, peasants have two to three months available to do other work. During these periods they turn to the forest to augment their income by gathering herbs and firewood, hunting, collecting honey, and taking care of their bamboo or eucalyptus stands. However these simple activities; apart from taking care of their plants and trees in the forest are banned by the government's current forest protection policy.

**Box. 5.3 Views of a Muot villager regarding firewood collection**

Now I don't have to go to the rice field because I have spread fertilizer; I just wait to harvest in a few months. Every day I spend my time in the forest gathering firewood. I have a lot of things to spend money on. I have three children attending school. Every month I spend an average of about one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand for weddings, funerals, and birth "gift-money". Before this day the gift-money for a wedding was just twenty thousand; now it is a minimum of fifty thousand [2.5 USD].

We have no extra income except from selling firewood. In the morning I go to the forest and gather wood. It is normally taken from dead trees so that we do not have to dry it and it can be used straight away. Each load of firewood like this, if I am lucky to get a regular or friendly customer, can be sold for seventeen thousand, otherwise it is about fourteen or fifteen thousand [0.7 USD]. In the past we could collect firewood as much as we were able, but now it is prohibited. Last month, a friend of mine was carrying firewood to sell in town and she was arrested. She was fined and her bicycle taken away for a few weeks. If I am unlucky I could be arrested at any time. We know it is illegal to collect and sell firewood but we have no choice. It is only way we can earn some money to support our family. When I am in the forest we are not scared of officers because it's hard for them to find us. We just worry when we carry the wood down to the town to sell. That is why everybody carries firewood to the town at sunset.

Source: *Mrs Bui Thi D, a Muot villager.*

People are aware of the nature of this. One day when I was doing a village transect walk, I met a group of women carrying firewood to sell to people in the district town. I politely stopped them for a while to conduct a conversation and take some photos. The women were startled when I produced a camera and tried to run away from me. They were frightened because they thought I was a forest management officer there to check on them. I quickly explained that I had come to the village as their friend not a forest police officer, and I would like to help them. In response they started to tell me their stories. Box 5.3 is the story told by Mrs Bui Thi D whose household is one of the poorest in Muot village. I asked her how long it took her to gather a load of firewood and how much she could sell it for.

There has been an endless controversy around the forest protection policy which has greatly affected the daily livelihood of indigenous minorities. The state government blames highlanders who gather firewood and logs, and engage in swidden cultivation. Highlanders are seen as the major cause of deforestation over the past seven to eight decades. A report by the Department of Forest Conservation has reported that in 1943 the forest cover was 57%; by 1979 it was 39% and in 1990, 26%. In some provinces including Thanh Hoa, the forest cover is now only 8 or 9%.

During my survey, I discovered that Muong engage with their forest assets in a more positive way, planting bamboo and creating products from bamboo. The elderly man in the photo earlier (Fig. 4.9, p.115) is bringing his bamboo baskets to the commune centre to trade. Each bamboo basket is sold for five to seven thousand VND (0.3 USD). The elderly man said it takes him about three hours to prepare bamboo-materials and weave one basket.

Hunting game and collecting forest products continue to be important in providing the indigenous minorities with livelihood opportunities. Although this activity was prohibited by law during my six months in the field, I was offered many chances to go hunting. From my observations, the number of animals that can now be found in the forests is greatly diminished. According to Muot villagers, there used to be monkey, tiger, deer, and many types of birds but over the past few decades hunting for trade and medical purposes has

driven these species to virtual extinction. Now the most hunted animal are foxes, birds, snakes, and porcupines.

Besides firewood collection, Muong also benefit by collecting other forest products such as bamboo and rattan shoots, honey and herbal plants. These activities are also covered by regulations:

- Bamboo shoots: Only authorized persons can take bamboo shoots in any quantity. This restricts commercial collection on any scale to those who have their own bamboo fields.
- Herbal plants are also restricted in quantity and to certain kinds of herbs. However, this is difficult to police because locals have many different ways of collecting and trading herbs.
- Most households restrict themselves to firewood and bamboo handicrafts. In Muong communities, close to tourist areas such as Cam Luong Commune, herbal plant trading is popular as locals can sell to tourists.

The above analysis of natural capital of the Muong households in Muot village reveals the importance of a continuing store of the natural resources. These natural resources include forest land, wetland for food crops, and home plot gardens. The forest plays a particularly important role in Muong livelihoods because of the diverse range of resources it supplies.

#### **5.1.2. Human capital of the Muong in Muot village**

Human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, ability to work and maintain good health, and the physical capability so important to carrying out the successful pursuit of different strategies (Scoones, 1998). Human capital plays an important role in economic growth and poverty reduction. From a microeconomic perspective, the accumulation of human capital “improves labour productivity; facilitates technological innovation; increases return to capital; and makes growth more sustainable, which, in turn, supports poverty reduction” (Son, 2010, p.2). Human capital may be considered as the “ability and efficiency of people



to transform raw materials and capital into goods and services” (Leroy, 2011, p.4). Therefore human capital development is important for sustainable economic development.

Although the conceptual definition of human capital is clear, it is hard to measure individual skills and knowledge, as different capabilities and talents are required for different contexts. Son (2010) suggests that there are some universal ways to measure human capital such as literacy rates (Azariadis & Drazen, 1990), school enrollment rates (Mankiw et al., 1992), years of schooling (Barro & Lee, 1996, 2001, and 2010, Cohen & Soto, 2007), and test scores (Hanushek & Kimko, 2000).

In this study, two separate exercises were conducted to measure the human capital of Muong in Muot village. In the first exercise I let the villagers evaluate themselves in my survey form. In this activity, I explained carefully to the villagers the criteria of human capital before they started to choose which group they would put themselves in: very poor, poor, standard, good, and very good. As agreed with participants, there were no fixed criteria for the standard evaluation. We all agreed to divide it into five groups. “Very good” means very skilled labour, a person who earns more than five million VND per month regardless of where they live. “Good” means people know how to earn an income of more than two million VND per month. This level of income is equal to that of a government officer working at commune level such as a commune officer or school teacher. “Average” means they know how to make enough to support their family. This level is not based on how much a person can earn per month but depends on how secure their life is. For example, a life is secure when a person is not in debt especially with unpayable debt. “Poor and very poor” refer to people who cannot make enough to secure a living and are generally in debt. Besides income, my criteria included “capability” and “attitude”. Capability in this context refers to work skills and the ability to cope with vulnerability. For example, a person who has a standard level of human capital should know how to earn enough money to support themselves and handle unexpected problems.

The second exercise I conducted was designed to compare the educational level attained by heads of households and the total income of the household. This exercise was more

objective and based on reliable facts. The educational level achieved by householders and their average income was recorded in my household survey profile. The data was entered into a database and I used the SPSS program to compare the sets and establish a formal measurement of most households in Muot village.

The results of the survey of my first exercise showed that 63.4% considered themselves to have average labour skills, 6.5% considered themselves as good, 28.8% poor, 1.3% as very poor. No one considered themselves to be very good (Figure 5.4). Despite the results, it is important to note that the concept of “adequate” labour in a villagers mind may be quite different from what is set up by the state government or an international organization. The way most villagers perceive a standard set of skills and knowledge required to perform basic agricultural and forestry tasks might be very different.

**Table 5.4. Human Capital of Muong households**

	Frequency	Percentage
very poor	2	1.3
poor	44	28.6
standard	97	63.0
good	10	6.5
Total	154	100.0

Source: *Fieldwork data, Muong, 2010.*

Education has long been considered a key factor in economic growth because workers need education to utilize new technologies, analyze the trend of market development, and equip them with knowledge necessary for livelihoods. In Table 5.5 I present my analysis of the



relationship between the education level attained by the household head and the households total income.

**Table 5.5. Relationship between level of education of household head and total income**

Level of education of Muot Household head	Household income in Muot village in 2010 (Unit: in million VND per family per month)							Total
	0-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	
No schooling at all; illiterate	2	11	3	1	0	0	0	17
Finished primary school	1	26	4	3	1	1	0	36
Finished secondary school	5	32	30	4	1	1	0	73
Finished high school	2	8	7	5	2	0	0	24
Has earned a college degree or certificate	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
Total (N=153)	10	77	44	14	4	3	1	153

Source: *Fieldwork data of the Muong, 2010.*

The income each of the 153 Muong households was varied and uneven. In order to use a program to compare the interrelationship between income and educational qualification I

had to divide the income into seven groups. The lowest income in the database was 1,286,000 VND and the highest 6,893,500 VND. This was the total income of the household per month counted in million VND.

In my data analysis I also categorized the educational level into five different groups: No schooling at all (illiterate); finished primary school; finished secondary school; finished high school; and has earned a higher education or certificate. From the table 5.5 we can see that 47% of Muot householders finished secondary school, 23.5% completed primary school, 15.6% completed high school, 1.9% earned a higher education qualification, and 11% are illiterate.

I contacted each of the three persons who achieved a higher education qualification. One of them was the Vice-chairman of the commune, the second most powerful person after the chairman. He is Mr Truong Công A. I visited Mr A in the afternoon of 23 October, 2010, following up on an earlier invitation. As I had imagined he displayed the attributes of a person who led quite a comfortable life, lived in a house constructed of permanent materials equipped with plenty of furniture. He dressed and communicated with a certain leadership style, commanding and skillful. As a confident leader of the community he expressed his opinions openly and was happy to share his views on economic development.

I understand that Mr Truong Cong A is a politician. Therefore whatever information he provided had to be positive rather than negative, as this way he is able to avoid any unwelcome trouble for criticizing the Party. Nevertheless in conversation he admitted that a large portion of the Muong population live in poverty and people lack labour skills, livelihood knowledge, and the capability to cope with shocks. This backed up the official view of the administration that the human capital of Muong is very poor.

**Box 5.4 Muot village leader's news on education and development**

Muot village households have improved significantly in terms of economy and education. Villagers' lives have improved in the last five or ten years. Children have better education. More and more students pass the entrance exam into universities in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City. However, in general, most Muot householders live in poverty. And to change their social and economic status takes time, and we hope that with the special concern of the government, Muong people will enhance their capability in terms of livelihood skills and social knowledge. The village has 30-35% population in poverty and they need to be supported by the government.

In general, Muot villagers lack livelihood skills and knowledge. They rely too much on natural resources which are becoming exhausted and which they are prohibited from exploiting. I hope with the special care from the government, our people will be trained to acquire better working skills and improve their living conditions.

Source: *Mr Cao Tien T*

In conclusion, the analysis of human capital of Muong people shows that they lack many livelihood skills for the modern world. Muong villagers spend most of the time in their forest areas collecting firewood, herbs and bamboo shoots for both daily food and sale. Skilled labourers are likely to move to urban areas and work in factories or companies. Skilled workers are those who have a higher education.

**5.1.3. Social capital of the Muong**

Social capital refers to “social networks, relationships, affiliations, and associations upon which people draw when pursuing different livelihood strategies requiring coordinated

action” (Scoones, 1998, p.8). Like ethnicities in other regions in Vietnam, Muong have the same political administrative structure at both commune and village levels as the rest of the country. The administrative units at both village and commune level have a range of associations specifically for elderly, youth, women, veterans, and farmers. These associations work under the commune or village administration committee. Under the Communist Party’s leadership, these associations work together in order to carry out the Party’s guidelines and policies. Table 5.6 presents the evaluation of social capital of Muong in Muot village.

**Table 5.6. Social resource of the Muong**

<b>Evaluation of social capital of Muong households</b>		
	Number of responses	Percentage
Poor	10	6.5
Standard	117	76.0
Good	26	16.9
Total	153	99.4
Invalid	1	0.6
Total response	154	100.0

Source: *Data of fieldwork survey in Muot village, 2010*

The evaluation of social capital is based on the question: How effective are village associations in contributing to the social connections between people and maintaining traditional culture and values? 93.5% of Muot householders are happy with their social capital. Only 6.5% consider their social capital to be poor.

It is important to take traditional culture into account when considering the social capital of Muong. Muong have a long cultural history and this includes many beliefs and norms which are significantly different from those of the lowland Kinh majority. However, in the

last few decades with their integration into Kinh culture, Muong's culture has changed noticeably. The most obvious change is that their traditional dress is now no longer worn.

**Box 5.5 A Muot villager's ideas about their Muong culture**

Muong have had their own culture for thousands of years which is different from that of other ethnicities. We have our own language and it is used daily. However, Muong traditional culture including customs, beliefs, rituals, and part of our spoken language is changing toward Kinh. For example, in the past traditionally each invited guest invited to a wedding brought a piece of pork (about one kilogram or more), one kilogram of sticky rice, and a bottle of rice alcohol to congratulate the host and share their happiness. After joining the wedding party, the hosts returned a piece of pork to the guests to express their thankfulness. Now this custom no longer works. Guests present an amount of money as a gift and the host can use the money for their own purposes. This is a lowland Kinh custom. Muong people also find it more convenient and suitable to it do this way. Nowadays, the younger generation of Muong are so close to Kinh because of many reasons. Firstly more children have a higher education in which they socialize with Kinh and learn what Kinh do. Secondly economic integration brings them together. I believe that the more that economic and social integration occurs the more indigenous traditional culture will be lost in the future.

Source: *Mr Bui Van H, a Muot village patriarch*

In order to a better understand Muong social capital, I conducted an interview with the 73 year old village patriarch Bui Van H who used to work in the cultural department of Cam Thuy district for many years.

There is a contradiction between what most development scholars think and the perception of local indigenous people. While indigenous Muong do not highly value the importance of traditional values, norms, and practices and consider the cultural losses as the cost of development and modernization, some development scholars see the loss as a retrograde step that is destroying traditional indigenous culture (McCaskill, 1997). Development as perceived by outside experts is not always shared by people from indigenous cultures who may see changes not as destroying their true identity but actually enhancing their ability to cope and engage with the contemporary world. In the past, Muong rarely left their home village on either a temporary or permanent basis to migrate to urban areas. According to a report of the Ministry of Labour and Social and Invalid Affairs in 2006, today 7.5% of Muong become rural- urban migrants who move to industrial and economic zones in search of employment. In fact, my survey of migration in Muot village shows that 75% of young people from age 18 to 25 leave their home to find work in one of the main cities; 10% of them, those who have earned higher educational qualifications, securing permanent jobs and remaining in cities to work. Those who lack educational qualifications have to settle for jobs as labourers.

Poverty drives indigenous minority people into an unfamiliar modern world in which, tough as it may seem, they either succeed or fail to make a living. Many people do not really have any idea about how to find a job or to adjust their lives to a different world; however curiosity overcomes all and the lack of knowledge creates a blind and optimistic “movement of migration”. In this context it becomes necessary for individuals to accept change and go through a radical process of transforming their beliefs, values, and behaviours as part of how they must adapt to changing conditions (Ibid.p.32). This issue is discussed in more detail below in section 5.3.

The losses inflicted on Muong traditional culture are not only the consequence of the process of development and modernization but also a conscious part of central government policy. The Party believes they must use their authority to develop a sense of cohesion among their citizens; cohesion strengthened by belief in a shared culture. The government applies the same education system and media to all ethnicities. The language of education is Kinh, and most teachers in minority communities are Kinh who cannot speak local languages and do not have enough understanding of indigenous culture to teach from within it. The thrust of this policy is homogenization and assimilation.

It is not my role to argue whether government policy is right or wrong; indeed what I am principally concerned with here is how indigenous Muong react to the cultural changes, how these changes affect their livelihoods and what the implications are for poverty reduction. Most scholars agree that local people should make their own decisions and choose their own way to develop or react to situations (Kampe, 1997; McKinnon & McConchie, 2004). However, the Muong evaluation of social capital as stated by Muot householders in Table 5.6 shows they share a positive attitude towards the current situation. The question is then how can indigenous Muong apparently be happy in a situation where their traditional culture is in a state of decline? I am inclined to hypothesize that Muong neither see any real value or significance in their traditional culture; they do not see it as being relevant to their immediate need for social and economic development. In other words they may undervalue the importance of their own values, beliefs, and other practices. While traditional cultural social capital plays an important role in livelihood development, Muong do not see its intangible contribution to social and economic development as having much importance. Muong now relate the pursuit of livelihood resources to tangible assets, namely the acquisition of money, land, forest, housing, and whatever they can directly use to enhance their livelihoods.

The most important concrete livelihood resource sought by the Muong is financial capital which I discuss below.

#### 5.1.4. Financial capital of Muong households

Financial capital, according to DFID (1998), is cash, savings, credit/debit and other economic assets. These sometimes include the basic infrastructure of banks, credit unions and the like, as well as equipment and technology used in the production process.

In this section, I am going to discuss the main capital assets of Muong such as cash, credit/debit, savings, and commercial infrastructure that directly impacts on their livelihoods and poverty reduction strategies. The report of the Thanh Hoa Ethnic Minority Committee (2008) declared that 24% of Muong live in poverty, which was a drop from 38% in 2000, and 55% in the 1980s. Obviously the living conditions of Muong have improved; however the improvement is a lot slower than expected, especially in the context of rapid nationwide economic growth over the last two or three decades.

Poverty is the main issue of livelihood development for the Muong and ethnic minorities in general. The lack of financial capital prevents people from accessing livelihood resources and pursuing their livelihood objectives. After Vietnam was reunited in 1975, the government has made policies and carried out many programs in support of ethnic minorities; however poverty rates remain high.

**Table 5.7. Evaluation of financial capital of Muong households in Muot village**

Evaluation financial capital	Number of responses	Percentage
Very poor	125	81.2
Poor	19	12.3
Adequate	9	5.8
Total	153	99.4
Invalid data	1	0.6
Total of households (N= 154 participants)	154	100.0

Source: *Data from fieldwork survey in Muot village, 2010.*

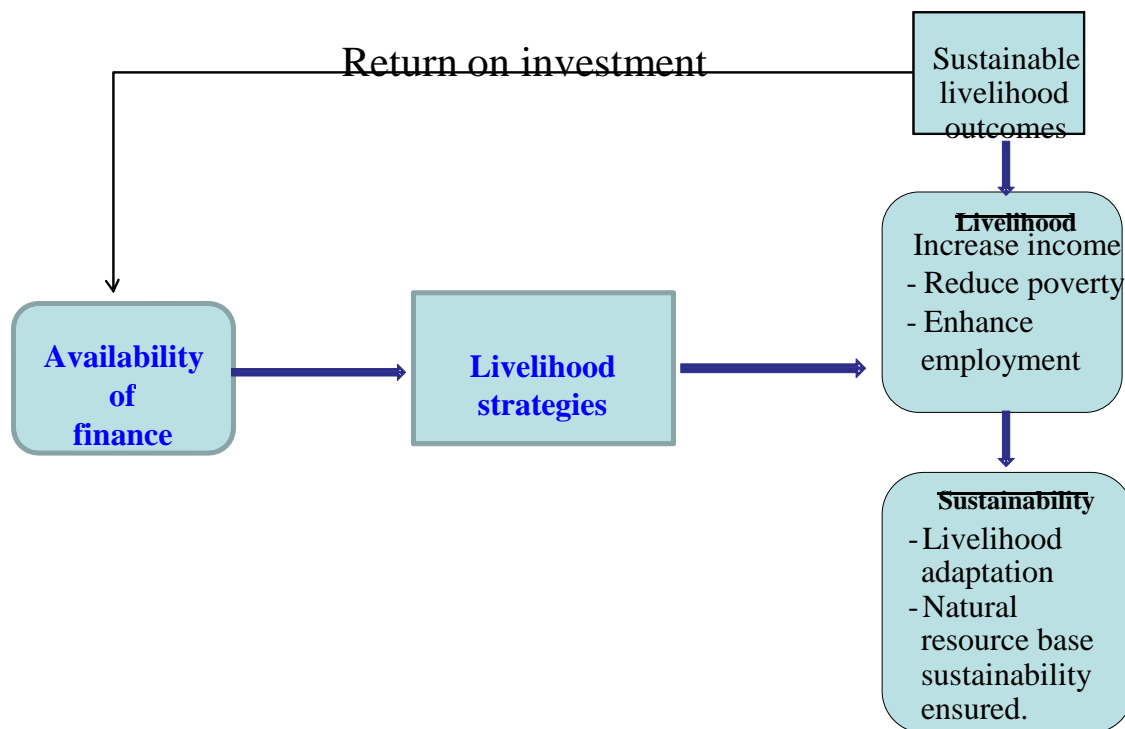


Table 5.7 presents the Muot households' evaluation of their financial capital. 81.2% reported they were very poor and 12.3% poor; only 5.8% considered themselves to have adequate; no household thought they had good or very good financial resources.

Question 8 in my questionnaire survey (Appendix 2) asked the householders in Muot village to evaluate the situation of their financial capital. Before the householders filled in their answer sheet, I carefully explained to them that their evaluation should be based on the level of satisfaction of how much money they expected for livelihood management and how much they actually earned. The cash or credit might come from different sources: trading home produce or livestock, savings, or loans. In other words, Muot householders placed their financial status in one of the categories above based on their cash income and the amount of money they required to invest in their forest holdings, agricultural inputs, education and other expenses such as power, transport, clothing and so forth.

We have to consider the term “availability of money” in this case because different economic regions may require different cash flow/availability. In other words, how much money is considered good, standard, or poor for livelihood management in this Muong community? Muot villagers told me that they needed an average 1.5 million to two million VND (approximately USD100) to invest in each hectare of forest per year, depending upon how large the forest areas of each household is. This means each household requires a standard capital investment from 10 to 15 million VND (USD500-750USD) for forest maintenance alone which is their main source of livelihood income.

**Figure 5.6. Financial capital and livelihood outcome**



Source: Adapted from *Sustainable Livelihoods Framework* (Scoones, 1998).

In fact, 95% of Muong households could not afford this and they are constantly in debt. According to household poverty survey findings, most Muong households in Muot village owe between five and 30 million to the government bank. For the outsider it is difficult at first to work out why people fall into such debt. However, the reality is not too difficult to establish. Although, they have the natural resources available to earn a good living from their agricultural holdings and forest allocation, they only achieve minimal returns and the cost of this is that more and more young Muong leave their homes to seek jobs in urban areas. Villagers do not know how to invest wisely. They have limited knowledge and exposure to modern technology and do not know how they can improve their situation. The

combined impact of limited financial capital plus poor knowledge leads households deeper into debt and poverty. The findings in Figure 5.6 show that the greater availability of financial capital then the better the livelihood that a household will achieve and a higher income.

The most important types of financial capital in this case study are cash, credit/debt, and savings which impact on investment in education, production equipment and new technology. I noticed that Muong villagers also consider financial capital to be a key issue in development. Whenever we had a conversation, they put financial matters at the top of the list. During fieldwork, I often heard people complaining about their financial situation and I decided to conduct a supplementary survey on household financial status by conducting interviews. The survey included an evaluation of householders' financial capital, the total income per household per year, as well as the total income from agriculture, livestock, and forestry per year.

**Table 5.8. Interrelationship between financial availability and income**

Availability of financial assistance	Household income per month in 2010 (Column unit in million VND)							Total
	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	
Very poor	9	72	39	5	0	0	0	125
Poor	1	5	5	5	1	2	0	19
Adequate	0	0	0	4	3	1	1	9
Total	10	77	44	14	4	3	1	153

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

In order to illustrate the causes of financial distress and the villagers' ability to cope with it, I conducted a number of informal interviews with householders who were heavily in debt. I had extended conversations with two of the poorest households in the village. Their situation is typical of families living in poverty.

Mr Trương Công V is head of one of the poorest households in the village, and it was no surprise to discover that the single most valuable item they owned was a bicycle which they used to take firewood to the commune centre to sell. The family has five members and each member earns an average of VND 320,000 (USD15) per month. His three children left school early. Every day, the three children go to forest and help their parents cultivate their garden and collect food and firewood.

When asked how he could increase his daily income, he said they knew of no other way than collecting more firewood for sale. In 2007 his eldest son, 24, left the village to find work in Ho Chi Minh City. He hoped to get a labouring job and send money home to support his family, but he failed to do so because his wage was not enough to cover his expenses. As a result he fell into debt and when it was time to go home he did not even have enough money to pay the fare for a train or bus. His parents had to send him the money to buy a train ticket. It is six months since he returned from Ho Chi Minh City, and he is now reluctant to work in the forest like his peers and has become playful and lazy. Every night he gathers with his friends in the village to play cards and gamble. He lost so much money that his parents had to sell a buffalo and borrow additional money from relatives to pay off his debt. So far there has been no sign that his son will straighten up his life and meet his parents' expectations. Instead of growing up, he is growing his debts and there seems to be no end to his self indulgence. It may seem a naive observation, but his story is perhaps typical of children in these increasingly prosperous times who form false expectations through mass media advertising but do not have the earning capacity to succeed in a consumer society.

My second case study is Mr Bùi Văn K. Mr K is 43 years old and illiterate. However his two children are attending school and have outstanding school records. Unlike other Muot

households, his family only rarely draws income from the sale of either forest products or livestock. He explained to me that he does not have enough money to invest in afforestation or purchasing or feeding livestock because, since he married, he has never had enough money to improve his situation. His family managed to get by quietly and peacefully until his children started secondary school. This drastically increased household expenses. His wife and he work hard all day long but cannot earn enough to cover their expenses. He has negotiated with his wife to let him go to Ha Noi or Ho Chi Minh City to find temporary work to make up the shortfall but his wife refuses to go along with the plan because she thinks their children are too young to be left without a father. His wife is also aware that the chances of finding work are uncertain. She has seen many other villagers go, fail to get a job and return to the village even deeper in debt.

Most Muot villagers agree that they face significant financial challenges that prevent them from pursuing more rewarding livelihood strategies. Indebtedness prevents households from making sufficient investment in livestock, agriculture, and forestry that would increase their incomes. For example, each household needs to invest an average 100 to 200 USD per year to buy genetically improved livestock including poultry and cattle. Chicken and ducks can be fed on a wide variety of food including wild insects from the forest. Cows and buffalo can be grazed in the forest where they can forage for grass and vegetables. Livestock can be traded for a profit and the money put into savings or invested. Such a strategy enables farmers to improve their cash flow and grow their capital holdings.

The household poverty survey carried out in October 2010 showed that 99% of Muong households in Muot village wished to ask for financial support and stated that they lack money to invest in their livelihoods.

**Table 5.9. Householders expectation of financial support from the government**

Do you expect to receive financial support from the government?		
Response of Muot villagers	Number of responses	Percentage
No	1	0.6
Yes	152	98.7
Total	153	99.4
Invalid data	1	0.6
Total households	154	100.0

Source: *Fieldwork data in Muot village, 2010.*

It is not too difficult to understand why ethnic minorities in general and Muong in particular see themselves as poor and the lowest class in society. They want to earn higher incomes and believe that getting financial support from the government will help them achieve this. Muong and other ethnic minority peoples now have more opportunities to engage in the social, economic, and political life of the nation, and more and more of them understand ideas about economic growth and are aware of the growing disparity, the development gap between different regions and peoples. They recognize that they are disadvantaged and are becoming more willing to raise their voice and ask for more equality. The idea that indigenous minority highlanders are satisfied with their lot and do not want to ask for assistance may be past.

Not only politicians but also many minority people themselves are aware of the extent to which they have been left behind. They experience the difference as soon as they leave their home village to seek work in the cities. They see the wealth of the intelligentsia, government dignitaries, and business people and become more aware of their relative deprivation. Disadvantaged financial capability is always related to poverty, and “poverty is a key criterion in the assessment of livelihoods” (Scoones, 1998, p.6). Poverty and inequality are reliable indices of the status of livelihoods and the trend of development.

In order to achieve savings, Muong often form groups of households (normally from five to ten friends or relatives) into joint savings groups. These groups have their own rules and conditions. When I was doing the fieldwork in Muot village in 2010, I witnessed an occasion in which a savings group of seven households collected rice. I was invited as a special guest to one of their parties held twice a year on 15<sup>th</sup> May and 15<sup>th</sup> November. Each household contributes 200 kilograms of rice (equal to about one million VND or 50 USD at the current price). The group members conduct a lucky-draw to identify the person who will sell the rice and keep the money. The rice must be well-dried and clean. The winner must host the next gathering of members. To be fair, each member has to contribute equally about VND 100,000 to the party. The rice should normally be the same quality and amount each time so that subsequent winners have an equal chance of receiving the same price.

**Box 5.6 A villager's views on his savings group**

In our village we are all very poor and we do not have stable incomes. That is why we cannot save money for big investments such as houses, paddy land or forestland. By doing it this way (joining saving group) we can save big amounts of money and we can do something with it. For example, this is my turn to receive rice and I will use this cash to buy a motorbike. Most households in our village have a motorbike but my family has not got one. This is a chance for us to buy one. The total amount I receive from the savings group this time is about seven million VND. The motorbike I plan to buy will cost me about 10 million VND, therefore I will trade my litter of piglets to meet the cost. The purpose of joining the savings group is useful not only in terms of helping us to make savings but also enhancing the friendship among neighbours and villagers.

Source: *Mr Bui Khac D, a joint savings group member*

The money earned from the sale is usually invested in housing, infrastructure or a livelihood investment plan. During the party I had an opportunity to talk to each member. They organized a very big party because not only the householders but also their families joined the party. Mr Bui Khac D was a member of the savings group who won the draw last time.

In summary, the financial capital of the Muong in Cam Thuy district is restricted and vulnerable. Muot villagers need money to invest in their wet rice cultivation, forestry and raising livestock, but access to capital is very difficult. Nearly all householders want direct financial support from the government.

#### **5.1.5. Physical capital of the Muong**

Physical capital is comprised of the public infrastructure banks, retail shops, schools, the transportation system, buildings, irrigation facilities, clean water supply, and accessible energy and information. Physical capital directly influences the sustainability of a livelihood because it can enhance or obstruct access to health services, school, opportunities to earn income and so forth (DFID, 2007).

First of all, the basic domestic physical capital or infrastructure is housing. 96.7% of Muong households in Muot village live in temporary, and semi-permanent houses. My survey of house status is divided into four groups: temporary (*Nhà tạm bợ*); semi-stable (*bán kiên cố*); permanent (*Nhà kiên cố*), and no house. The Muot householders evaluated their house status by themselves and the criteria used to classify a structure as temporary or permanent is shown below (Table 5.10).

A pole-house or “stilt-house” is almost a symbol for ethnic minorities in Viet Nam. Most Muong still live in pole-houses components of which have sometimes been recycled for many years and may be in an unstable condition. However, Muong are very confident about the capacity of such houses. Unlike lowlanders who choose to live on the ground, Muong and other ethnic minorities prefer to live in valleys surrounded by high mountains. Highland villagers believe that the mountains around them protect them from storms and



this appears to be the case as their houses are rarely affected by storms. However such flimsy houses cannot keep people warm during winter, especially without fires.

**Table 5.10. Housing conditions of the Muong in Muot village**

Temporary house	Solid/Permanent house
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Old pole-house with split- bamboo walls and bottom story on the ground</li> <li>- Not reliable or stable during the rainy and storm season</li> <li>- Thatch roof</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The house stands on solid foundations</li> <li>- Normally built out of reinforced concrete or milled timber</li> <li>- Can resist strong wind, storms, or bad weather.</li> <li>- Can last for more than 50 years</li> <li>- Tile roof</li> </ul>

Source: *Based on the Thanh Hoa official criteria to verify poverty.*

It is important to explain the criteria that I based on to classify the housing status in this context. Traditionally Muong people have lived in pole-houses (some others call them stilt-houses) for hundreds of years. However, most Muong in Muot village were more likely to consider their pole-house as temporary. Throughout the daily conversations with Muot villagers I realized that they understood their housing conditions very well. Social economic integration has provided indigenous people with opportunities to travel along the nation and witness and learn the disparity between rural and urban lives. They are aware of their poor living and housing conditions. The lack of finance has not enabled them to build solid houses.

The criteria above (Table 5.10) were not only selected from the standard housing conditions of the household poverty survey but also learned from the popular opinions of Muot villagers and from what I observed.

**Figure 5.7. Temporary and permanent traditional pole-house of Muong people**



Source: *Temporary and stable pole house in Muot village, 2010.*

**Table 5.11. Muong housing types**

Housing conditions	Number of responses	Percentage
Stable/Solid	1	0.6
Semi-stable/solid	116	75.3
Temporary	33	21.4
No house at all <sup>19</sup>	2	1.3
Invalid response	1	0.6
Total	154	100

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

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<sup>19</sup> The people who do not have their own house are not homeless. They are often newly married spouses and live in the husband's parent house until they can earn enough money to buy a new house.

I visited most Muot households and I found that most of the villagers live in sub standard conditions, which are quite different from housing found in urban areas. Their houses are unstable, and little of commercial value can be found inside them. Many households do not own a bed which might cost them about one million VND (50 USD). Some use the split-bamboo floor as their bed. At night some lay timber planks on the ground beneath the house where it is cool enough to sleep soundly, and in the morning stack them out of the way. The most common luxury items that can be found in nearly every household are a small TV and an ancient Chinese motorbike which, I believe that, is no longer used in urban areas and is rarely seen on the lowlands.

**Table 5.12. Muot villagers evaluation of their physical conditions**

What do you think about your family's physical conditions?		
Status of physical conditions	Number of responses	Percentage
Very poor	128	83.1
Poor	20	13.0
Adequate	5	3.2
Good	0	0
Very good	0	0
Total	153	99.4
Invalid data	1	0.6
Total	154	100.0

Source: *Data of fieldwork in Muong community, 2010.*

The findings from the physical condition survey (Table 5.12) shows that 83.7% of Muot households have very poor physical capital; 13.1% are poor; and only 3.3% considered their physical capital adequate. The evaluation of the physical capital included local roads (the roads from their houses to the commune centre or the main road on which most public services are located), the irrigation system that brings water to their paddy field, the water

supply system, access to information (mass media), and the quality of housing. The quality of these assets impacts on their vulnerability to shocks and therefore on their ability to secure a sustainable livelihood.

Poor public transport can prevent children from getting to school and this negatively affects their school performance. A poor and difficult road subject to frequent wash-outs in the rainy season forms an obstruction to local villagers engaged in selling products from the forest, or bringing paddy rice or produce from their fields. For example, many elderly people who cannot ride a bicycle or motorbike, have to walk four or five kilometres carrying woven bamboo baskets to sell at the market. Muot village is beyond the reach of a popular TV broadcast network and radio reception is also limited, so households have to buy a satellite receiver. Many poor families cannot afford this and cannot watch TV programs. There is no internet access in this community and Muot villagers have no idea of what the internet can do.

Nowadays mass media plays an important role in social and economic development. It provides people with a knowledge of the outside world, national events, market prices and the state of the economy, all of which might contribute to development. The findings from my survey show that Muong have started to realize that their physical capital needs upgrading. Local villagers are also starting to notice the importance of access to information as a component of livelihood development. The need to connect with the outside world has become a real concern. Indigenous minority people are not self-contained and want to know more. This observation is unlikely to hold across the whole of Vietnam, especially for people in extremely isolated areas, but for the Muong in Muot village I can speak with absolute confidence.

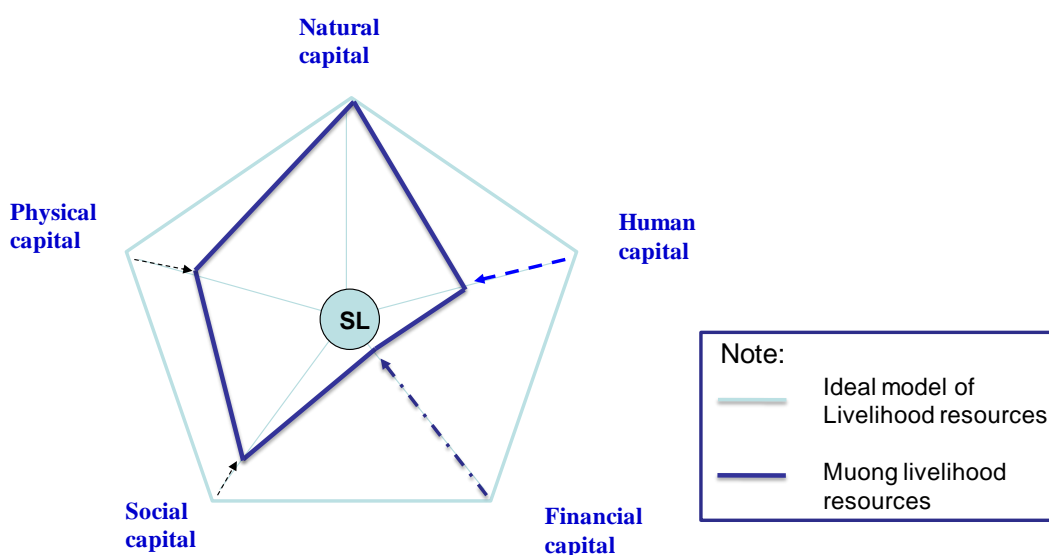
#### **5.1.6. Summary**

Livelihood resources underpin livelihood development. Five elements of livelihood assets, natural, financial, social, human, and physical capital of the Muong, are uneven. Most households have available natural resources, however they lack financial and human capital

to use them to their full potential. The diagram below presents a configuration of the livelihood assets of Muot village in summary form.

Figure 5.8 presents a depiction of the relative stores of the various focus of capital in Muot village. It shows that the availability of financial capital is the most outstanding shortfall. Muong villagers cannot save enough money to invest in livelihoods. However, many householders have borrowed money from the bank to invest in wetland cultivation and forests.

**Figure 5.8. Muong livelihood assets: A conceptual depiction**



Source: *Data fieldwork configuration based on livelihood assets collected in Muot village, 2010.*

Muong villagers lack adequate education. Therefore they do not have a relevant knowledge to make wise investment in livelihoods. Although each Muong household in Muot village has a large forest area and a large home garden plot, they still live in poverty. The diagram above (Figure 5.8) does not reflect how the situation affects all households in Muot village, but is a true summary of their situation.

## **5.2. Livelihoods Strategies of the Muong in Muot village**

Livelihoods strategies refer to a dynamic process in which people combine activities to meet their different needs at different times of the year (seasons) and on different geographical or economic levels. It comprises the range of choices and activities that people undertake to achieve their livelihood objectives (Bebbington, 1993; Brown, Stephens, Ouma, Murithi, & Barrett, 2006). It is obvious that different regions, or those with access to a different set of socioeconomic opportunities, follow different livelihood strategies. Suitable and practical livelihood strategies are rarely formulaic and always based on local conditions. The Muot livelihoods outlined in this study for instance, although they share characteristics with neighbouring villages, are in their own way unique.

An IDS working paper in 1998 introduces a framework for the analysis of sustainable rural livelihoods that will now be used as a part of my analysis. In this study the author identifies three broad clusters of livelihood strategies: migration, livelihood diversification, and agricultural intensification/extensification (Scoones, 1998).

This framework lends itself to use in the case study of Muot village.

### **5.2.1. Issue 1: Migration and Remittances: A method of poverty reduction?**

Migration has dramatically changed everywhere in Vietnam over the past 50 years. The impact has had diverse social, economic and geographic consequences and affects social resilience by altering peoples' sense of economic well-being, changing community structures, and affecting the natural resource base (Adger, Kelly, Winkels, Huy, & Locke, 2002). The causes of migration can be traced to economic determinants: the search for better income earning opportunities and employment. Unemployment is the main driving force. The Vietnam National Committee of Ethnicities acknowledges that before the early 1990s, there were very few minority labourers in urban areas. This was partly because indigenous minority highlanders did not know what opportunities existed, but as mass communication systems have improved, better information has become available. By the

2000s, the number of labourers from indigenous groups working in urban areas, especially Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City increased from 0.5% to 1.6% of the total labour force.

Migration to the cities from rural lowland areas follows the paddy rice cultivation cycle. Before the busy harvest period, while the rice is growing, farmers have free time. The temporary or circular rural-urban migration has become an important way for them to top-up their earnings and send money home in the form of remittances. Muong now follow the same path as rural lowland Kinh. Farmer migrants give many reasons for migrating.

### ***Migration for remittances***

I carried out a survey in which I questioned 154 individuals from households in Muot village. Detailed information was collected on the motivation of 37 of these Muong who were rural-urban migrants. These 37 persons I talked to were currently living in Muot village but at one time or another had moved to big cities to look for work. I also had a chance to interview a number of Muot villagers who were living temporarily or had moved permanently to either Ha Noi or Ho Chi Minh City.

A total of 154 individuals answered the question about the purposes of migration. Nearly all 154 householders indicated that they moved to urban areas to seek employment and send money home and 150 people went because they believed that there would be more job opportunities there for them (accounting for 99.3% and 97.4% respectively). More detail from the findings is presented in Table 5.13.

**Table 5.13. Muot villagers' migration purposes**

Reasons given by villagers to explain why they migrated to urban areas	(N = 154)	
	Number of people	Percentage (%)
Better employment/send money home	153	99.3%
More job opportunities	150	97.4%
Joined siblings	1	0.64%
Learning new culture	0	0%
Gaining experience of urban life	0	0%
Avoid home-village agricultural work	0	0%

Source: *Data of fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

In fact, migration from this Muong community has become a new movement if not to say a new lifestyle. The term “lifestyle” is used because in villagers' minds migration is not a simple livelihood strategy to earn money to send home. It has also become a fashion. Those who have never left their home village are always curious about the stories told by those who return from big cities. Stories about the strange and new life really attract them. However, they pay for the experience. It is extremely difficult for them to earn enough to cover their daily expenses, let alone send money home. Finding a job that will enable them to earn more money is an unending search. Remittances constantly fall short of what they need to pay for their children's school fees and books. The idea that parents can go short themselves to help their children get a full education is also a price that people are willing to pay and in the hope that it will help keep people moving to big cities.

Muong men (mostly married men) often enter into cyclical rural-urban migration arrangements for three to four months over the June to November period. The paddy field jobs of planting and weeding are normally performed by women. Men who move to urban areas tend to return home in early December to help with the harvest. Moreover, following traditional culture, Muong like Kinh and Chinese, celebrate the Lunar New Year as the biggest festival of the year and this costs a lot of money. Three-day parties are held, gifts



and new clothes must be bought for children. The New Year festival may cost a family from one million to 2.5 million VND (USD1 = VND21,000). For wealthy urban families, this amount of money may not be enough for a single dinner out; but for most rural, small holder families they have to work very hard to save the amount over several months.

**Table 5.14. Muong's views on migration**

Muong perception of migration to urban areas (cities)	N=154	
	Number of responses	Percentage
Not important	13	8.4
Important	131	85.1
Very important	9	5.8
Total	153	99.4
Invalid data	1	0.6
Total	154	100.0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

The 37 villagers (32 men and 5 women) included in the migration survey had worked in Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, or Thanh Hoa City. Some of them had repeated this journey several times and a few had failed to get work and had to return to Muot after a few weeks. Some people intended to go again, while some others swore they would never go again.

Most rural-urban migrants were between 18 to 35 years old and most looked for labouring jobs on building sites, loading and unloading goods on a casual daily basis without signing any official labour contract. The conditions for such temporary work were made in verbal agreements. The employees had no insurance nor did they enjoy rights given to most workers. The following story was provided by Mr Cao Van T, 25 years old, the son of Mr Cao The H – the secretary of Muot village. It illustrates the extreme difficulties migrants face in securing wages high enough to enable them to buy food (Box 5.7).

T also explained that the reason they had to postpone his wedding was not only because of their own lack of funds, but also because most villagers were also short of money. It has become an unwritten expectation in rural areas for villagers to present cash as a gift when they are invited to a wedding. When a family has a wedding, the whole village is invited.

**Box 5.7 The story of a migrant**

I finished high school six years ago and for a couple of years I tried to get into university but unfortunately I failed. In 2006 I left my home village to go to Ho Chi Minh City at the suggestion of some friends of mine who are studying and working there. After a few weeks looking for a job, I finally got a labouring job with a construction company. My job was to carry concrete and the materials that builders required. However, my wage was just enough for accommodation and daily expenses. I could not save any money to send home. I could not see any brighter future if I continued to do labouring work when the cost of living was so expensive. I decided to return home and look for some other way to earn money. Now I am harvesting bamboo for a bamboo production company in the neighbouring village and I earn about 1.300.000 VND per month. The job is hard but I have no choice and it is better than staying at home and doing nothing. I planned to get married in two months. However, the paddy harvest crop this season is so poor that we could not afford the wedding. My parents want to postpone my wedding until next year in the hope that the harvest will be better and I can save some more money.

Source: *Mr Cao Van T, a Muot villager*

The survey data gathered in Muot village indicates that most remittances are used for:

- Investment in paddy fields and forest plantations.
- Supporting children's schooling right through to higher education.
- Building (houses, livestock pens and hutches).
- Paying off debts.

The findings show that not only did 37 migrants go in search of money to cover all four financial needs listed above but also 95% of Muot households share the same objectives. Unfortunately, most temporary migrants lack the skills necessarily to do well in urban areas because they cannot compete with local urban labourers who know what is required. Many immigrants failed to make enough money to cover the costs of return travel.

### ***Migration because of unemployment***

Muong follow the same seasonal crop calendar as rural lowland Kinh. They grow two wet paddy crops in a year. There are two periods during the year when farmers have a lot of free time. The first period is from February to May. After land preparation and sowing farmers leave their fields to do maintenance work on their houses and agricultural equipment. These tasks are rarely urgent and until the main rice crop is harvested in June they have time to spare. The second cropping period falls between July and December. After harvesting the second crop of the year, the land is left fallow for three months. Some households may plant a winter crop but not everybody does this. It is during these periods that many men leave their homes to look for work in urban areas. The journey is expensive and the time spent looking for work takes its toll, but in spite of the difficulties most villagers agree that they would rather try to get work and earn something no matter how small than just stay at home and get nothing.

Unemployment is a push factor in both cyclical and permanent migration. In many Muong villages the voices of men can hardly be heard during these periods of absence because only women, children and elderly people are left behind. The villages become gloomy and quiet.

Under the new economic development policy many new economic zones with companies and factories have been established, but for obvious reasons these have not been set up in remote mountainous areas, where poor roads, isolation and limited access to skilled labour present major disincentives to investment. Most new economic and industrial zones are located on the outskirts of the cities where investors can benefit from the low cost of land, good infrastructure and the availability of a plentiful supply of skilled, well disciplined and relatively cheap labour. It is the people in remote areas who must move; work will not come to them. There are two small factories in Cam Thuy district: one a factory making bamboo chopsticks, and the other processing corn-starch. However, they do not employ many people and preference is given to those who live close by, near the district centre. Most villagers who live 25 to 30 kilometres away find it hard to compete for a position in these factories. Even if they got a job, in the absence of public transport, it would be difficult to travel each day.

Unemployment remains high, especially for young people who become demoralized when they have nothing to do. They often gather in groups to play pool or cards for cash. There are four pool bars in Muot village, a number that seems excessive to outsiders.

Apart from the sad stories of unfruitful temporary migration, Muot villagers are proud to tell visitors of villagers who have done well. A large of proportion of those who have achieved good qualifications through higher education get good jobs in the big cities of Vietnam. Many have settled permanently, married and are now raising families in urban areas. They often send money back home to support their parents and siblings.

Mr Quach Le T makes a good case study. Muot villagers call him by the respectful title of “*Ông*”. Now 65 years old, T was born in Muot village into a very poor family. His mother died when he was very young. His father was so poor that he struggled to bring up his children. At the age of 18 Mr T joined the army. When the war ended in 1975 he took up tertiary studies in economics. Following graduation he started to work with the central government. As a person of exceptional ability and capability, he was promoted to increasingly higher positions in the state government. Before he retired in 2009 he held the

position of general state inspector. For most of his career he worked in Ha Noi where his whole family now lives. He treats all Muot villagers as his friends and relatives and is remembered for getting government funds to build good roads into remote minority areas such as his home village. Muot villagers love him like a father and are proud that he has brought much prestige to the village of his birth. His influence on the younger generation is legendary. His example is used to show how higher education can make a difference to a persons' life. His view is that all people regardless of their ethnic origins or socio-cultural background can acquire the right qualifications to make it in society. He is an inspiring example of how education can help people get out of poverty and develop their lives sustainably. Muong are beginning to appreciate strongly what education can do for their children and in recent years the educational performance of Muong children has improved significantly. This matter will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

### **5.2.2. Issue 2: Livelihoods diversification or passive dependence on natural resources?**

Ellis (1996) describes livelihood diversification as a “survival strategy of rural households” in developing countries. It is a process by which rural households construct an increasingly complex portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and improve their standard of living. Watson and Binsbergen (2008) have argued that for pastoral people, diversification can include both pastoral produce extended to become an income earning activity in the wholesale and retail trade, selling livestock, milk, hides and skins, honey, and artisan foods. It can also include non-pastoral commodities such as the gathering and sale of wild products like firewood and medicinal plants. This example brings our attention to produce that the Muong know and handle themselves. Forest resources could be traded very easily in towns and cities. This could make use of a wide set of skills other than just hunting and gathering for domestic consumption. Diversification of the use of forest products has considerable potential and could increase employment, income and productivity (Ellis, 2000).

**Table 5.15. Source and total average income per household in Muot village**

Income source	Test Value = 0					
	t(,000 VND)	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Sale of agricultural produce	13.481	152	.000	7111.06536	6068.9358	8153.1950
Sale of poultry	8.411	152	.000	1462.48366	1118.9738	1805.9935
Sale of cattle	10.068	152	.000	1136.63399	913.5768	1359.6912
Wages or Salaries	17.081	152	.000	8497.69281	7514.7865	9480.5991
Sale of forest products or services	12.165	152	.000	2092.84314	1752.9408	2432.7455

Source: *Data from Thanh Hoa Provincial Household Poverty Survey of Muot village, 2010.*

A recent literature review of rural livelihood development studies has emphasized that livelihood diversification is the most significant strategy for improving income and living standards (Niehof, 2004). This author argues that there are two reasons that make livelihood diversification important. First, poor farmers lack resources and assets other than their own labour and, therefore, have to resort to non-farm activities to earn income, resulting in a negative relationship between on-farm and off-farm income. Second, the poor do not benefit from favorable labour markets because they have low education, low human capital and lack access to resources that could enable them to improve their position. They are caught in a poverty trap. Ellis (2000) asserts that livelihood diversification can increase the returns from both on-farm and non-farm activities and therefore have an equalizing effect on rural incomes and wealth and improve overall economic conditions.

In this context what is meant by on-farm and off-farm income refers to wet paddy fields and cultivated land as on-farm and forestland on the mountains as non-farm. Forestlands play an even more important role in providing income for Muot villagers not only because forests occupy 96% of the total land area of the village but because off-farm produce gathered in the forest, such as firewood, medicinal plants, (and herbs) vegetables, birds, and snakes, stand alongside waged employment as important sources of income.

Table 5.15 shows that income from trading livestock (cattle and poultry) is higher than returns from forestry and wet field production including rice, corn, peanut, kumara, sweet potato, and sesame. The second significant income of Muong is from wages, salary, and social payments. In fact, only five of the 154 households who participated in the survey receive a government payment (salary or pension). The remainder made their money by working as seasonal labourers.

The most sought after work is bamboo harvesting. The job provides steady employment all year long, is readily available, and for this reason alone is preferred even though payment is low and the work hard. A man working in a bamboo field from 7 am to 6 pm (with an hour break at midday) earns 50.000 VND (2.5 USD). Where there are few competing options, the work is better than nothing and provides an opportunity to earn some extra income.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, in the mid 1990s the government introduced a project of livelihood diversification for rural areas called VAC (Garden-Pond-Cage). However, according to the report of Vietnam's Committee of Mountainous Minority (CEMA) Muong and other ethnic minority groups in remote mountainous areas did not benefit from this project. In the rural lowlands, the VAC provides capital to increase the inputs and therefore the outputs from promising enterprises that require investment in labour, technology, breeding and so on. There are several reasons why Muong and other minority groups were not included in the VAC project. The government focused on providing interest free loans to rural households rather than organizing vocational training courses for specific groups in different communities. The money invested was the same for everyone, but how the money was used differed from place to place, household to household according to their needs.

Those who designed the scheme expected recipients to have a clear idea about what sort of training they wanted and where they could find it. The VAC was therefore only made available to those who already knew what they wanted and where to get it. For highlanders with such a limited knowledge of the modern industrial economy and its commercial opportunities the scheme simply exceeded their understanding.

### **5.2.3. Issue 3: Agricultural intensification.**

In neoclassical economic terms agricultural intensification has been defined as increased average inputs of labour or capital on a smallholding which might consist either of cultivated land alone, or “mixed cultivated and grazing land, for the purpose of increasing the value of output per hectare” (Tiffen, Mortimore, & Gichuki, 1994, p.286). Carswell (1997) has argued that increased demand for output is usually necessary for agricultural intensification. Agricultural intensification is also necessary if there is a fall in the availability of land, water supply, or labour while poverty remains stable or expands. Two key factors usually play a part in pushing agricultural intensification: increased demand and a fixed or decreasing area of cultivatable land. Rapid population growth creates more market demand while the land areas remain the same. Therefore farmers have to make available land more productive. The process of agricultural intensification includes an increased frequency of cultivation per fixed unit of land, an increase in labour inputs, and usually involves technological innovation (Carswell, 1997).

Agricultural intensification is one of the livelihood strategies which has significant implications for poor rural areas. Muong farmers can increase their agricultural inputs in different ways by using artificial fertilizer, improved seeds, animal traction, and multi-cropping to improve productivity.

Muong farmers themselves know how to use locally available resources to increase output. Most Muot households use dung (pig and buffalo waste), artificial fertilizers (nitrogen, potassium, phosphate), and vegetable manures. However the high price of artificial fertilizer does not always allow poor households to use enough on their paddy and vegetable fields to make a critical difference. Over recent years the use of animal waste has



declined. The older Muot villagers who have used dung and other animal waste throughout their life believe it is better for the soil but fewer animals are kept these days. Most Muot households have a pig sty into which they put straw and weeds for the pigs to sleep on. The straw and weeds disintegrate and mix with manure. They use this mixture for paddy land. However, recently fewer Muong continue to raise pigs for trading and manure because epidemics of animal diseases have put them at risk of infection.

Another way Muong intensify their agricultural system is by selecting improved seeds and animal breeds. In the past, Muong took the seeds from the previous year's crop and retained a stable system of inputs from year to year. Over an extended period the genetic viability of seeds deteriorated, productivity dropped and new seeds were sought from neighboring villages and distant relatives. Now Muong spend money on good seeds for each crop. Productivity has improved significantly and because warranted seeds can partly resist pests, harvests are more reliable. The most popular rice variety Muong plant for a spring crop (January to May season) is 13/2, Q5. The high-quality rice variety for the autumn crop (June to November) is Tap Giao, Nhi Iu. Each rice variety may be grown for a period of three to seven years depending on how quickly new varieties are made available.

The method of rain fed cultivation of Muot village is quite simple. This is because of several reasons: the parade field is not suitable for machines and most households can not afford to buy ploughing machines.

The most popular technique used in agricultural intensification is multi-crop, rotational cultivation. According to some old villagers, in the past Muong farmers cultivated one crop each year and left the land fallow over a long period before the new crop was started. Farmers also did not take good care of their crop and as a result the productivity was low. At that time agricultural produce was mostly for domestic use and rarely trade a profit or savings. After the economic market was opened in 1995, the demand, supply and the integration with other ethnicities led Muong to prepare agricultural produce to trade for a profit so it as necessary to start agricultural intensification.

Figures 5.9 and 5.10 show crop rotation in the same land area of the Muong. This creates more jobs and helps to improve income. However, not every household in Muot village enjoys doing a winter crop (corn, peanut, sweet potato and so forth) because the winter crop (shown in Figure 5.10) is in rainy season. Most fields in lower terraces are likely to face floods. Muot households have experienced many poor crops owing to floods. Many of them think they would rather find other temporary jobs for extra wages or search for income from the forests by collecting firewood the like.

Such challenges are likely to lead Muong to vulnerability. They expected more support from the government regarding both financial capital, technology and infrastructure such as irrigation. Despite the fact that indigenous Muong face many difficulties in their agricultural production, there has been a recognized improvement in both quality and quantity of productivity, according to the report of GSOV (2005).

**Figure 5.9. Planting rice in Muot village**



Source: *Photos of fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

Over recent years, under government supported policies and programs to promote new agricultural technologies, the productivity of each crop per fixed unit of land has improved gradually. The same trend is apparent in Muot village.

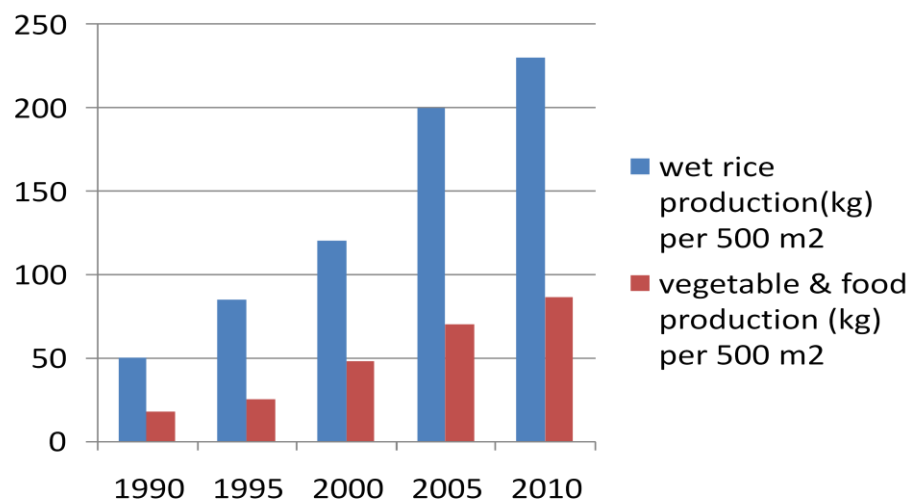
**Figure 5.10. Planting winter corn crop in Muot village**



Source: *Photos of fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

In this exercise, Muot villagers were asked to estimate their productivity per fixed unit of land over the past ten years. The recalled data may not be accurate but I believe it shows a valid upward trend. The graph above presents the average production of rice per 500 square meters in Muot village from 1990 to now. Corn is the dominant vegetable winter crop which is easy to grow and Muong prefer it both as a food and fodder livestock. The price of rice is around 4,500 VND per kilogram. It means that from each crop Muot villagers earn on average 1,250,000 VND per 500 square meters.

**Figure 5.11. Estimate of total agricultural productivity per fixed unit of land in Muot village<sup>20</sup>**



Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

The selling price of corn is about 9,500 VND per kilogram. The corn crop is planted in November and harvested in early January. Under the crop rotation system (two wet rice crops and one winter crop in between) the land is not fallow at any time. The improved productivity shown in Figure 5.11 is due to better seed selection, better fertilizers, and improved labour skill in terms of cultivation technique and plant care.

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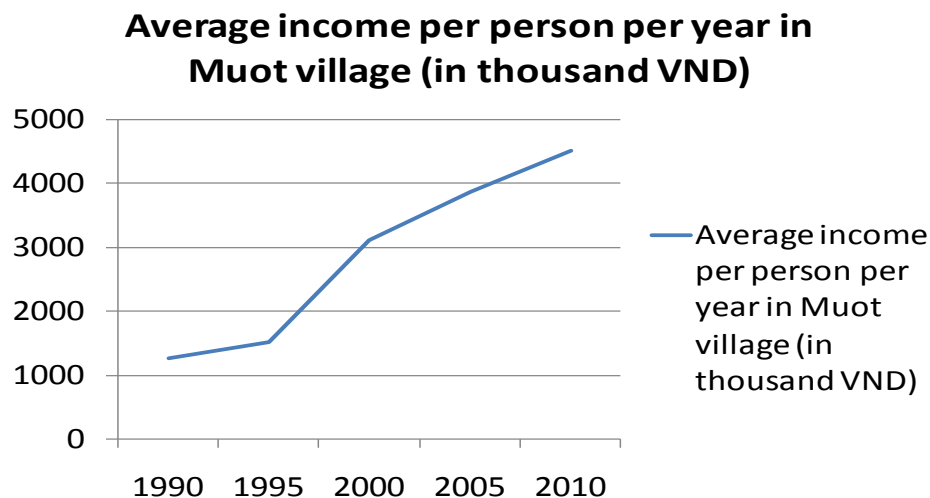
<sup>20</sup> I chose the fixed unit of land 500 m<sup>2</sup> to analyze because it is familiar to local villagers. The concept of a hectare is hardly known in Muong community. The local government provides cultivation land to each household based on the number of household members. Each Muot village citizens gets “2 sào” equal to 1000 m<sup>2</sup>. This means each “sào” is 500 square metres.

### 5.3. Livelihoods Outcomes for the Households of Muot Village

#### 5.3.1. Slow income improvement

As is shown in Figure 5.12 below, the average income per person from agricultural produce, forestry products and livestock over the past twenty years shows a marked upward trend. Again, in this exercise the villagers were asked to estimate the income per person per year over the past ten years. I have to acknowledge that people estimated their income based on the quantity of rice per fixed unit of land (Figure 5.12).

**Figure 5.12. Income per capita per person of Muot villagers from 1990-2010**



Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village (Nguyen, 2010).*

The graph above shows a constant increase in the average Muot villager income from 1990s to 2010. However when inflation of the currency is taken into account the figure does not reflect the real livelihood outcome. Their savings is not significant because they have to spend more money on daily expenses. The price at the market increases constantly while their net income improves to some extent.

In the mid 1990s, a kilogram of rice cost VND 1000. Today the same amount costs VND 4500. Not only has the price of rice increased but also the price of all agricultural products by four to five times in the last 15 years. Inflation significantly affects the poor and creates

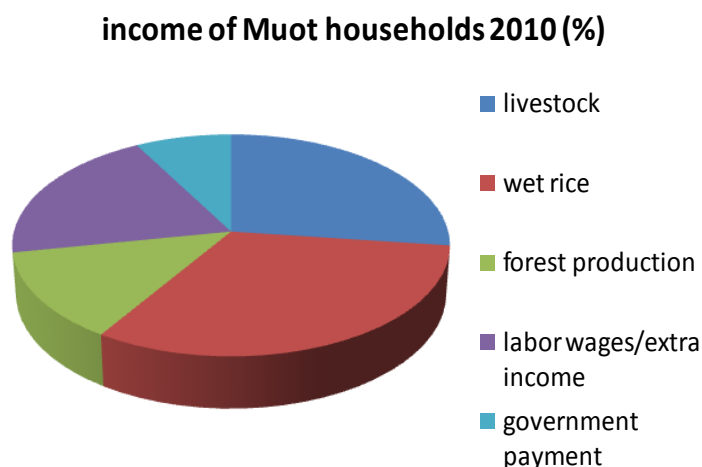
a huge gap between the rich and the poor. The poor cannot catch up with the high rate of inflation because they do not have a stable income such as salaries that are adjusted for inflation. Not all the news is bad though. The Muong still grow or obtain their domestic needs from the land and are not solely dependent on the market, but it is clear that Muot villagers have not benefited from government economic policy. Human capital remains poor, people lack the skills to get better paid employment, and the government continues to support programs and policies which ignore the importance of having skilled people in the labour force.

The location of commercial zones also makes it difficult for people like the Muong and other mountainous minority who live in isolated areas to find employment. Such people are forced to rely on natural resources. Another count on which people such as the Muong miss out are the government policies on forest ownership, fixed cultivation areas and permanent settlements. In the past, the health of shifting cultivation systems was maintained only because the land was used in rotation which is now prohibited. As a consequence the swidden cycle has been truncated and farmers are no longer as able to produce their food needs as they did in the past and are more likely to be driven to find alternative means of employment. The greatest source of income for the Muong in Muot village is from wet rice cultivation. Although it is widely believed that Muong live on or from the sale of forest resources, the findings shows that this is far from the truth: only 13% of their total income comes from forest resources. It could be much greater. As already discussed, the government policy that prevents indigenous people from full and open access to and use of forests products works against their interests. This is not unusual. Recent ethnic minority studies argue that such groups throughout the region have not benefited as much as lowlanders from rapid national economic growth (Baulch et al., 2007). In fact as I have pointed out, economic growth has created an even bigger gap between rich and poor, rural and urban, majority Kinh and ethnic minorities.

Question 4 (form B) in the Provincial Household Survey carried out in Muot village in , asked householders to provide information on annual income from different sources including wet rice, food crops, livestock, forest production, wage labour, and government

payments (Appendix 1). This questionnaire asked the householders to declare their total income and total expenses in each category. The pie chart shown in Figure 5.13 summarizes the proportion of income from different sources. It shows the dominant income of Muong people is derived from wet rice and food crop cultivation. The second main source of income is from livestock. Muong people raise cattle and poultry. Buffalos and cows are used as draught animals (Figure 4.3) and are also sold to raise money for big purchases or for savings. Chickens, ducks, pigs, and goats are also killed for meat but are mainly traded for cash.

**Figure 5.13. Income sources of Muong households in Muot village**



Source: *Data from the Provincial Poverty Household Survey, 2010.*

### **5.3.2. Skilled and unskilled employment and the matter of education**

The slow growth of Muong income is mainly due to their lack of education. Education has a profound impact on the development of labour skills. Muot villagers still show a high rate of illiteracy, and few villagers have attended secondary school. This lack of education and educational qualifications is closely related to their poor economic performance. This is not because they lack the ability to do well. Studies of indigenous highlanders have shown that they are very skillful (Breidlid, 2009, Sutthi, 1985, Chapman, 1978). The challenge is that these cultural skills are no longer relevant in a political context in which the state regulates



use of the forest and has prohibited shifting cultivation. Other skills, including literacy training, are vital for maintaining livelihoods. The returns on the investment of education directly affect the livelihood outcomes as illustrated by the positive correlation between the level of income and educational levels shown below.

In order to use SPSS to make a cross-table analysis of educational level and income per head, I assigned household incomes to one of five groups from low 0-0.5 million VND to high 2-2.5 million VND. The education data was divided into four levels: illiterate, primary school graduate, secondary school graduate, high school graduate, and higher education. The positive correlation between income and educational level shows that the higher the educational qualification that villagers have achieved, the higher the income they earn (Table 5.5).

### **5.3.3. Natural resource based sustainability**

The natural resource based view of sustainability is built on the relationship between pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development (Hart, 1995). Natural resource capability is often the consequence of the process of economic development. The Vietnam government has recently focused on economic development and ignored environment devastation. An obvious challenge to a liberal development policy is the Bauxite project in DakNong and DakLak province in Central Highlands. In a one-party state where people are routinely jailed for criticizing government policy, state governments often do what they intend to do despite cautions and protests of activists, scientists, and ordinary citizens. Vietnam has the world's third-largest reserves of bauxite, the raw material for aluminium found in the central highlands, and the government considers this natural resource a major benefit for economic development. As part of this plan the Prime Minister, Nguyen Tan Dung, called for support as it is "a major policy of the party and the state". The government has been seeking to attract US\$ 15 billion or more to invest in bauxite mining and aluminium refining projects by 2025 (*Report of National Assembly July 2009*).



While inspectors and their opponents argue the pros and cons of this project, life for indigenous minority farmers in nearby communities has already been negatively affected. A state controlled Dantri Newspaper report in May 2010 was critical of what is happening. The state government leaders have in the past asserted that ethnic minority groups in the central highlands should focus on agricultural plantation development; however economic achievements have been relatively limited while the life of local inhabitants faces high danger. “Bauxite exploitation has been defined as an important force for socio-economic development of the region”, Nguyen Manh Quan, director of heavy industries department, told the fifty scientists gathered at a seminar.

Poverty-reduction strategies typically focus on general reforms and service delivery to lowland rural communities. Services delivered to the poorest and most marginal communities where people depend so much on natural resources are less than satisfactory. The government policies imposed on mountainous highland communities concerning forest ownership, plantation development and forest protection prevent these communities from utilizing the natural resources at hand.

## **5.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have identified and discussed livelihoods resources, strategies and outcomes of resource use in Muot village. There are 198 households in Muot village. Because of limited time and budget I worked with just 154 households. I have analyzed Muong livelihoods using the sustainable livelihoods framework developed by Scoones (1998) but could not use participatory methods to the extent I had planned. My findings show that 45% of Muong live in poverty. Like other ethnic minority groups in Vietnam, Muong may have gradually improved their standard of living over recent years; however this remains difficult to establish with certainty and the significant number of poor people remains as a reminder of what needs to be done (Tachibana, Nguyen, & Otsuka, 2001; Walle & Gunewardena, 2001). The challenge of improving Muong livelihoods faces a lot of obstacles. The increasing socioeconomic gap between rich and poor is not easy to eliminate. There are two main causes of Muong’s poverty; low labour skills (poor human

capital) that leads to high unemployment, and inefficient government policies. From fieldwork findings and my practical experience in Muot village from June to November 2010, I have learnt that there is a strong connection between livelihood performance and educational achievement. My data shows that there is a positive correlation between higher education and income. Although there are individual cases where less educated householders have achieved high incomes, these are definitely exceptions to the rule.

This chapter also shows indirectly how recent economic development, modernization and national integration have ridden over the top of Muong culture and replaced many of the old values relating to subsistence production, reciprocity, dress and the form taken by cultural events such as marriage. However, Muong now seem to care more for matters of money and material matters of consumption than what has happened to their culture.

The most important matter that emerges from this review is that education must play an important role in future development.

# **CHAPTER SIX**

## **MUONG CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND THEIR FUTURE IMPACTS**

### **6.0. Introduction**

Chapter Five documented how education has a positive influence on livelihood status of Muot households. In this chapter, perceptions and attitudes of parents and students towards education and the role it might play in the future will be addressed. It presents and analyzes the fieldwork data and discusses the most significant factors that affect Muong children's educational performances.

As stated in Chapter One, my personal experience inspired me to carry out this study. Coming from the lowest and poorest social class (rural poor farming household), through hard work and good fortune I changed my future to become a university lecturer. I did not realize the extent of my good fortune until I realized how very few students from remote rural areas, especially those from indigenous mountainous areas, have access to a basic education through which they could qualify for and enter university. Even in these more prosperous times, access to higher education remains difficult, especially for those from remote and mountainous areas. In Thanh Hoa province this means that young people from 12 out of a total 27 districts who are considered to dwell in especially difficult and mountainous districts face difficulties that have more to do with their place of birth than their inherent ability. While one fourth of the total provincial population belongs to an ethnic minority, only 7.6% of those attending university are from minority families. Why do minority people have so few opportunities to achieve higher education? Is the entrance exam too difficult for them to pass? Is their school performance not good enough? Are minority students interested in higher education? To what extent does the lack of financial resources affect their schooling performance? Do their parents support or prevent them from entering higher education? In this chapter, I will attempt to answer these questions and match the results with the analysis and discussion presented in Chapter Five.

The data analyzed in this chapter was collected in Muot village from 75 Muong students who attend secondary and high school [Grade 6 to 12]. I focus on this group because students from this age group (12-19 years old) are able to recognize the importance of education to their future. Primary students are too young to understand and comment on these matters. Missing from the sample are eight university students studying in distant cities. I also conducted a number of interviews with four students who had already left school. Initially they were not willing to cooperate, as they felt embarrassed and reserved. However, after a certain time they started to understand that I just wanted to talk to them as a friend and researcher who did not intend to judge them.

My argument in this chapter is underpinned by the principle that “education is fundamental for a just, peaceful, adaptable society without poverty” and “critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capability of the people to address development issues” (UNESCO, 2009, p. 17).

In the later part of this chapter I also discuss the programs of the NGO World Vision that is now helping indigenous Muong get access to education and healthcare.

## **6.1. Muong Children’s Education: An overview**

As discussed earlier (4.3.2) Muong is the fourth largest population of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam. Like other ethnic minority groups, they have shared in recent economic growth. However, this gain is too limited and the socioeconomic gap between Muong, as well as other minorities, and Kinh is widening. This matter has arisen despite the fact that the state government has attempted to support and develop special programs for citizens in remote and disadvantaged areas.

According to data made available through the General Statistic Office (1998, 2002), education often runs parallel with socioeconomic status. For example, students from a wealthy region often have better and higher education than those from poor and difficult regions. This can largely be explained by the fact that wealthy regions invest more in

education, have better qualified teachers, better teaching and learning facilities, and better infrastructure. These are the most obvious reasons why students in urban and lowland areas have a higher rate of university entrance than those from remote mountainous areas.

Like the other 53 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam, illiteracy rates for the Muong are high. UNICEF (2005) reported that most of the 6% illiterate people in Vietnam live in remote rural and mountainous areas, and most of them are of ethnic minority background. There are many reasons for this. In Vietnam, literacy refers to the ability to read and write in Vietnamese, the national language which many do not speak. Minority children face multiple disadvantages: poverty, poor health, lack of a conducive and literate environment, poor educational facilities, and difficult physical conditions. Although the government has paid more attention to education in marginalized areas, it has not been effective because of the low quality of teachers. Research on educational participation in specially difficult and poor areas carried out among graduate students by Pham and Fry (2002) indicated that most university graduates refused to work in especially difficult remote areas even though they would be paid double the normal rate. There are few teachers available from the local area and Kinh teachers do not tend to speak local languages. Fortunately, partly because Muong language is so close to Vietnamese, Muong students have no trouble in understanding the language but this does not hold for other minority groups in isolated areas.

The Vietnamese government has been trying to develop literacy among indigenous minorities by promoting bilingual education. The aim of this bilingual program at primary level is to promote literacy in ethnic languages and facilitate learning of Vietnamese (UNDP, 2002). However, the programs have faced many difficulties to set up because each community has its own geographical and socio-cultural features. Cam Thuy is a minority and mountainous district of Thanh Hoa province; however, the educational curriculum for children in this community is no different from that used in lowland and urban areas. This is because Muong students can speak Vietnamese fluently and have no problem in understanding the content.

### 6.1.1. Increasing literacy rates over the period 2000-2008

Education is an important part of the national socioeconomic development *doi moi* process, and the Vietnamese government has promoted basic primary and secondary education for all (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001). In Vietnam, basic literacy is considered to have been achieved when a student has completed primary school. By this time they are expected to be able to read and write Vietnamese (UNDP, 2002). While Vietnamese is the language of instruction used in primary education, many ethnic minority children have no experience of Vietnamese before beginning school. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) evaluate the literacy rates only by considering their ability to read and write Vietnamese, not their local languages. Each ethnicity has its own language. For example, the Muong language, closest to Vietnamese, has a long history and remains the lingua franca within their communities. However, the Muong dialect has no formal written characters. The government policy has enjoyed some success and the enrolment rate of primary and secondary schools has increased significantly over the past decade.

Cam Thuy is one of many remote and mountainous districts in Thanh Hoa province where most Muong live. The report of Cam Thuy District's Division of Education and Training in 2010 showed that 99% of Muong children complete primary school; 95% complete secondary school; 57% complete high school, and 23% of students who graduate from high school go on to higher tertiary education: university, college, and vocational training. Children tend to gain primary and secondary education qualifications easily enough because tough examinations are no longer held at these levels. The government insists that all children complete a secondary education (Huynh, Duong, & Bui, 2002) in a policy known as secondary school popularization (*Phổ cập bậc trung học cơ sở*). However, the graduation level does not remain high for high school and higher education. This is because if they are to continue their education, children who finish secondary school must pass the high school level entrance exam. This examination is very competitive and difficult for those who have an average or poor school record. The principal reason for this is that the number of applicants exceeds the number of places available.

**Table 6.1. Secondary school enrolment rates by ethnic groups and gender**

Ethnic group	2000		2004		2008	
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	Girls
Kinh	65.5%	64%	82%	81.7%	97.2%	96.8%
Hoa (Chinese)	50.4%	53.1%	72.5%	73.1%	85.1%	87%
Khmer	23.8%	21.2%	48.5%	47%	65%	67.2%
<i>Central Highland</i>						
Gia-rai	15.2%	14.5%	38.1%	37.5%	58.7%	60.1%
Ba-na	9%	8.9%	24.8%	23%	65.2%	64.7%
Xo-dang	12.7%	7.1%	25%	20.7%	62.9%	57%
<i>Northern Uplands</i>						
Tay	47.1%	55.2%	64.5%	68.3%	76.1%	81%
Thai	33.6%	30.5%	48%	46.2%	67.3%	65.7%
Muong	50.8%	53.9%	68.7%	72.1%	81.2%	85%
Nung	37%	41.6%	48%	50.2%	61%	64.5%
Hmong	7.5%	1.6%	18.1%	16%	42%	40.8%
Dao	11.9%	11.8%	22%	23.7%	54.1%	57.2%

Source: *Data of educational survey by National Statistic Office of Vietnam in 2008.*

The table above shows the increased percentage of secondary school enrolment rate by ethnic group and gender from 2000 to 2008. The number of children completing primary school has also increased. The government policy to popularize secondary educational level has worked well but the capacity of available infrastructure and the lack of qualified teachers has slowed development down. It is not yet possible to extend this inclusive principle to high school level. This is why the high school examinations are so competitive. At present, each commune has one primary and one secondary school. Each district has three to four high schools depending on how wealthy it is.

My survey of children's education in Muot village in 2010 showed that there are 178 children between the ages of 6 and 18, and 16 of these had already left school. Of the 162 students attending school, 79 were in primary school, 41 were in secondary school and 34 were in high school.

Like Kinh children in rural lowland and urban areas, Muong school-age children rely on their parents materially and spiritually. They are dependent on their parents until they finish their university education. Owing to this dependence, the opportunity of attending school is decided by their parents. Throughout the conversations with Muot parents I realised that despite different economic backgrounds between households most parents expected their children to attain a good educational level and they were willing to pay for this. This type of attitude is timely because they started to realize that education could provide their children with a brighter future. This is why most Muot children have the opportunity to attend school.

In Vietnam, children start primary school at the age of six after they have attended three years in local village preschools. Each rural village has a preschool in which children socialize and learn the Vietnamese alphabet. Village preschools work under the supervision of the commune committee. Teachers working in village preschools are paid out of the commune budget at a rate fixed by local commune policies.



**Table 6.2. Number of children attending and who have already left school in Muot village by 2010**

	Primary school ( <i>grade 1 to grade 5</i> )	Secondary school ( <i>grade 6 to grade 9</i> )	High school ( <i>grade 10 to grade 12</i> )
Number of children attending school	79	41	34
Number of children who left school	0	5	11

Source: *This data was adopted from Provincial Household Survey in Muot village, 2010*

In Muot village preschool, there are six teachers who take care of about 45 toddlers. The data in Table 6.2 indicates that the younger generations are no longer illiterate. All village children complete primary school regardless of socioeconomic or geographic conditions. Mr Cao Tien Tien the head of Muot village had a long conversation with me and expressed his ideas openly (Box 6.1).

During six months of data collection exercises in Muot village, I found that most of the villagers with whom I talked have the same opinion as Mr Tien. They all share a common commitment: “I can make sacrifices so my children can get qualified education”. I was not surprised to hear that this commitment is also shared widely throughout poor lowland rural communities in Vietnam. Small holder farmers have started to realize that they are the lowest and poorest class in society. Their hard labour all year round does not make them wealthy; it does not improve their social status. Their children face a far greater number of obstacles and disadvantages in the competition to get a good education. The challenge of securing a future for their children is much more difficult for them than for parents from wealthy urban backgrounds.

### **Box 6.1 The views of the head of Muot village about education**

Muot village has more than 200 children including those who are in kindergarten and preschool. We are very proud that children in our village have improved their schooling performance in recent years. The reason is that in the past, our economic condition was too poor and the transport system was difficult. For example, students normally had to walk three kilometres to school every day. That is why many children dropped out of school earlier in the past. However, now all children can ride bicycles to school. Each family has an average of two to three bicycles. Parents can use one of them for daily tasks, and children can use a bicycle to go school. For the kids from grade 1 to grade 3, who may be too small to ride a bicycle, their parents are now willing to give them a ride to school and pick them up when school time is over every day. This is the main reason that 100% of children from our village complete primary school. There is no more illiteracy in my village.

However, there are some students dropping out of school at secondary and high school levels for various reasons. The main reason is the students themselves. They may be too lazy to study; they prefer to play rather than study. Plus their parents are not determined enough. As far as I know, no parents prevent their children from achieving better schooling and a higher education. In contrast, they encourage their children to study, and are willing to do everything possible to enable their children to achieve higher levels of education. I am an example. At this time I owe almost 25 million VND in loans (15 million from the Agricultural and Rural Development Bank, and 10 million from relatives) which I have taken out in order to support my daughter who is studying at Sam Son College. It is really a burden for us but I am willing to do so as long as my daughter can complete her study and get a good job after her graduation. We don't want our children to continue to be farmers like us. They need to escape from this status, and I think only education can help them.

Source: *Mr Cao T. T, the head of Muot village*

However, it is also important to clarify the meaning of their dedication and what they are prepared to sacrifice for their children. “Sacrifice” does not mean that they are prepared to die for it. It means they are willing to do everything they can no matter how hard it is so their children have chance to get an education. Another term people use here is “enough/full education”. It is not easy to define what level of education parents consider to be enough for their children. However, most parents explained that “enough education” refers to a national level which will enable their children to secure a well paid job, good enough to ensure a stable future consistent with their child’s ability.

### **6.1.2. Improving school performances: Experience from Muot village**

Due to historical and geographical factors, Muot village has the biggest population [198 households] in Cam Thanh commune. Unlike other villages, which are normally separated from the centre by streams, Muot village is connected to the commune centre by a comfortable asphalted road. Moreover, the village is not too far away from the commune. These physical and geographical factors strongly influence the livelihoods of Muot households and directly impact on school performance.

In this section I will discuss the schooling performance of Muot students [secondary and high school from grade 6 to grade 12] and explore favourable educational trends that are currently occurring.

Because of school schedules, I had to organize small group discussions in the evening. Each group had 10 students. With the strong support of local village leaders and parents, I was allowed to use the village meeting hall to organize gatherings for my focus group students. I sent a letter of invitation to every student two weeks in advance so that their parents would know the purpose of the meeting and allow their children to attend. All but two of the 75 invited students attended the group discussions summarized in Table 6.3.

Of the 75 students participating in the exercise, 66.7% were female. This figure partly presents the trend of primary/secondary school enrolment of Muong by gender declared by

the General Statistical Office in 2009 (table 6.2). The number of female students attending school is twice that of males.

**Table 6.3. Attendance of secondary and high school students at meetings**

Level of school	Number	Percentage
Secondary school	39	52.0
High school	34	45.3
Total	73	97.3
System	2	2.7
Total	75	100.0

**Gender: male/female**

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	25	33.3
Female	50	66.7
Total	75	100.0

Source: *Fieldwork data in Muot village, 2010.*

Because permission from the local commune was withheld, I could not observe how classes were conducted. Fortunately, I had a chance to meet one of the secondary school teachers Cao Thi Huyen who lives in Muot village. She has been teaching in Cam Thanh secondary school for 12 years, and as one of the first local indigenous minority teachers, she has acquired over the past few years a thorough understanding of the educational background of her Muong students. When I visited her as a colleague, I was warmly welcomed by her family and we had a long discussion about local education and Muot children.

**Box 6.2 The viewpoint of a secondary school teacher in Muong community**

I have been teaching in Cam Thanh secondary school for 12 years after I moved from another secondary school in Ba Thuoc district. More than 80% of students in Cam Thuy and Ba Thuoc districts are Muong. I am also Muong. In recent years Muong students in general and Muot students in particular have significantly improved their schooling performance. 100% Muot children are able to complete primary school; 96% complete secondary school; and almost 60% complete high school. Before 2000 this level of attendance and achievement was unknown. In 2008 Muot village got seven students into university, five in 2009, and nine this year, including some students studying at college level. In the past, we rarely had any students passing the entrance exam to university. However, this number is increasing. The reason is that most children have started to realize that they do not want to be farmers like their parents. They understand that education will give them a better chance to improve their social status and future careers. Moreover, most parents also agree that education is the only way for their children to improve their lives. They are willing to support their children's schooling no matter how poor or hard up they are. In the past, parents often had a feudal attitude that females did not need a higher education as they believed daughters were lost to their parents after they got married. Therefore, they were not willing to invest in a daughter's education. However, now they have changed their attitude and more female students have a chance to gain their degrees. In contrast, male students tend not to study as hard as females. Muot village has only 198 households and it is in a rural mountainous area but there are four snooker clubs in the village. This is not a feature of all rural areas but here in Muot village, every evening many boys gather at these clubs and play for fun and sometimes for cash until very late. I am not happy with the households who run snooker clubs and I have suggested to them to give up it but they are still there.

Source: *Mrs Cao Thi H, a Muot villager*

The interview with this teacher provided valuable guidelines on the basis of which I designed a set of questionnaires that I used to find out more from Muot children. The result of the survey is more about their educational experience.

There are some standard evaluations of school performance and educational returns in Vietnam. First, children's school performance (from primary school to high school level) is measured by the academic grade they earn every semester. There are two semesters in an academic year. At the end of each semester, an academic transcript is prepared on every student, which covers school performance, including academic points gained and a personal evaluation of behaviour and attitude to learning. This is entered in a book, which makes up a report, which is given to the parents twice a year.

**Table 6.4. School performance of Muot students in 2010**

Gender	What academic point do you have this year 2010?				
	Excellent (9-10 points)	Very good (7.5-8.9 points)	Good (6.5-7.4 points)	Standard (5-6.4 points)	Poor- lower standard (0-4.9 points)
Male	0	0	2	20	3
Female	1	2	16	31	0
Total (N=75)	1	2	18	51	3

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010*

I asked students to write down an answer to the question, "What academic points do you have in 2010?" The academic grade system in Vietnam is from 0 to 10: 9-10 is excellent

equivalent to A and A+ in the European academic system; 7.5-8.9 is very good, equivalent to B+; 6.5-7.4 is good, equivalent to B; 5-6.4 is standard, equivalent to C+ to B-; 0-4.9 is poor to lower standard. The finding from 75 Muot students on this questionnaire indicates that 92% gained standard to good results. The number of students who attained a very good to excellent grade was the same as the number who achieved only a poor or below standard grade. However, the significant difference here is that most female students achieved the highest grades (4%). No male student attained very good or excellent points in this group. Students who fail to achieve at least an average grade in two thirds of their courses conducted over two semesters (5.0), or if they get under 3.5 for Mathematics and Vietnamese literature, cannot continue to a higher class grade. This means that they have to repeat the same grade for at least one more year and remain there until they reach the required standard. The findings presented in Table 6.5 show that female students have better school records than males. Why is this the case? The answers given to the question “How many hours do you spend on your home study?” is revealing. Although school performance depends on many factors other than this such as parental encouragement, the family’s financial capability, individual perception, and the individual’s academic ability, it was found that females gave more than twice the amount of time to homework than males.

**Table 6.5. Time spent on home study per day by Muot students**

	How many hours do you spend on your home work per day?			
	30 minutes	1 hour	2 hours	more than 3 hours
Male	4	5	5	11
Female	4	9	14	23

Source: *Data of fieldwork survey in Muot village, 2010.*

Answers to this question showed that 45.3% of Muot village students spent more than three hours a day on homework. Of the total number of students answering the questionnaire 67.6% or 34 were females. I use the word homework to account for all study activities of students out of school. Only 10.6% students spent less than thirty minutes on homework.

According to the teacher quoted above, both female and male children in Muot village in particular, and in rural areas in Vietnam in general, are strongly influenced by their peers. For example, if a village has a tradition of elevated academic achievement created by former generations, the chances are that successive generations will also be high performers. In contrast, if children in a village tend to leave school early and give priority to play, their peers are more than likely to follow them. From what I observed in Muot village, male students tended to fit into the “play” rather than the “study” category. They often gathered in groups in the evening and at night to play snooker and make cash bets on the outcome. They also played other gambling games such as cards or bet on soccer scores. Some students pursue activities that extend into a realm of misconduct that goes well beyond the reach of their parents. The parent of a child who had a heavy gambling debt told me her sad story. (Box 6.3)

### **Box 6.3 Story of a parent whose son gambled**

My son used to be a good boy; we did not have to worry about him. He had a very good academic point average in primary school. When he was in grade 6 and 7, he maintained a good level of performance. However, he started to fail in grade 8. He joined some of his friends to play at school and at home. He started to play truant; something he never did before. After dinner, he would leave home to join his village friends until late into the night. Finally, I learnt that he was in debt because of his gambling. He sold his bicycle to pay his debts and has had to pawn everything he has. A few months ago, I had to sell 200 kilograms of corn to pay his debt. We hit him and advised him a lot but he seems to have become addicted to gambling.

Source: *Mrs Cao Thi Q, a Muot villager*



The story is repeated by other families in Muot village. The parents involved consider it disastrous because it ruins their child's future. It shuts the door on their chance of success. This is also given as a reason why so many parents in Muot village strongly object to the households who organize snooker clubs.

Are Muong and Muot children aware of the importance of education to their future? The answer to this question in my survey reveals that 89.3% of the 75 students providing a response agree that a good education will provide them with more opportunities in the future (Table 6.6). Five secondary school students replied that education costs too much money and is useless for their future. Only three students provided a neutral response. The fact of the matter is that while most students are aware of the importance of education for their future prospects, many of them tend to choose play rather than study. The response made me wonder if those students who have a poor academic record are influenced by other factors such the presence or absence of parental support, or lack of money.

**Table 6.6. Muot student's perception of education**

Student response	What do you think about the relationship between education and your future career?		
	good education will provide more opportunities in the future	Education costs too much money and no career prospects	I have no idea at all
Secondary school	33	5	3
High school	34	0	0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

The question of parents encouraging or discouraging them revealed that 94.7% of students reported that their parents encourage and want them to study. Those who are not encouraged by their parents were in a minority of 5.3%.

**Table 6.7. Parents encouragement for children's study**

Answer	Do your parents encourage you to study?	
	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes	71	94.7
No	4	5.3
Total	75	100.0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

According to teacher Huyen, parental encouragement is now higher than ever before and this is one of the most important reasons Muong students have improved their school performance. Parental encouragement springs from the perception of their own subordinate status as the lowest class and the poorest people in society. There are some government officials who live in Muot village and farmer families can easily compare their socioeconomic backgrounds with them. The concern of parents is illustrated in different ways: being willing to offer financial support for books and tutorials, spending more time to observe their children's progress, not forcing children to earn money by taking on paid jobs after school and so forth. In the recent past students were expected to temporarily drop out of school to help their parents during busy harvesting or cultivating seasons. However, this no longer happens in Muot village.

Teacher Huyen also acknowledged that although many children, especially males, have poor results, the general rate of school performance has improved significantly.

#### 6.1.4. Muong's high rate of school dropouts

One of the major reasons why ethnic minorities remain significantly poorer and less well qualified to obtain well paid employment than Kinh is because they generally have lower levels of education (ADB, 2002). This is documented by figures available from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam which show that the school dropout rate for minority children is higher than for Kinh.

**Table 6.8. Enrolment rate of primary, secondary and high school education**

Gross enrolment rate by urban rural, gender, ethnicity of household head in Vietnam (Unit: %)						
	2006			2008		
	Primary school	Secondary school	High school	Primary school	Secondary school	High school
<b>Urban-Rural</b>						
Urban	101.2	96.7	85.7	101.1	96.9	86.9
Rural	106.0	95.8	70.1	105.1	95.6	70.0
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	105.2	96.9	72.6	105.1	96.4	69.6
Female	104.7	95.0	74.6	103.2	95.3	78.3
<b>Ethnicity of household head</b>						
Kinh	103.5	97.5	76.9	103.3	97.4	78.5
Tay	100.3	119.0	86.2	106.8	104.4	75.8
Thai	127.8	92.6	60.1	112.2	103.5	58.8
Hoa	95.7	91.0	83.9	106.0	95.9	56.2
Khome	124.0	67.0	29.1	104.6	77.0	29.5
Muong	105.7	96.4	59.0	106.4	105.7	56.3
Nung	104.2	110.6	71.2	109.0	105.1	53.3
H'Mong	112.0	56.3	15.1	109.9	58.7	14.0
Dao	116.5	79.0	32.3	115.9	69.5	26.9
Others	111.6	77.2	41.3	106.9	79.6	37.5

Source: General Statistics Office, *Education statistics: Vietnam, 2008*

The educational survey for 2008 showed high rates of primary and secondary school enrolment for Muong children. However the enrolment rate in high school for 2006 and 2008 was very low. The reasons given for this high rate of school dropout include:

- a. Muong and other minorities live in remote areas and children find it difficult to attend a school which is far away from their homes.
- b. There are a limited number of high schools in each district. Roads and transport are relatively poor. There are only three high schools in Cam Thuy district in a total land area of 42,586.19 square kilometers<sup>21</sup>. Cam Thuy High Schools 1, 2, and 3 are located nearby the district towns.
- c. It is also important to know that most Kinh and wealthy groups live in urban areas including district towns, and commune centers. Students from Cẩm Quý, Cẩm Giang, and Cẩm Thanh communes have to travel 10 to 15 kilometres every day by bicycle to their nearest high school. This difficulty plays a part in discouraging students from continuing their education.

**Table 6.9.** Muot village students journey to school

N=75	Do you have any problem getting to school?		
Student response	Not too far and comfortable	Very far and lack good transportation	We should have bus or public transport to school
Secondary school student	30 (40%)	1 (1.3%)	8 (10.6%)
High school student	3 (4%)	25 (33%)	6 (0.8%)

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

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<sup>21</sup> The data was adopted from Thanh Hoa Statistics Office: Thanhhoa.portal.org

Table 6.9 shows that most secondary school students are happy with their journey to school. The secondary school is located not too far away from the commune centre (two to four kilometers), and students from Muot village usually take 15 minutes to travel to school by bicycle. In contrast, the journey for high school students takes an hour. There is no bus or other public transport available. This is one of the reasons why the dropout rate suddenly increases between secondary school and high school.

There are many other reasons for the higher dropout rate. Muong and other minorities tend to be poorer, and are less likely to be able to afford school fees and other expenses such as books and additional tutorials. The role of tutorials or extramural instruction is important in both rural and urban areas in Vietnam. Teachers often organize classes in their homes. If students want to develop a deeper and better knowledge they usually have to pay to attend the teachers' home classes. This happens everywhere in Vietnam although the state government discourages teachers from doing this. There is a demand-yields-supply equation at work here that seems to be a force of nature. Both students and parents encourage teachers to open their homes for tutorials because they want to be sure they will pass the tough exams to high school and university. The practice receives a lot of support but few poor families can afford extra classes, let alone school fees, even though the government has tried to help the poor and encourage them to achieve an education by reducing fees, providing subsidies for books and clothes and so on. This assistance has not been extended to include additional tuition.

### ***Opinion of children who quit school early.***

According to Muot village's head, Muot village has the lowest percentage of early leavers in Cam Thanh commune. He explained that this is because Muot village has a good road which connects outlying houses with the commune centre. Moreover, the village has created a better study environment and expectations in the last decade. I finally managed time to meet and talk with four children (three boys and one girl) who left school early. By the time I met them the three boys were 12, 15, and 17 years old. The girl was 17 years old. Surprisingly when I asked "Do you think education is important to your future?" they

all said “yes”. They started to share different stories and when I asked why they decided to leave school early they had no hesitation in telling me. The three boys came from typically underprivileged backgrounds: a poor family, low parental involvement in encouraging engagement with school, indulging in play rather than focusing on study, very poor schooling performance, going out often at night. The girl’s story was different. She was a very good student but she left school because her family was too poor to pay the fees and unwilling to sacrifice anything more to support her schooling. She said that even if she had passed the high school entrance exam, she would not have had enough money to pay the costs. Higher education was therefore out of reach.

#### **6.1.5. Relationship between Muong parental income and their children’s schooling performance**

It is often argued that better economic conditions result in better school performance for children. This statement in general is true. However, it does not automatically hold that the children of parents who have a high income or ready access to money will make better students.

Wealthy regions normally have both enough good teachers and support equipment; teachers are better qualified and there is more developed public infrastructure. Students in wealthier areas have better conditions and more opportunities to achieve higher levels of education. However, it has also been observed contrary to expectations, that in wealthy areas rich students do not necessarily perform better at school than students from poor backgrounds. Data collected in the microcosm of Muot village illustrates the pervasiveness of this observation. The three students who have very good and excellent academic points all come from poor families. The first case of a grade 9 student Pham Thi H is famous in the commune for her excellent school record maintained over successive years. Hoa was born into a very poor family, her father is illiterate, and she has an older sister who does not match her outstanding record. She was unassuming and a bit shy when she told me the story of her success. Another question was designed to find out what the students would select as the single most important factor out of parental income, parental encouragement,

school facilities and teacher quality, and peer pressure as the most important factor influencing school performance.

**Box 6.4 The views of a student**

My family is poor because my parents have no salary. They work hard but remain poor. I want to be a teacher or a doctor in the future. I do not want to be a rice-grower. I hope I will pass the exam to university. My parents will borrow money for me to study. When I finish my study I will pay them back. At that time I may have the chance to help my parents.

*When I asked her what her biggest motivation to study was she told me:*

Four years ago, I witnessed my dad's sorrow when he could not get his motorbike drivers' license. He had been riding a motorbike for seven years without any licence, but recently the police made licences mandatory. However, in order to get a licence, applicants have to pass a test made up of two parts: theory and practice. Unfortunately, my dad could not pass his theory part because he could not read or write. That is why he was only able to ride his motorbike within the village for a time. Luckily, last year, they organized a special test for illiterates and my dad passed it. Now he has his licence and he can go to the town or city on his own motorbike. That story helped me understand that I need to study hard. Knowledge helps me in many ways.

Source: *Pham Thi H, a student Muot village*

**Table 6.10. Students' evaluation of factors that influence their performance**

Factor that affects your school performance most		
Student responses	Number of responses	Percentage (N=75)
Parents' financial status	17	22.7
Parental encouragement	45	60.0
School facilities and teachers ability	8	10.7
Peers in the village	4	5.3
Total	75	100.0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

The findings on Table 6.10 show that parental income (27.7%) was not what the students consider to be the most important factor that influences their educational performance. Rather 60% of the 75 students in the survey considered parental encouragement to be the most important factor. This appeared to count for a lot when considering why children from wealthy families scored badly. Children from poor families are more likely to witness the difficult (if not miserable) way their parents earn a living. They appeared to be much more aware of their family status. They acknowledged that by studying hard and achieving better academic results was a way for them to escape from poverty. In contrast, children from wealthier families did not appear to fully appreciate the effort required to make money and would rather enjoy the privileges earned by their parents wealth than worry about their future. Parents who were poor farmers also tended to encourage their children to study hard because they did not want their children to struggle like them.

This does not mean that all children from wealthier families refuse to take advantage of enhanced educational opportunities. It is just that the high income of parents does not in itself ensure children will succeed in study. Most appreciate the opportunity and are aware



of how money is earned and spent. What is very clear, however, is that parents with a high income are better able to help their children both access and take up the advantages offered in a higher education.

## 6.2. Education and Employment: Experiences from Muot village

### 6.2.1. Higher education for Muong Minority students: A solution for success

I started discussions on this issue by getting Muot village students to compare the level of education and income of government officers (GOs) and smallholder farmers. The 75 students were asked to compare the level of education between officers and farmers based on what they perceived. Farmers and government officers belong to different classes in rural Vietnam. Farmers are seen simply as rice-growers who spend most of their time working in the fields close their village. Normally, they do not receive a salary or government payment. The only exceptions are the families of soldiers who died in the war or veterans. Government officers are employed by various state sector agencies and are paid a government salary. According to the land policy of Vietnam, once a villager is employed by the government his allocated portion of collective land is taken away. This means he no longer has land on which to grow rice. However, his children and spouse may retain their right of land use.

**Table 6.11. Students' comparison of educational level between farmer and government officer**

Number of N=75	Do you think farmers or government officers are more likely to have a higher education?	
Student response	Peasants have higher education than government officers	Government officers have a higher education than peasants
Secondary school	2	37
High school	1	35

Source: *Data from fieldwork survey in Muot village, 2010.*

This question required the 75 students to compare the educational level of farmers and government officers<sup>22</sup> based on what they might observe around them.

Not surprisingly, 96% students believed that government officers have a higher standard of education than farmers and earn more money (Table 6.12). This is because recruitment of officials is normally selective and it requires educational qualifications. For example, teachers in primary or secondary school are required to have at least a college or bachelors degree. High school teachers may require a masters degree.

I believe that if students are aware of the income disparity between farmers and government personnel, the awareness will have an impact on their motivation for study. In my survey Muot students were asked to compare the income between farmers and government officers. The findings from Table 6.12 showed that 93% of Muot village students thought that government officers had a higher and more stable income than peasants did.

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<sup>22</sup> Peasant in this context refers to smallholder farmers who earn their living from agricultural production. Their income is mainly from irrigated rice cultivation. Government officer refers to the people who work for the government sector and receive a salary. Once an officer takes up his appointment as a government officer, he does not necessarily have to grow rice or do other food crop activities.

**Table 6.12. Students' comparison of farmer and government officer incomes**

Student response (N=75)		Do you think farmers or government officers have a higher and more stable income?	
		Government officers have a higher income than farmers	Farmers have a higher income than G.Os
Grade of student	Secondary school	34	5
	High school	36	0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

It is clear that students of secondary and high school age understand the financial gains to be made from academic achievement. It is known by most children that government officers, who have a higher education than farmers, have higher and more stable incomes. Depending on their level of education the minimum standard payment is 830,000 VND per month which is a lot higher than the income of farmers which averages out at about half this, between 300,000 to 500,000 VND per month.

It is always fairly easy to see the wealth of a rural family. A family with a high income is expected to live in a good house made of permanent materials, run motorbikes in good condition, own a TV and other consumer goods. In Muot village, 55% of households own Chinese motorbikes which cost from between 2 million and 5 million VND; the 20% who do not have motorbikes use bicycles; 10-15% have second hand Japanese or new Vietnamese motorbikes which cost from 10 to 30 million VND per unit. It is not a really a “show off” culture but people are still able to indicate to others how well off they are.

### **6.2.2. The story of “urban-job seekers” in Muot village**

In the course of field work I interviewed several Muot householders whose husbands, wives or children had left the village to seek jobs in urban areas. Based on what I recorded, this is what I learnt of their experience, their successes and failures, frequency and amount of remittances they were able to earn and send in relation to their educational level.

#### **Case study of Pham Thi N**

The first case study is a householder, Mrs Na, who is 56 years old and has two sons, now 30 and 25 years old. Both sons have been living in Ho Chi Minh City for many years and first went to earn and send money home in the form of remittances. Her first son left home after he finished high school in 1999. When I visited his house and had an informal conversation with him, nobody in his family knew what the son was doing other than that he had no stable job. In 2007, he had returned home with a few- months old baby boy he said was his son. While working at a textile factory he had fallen in love with a girl; however, they did not have enough money to afford a wedding and shortly after the baby was born, the girl left him. He decided to bring the baby home for his parents to take care of and then returned to the city to look for another job. The householder, Viet, said his son's life in the city was very hard. He had never been able to send any money back home because his income was only just enough to cover his personal expenses, so I did not learn the story of the younger son. However, he made it clear that neither of his sons wanted to live in the home village as they could not find well paid work and did not want to be farmers.

#### **Seasonal migration case study**

The second account is about a group of labourers who engage in seasonal migration. In Muot village this involves between 20 and 30 men, a group which includes married and unmarried men who leave in search of additional income over the spring and winter seasons. The only jobs they can usually find is to work as a builder's labourer. They have someone who acts as an agent in urban areas and contacts those looking for work with

contractors. When a vacancy comes up, this group gets ready to leave home for a temporary, stipulated period. These contracted jobs normally last for two to four months depending on the size of the project. In order to optimize the amount of money to send home, the workers minimize their expenses by crowding into substandard accommodation and keeping money spent on food and other necessities to a bare minimum. These men tend to return home in time to harvest the rice and prepare the land for the next crop. They make up a considerable part of the village labour force.

This temporary migration of unskilled labour is difficult and poorly paid. Remittances are limited. The men rarely enter stable jobs, and travelling costs are expensive. Their temporary absence, though, helps their families cover some expenses or short term reinvestments for crops such as purchasing breeding stock, fertilizers, production tools, and paying children's school fees.

### **Skilled migrants**

The experience of skilled migrants who have higher education is quite different. There are 57 Muot villagers who have completed a higher educational qualification such as a bachelors or masters degree in the last 10 years. One fifth of them returned to their home district of Cam Thuy after they graduated. Included amongst them are teachers, doctors and accountants. The rest live in Ho Chi Minh City, Ha Noi and other cities.

The best known 'migrant' in this category is a Muong from Muot who rose to achieve one of the highest positions in the government of Vietnam. Mr Quach Le T was born into a very poor family and his mother died early. After returning from service in the army in the early 1970s, he entered university and after finishing his bachelors degree got a job in Vietnam's parliament. He quickly showed his competence and was promoted again and again to higher positions. He finally rose to become a General Government Inspector, one of the key players in government. His success story has had a strong influence on the next generation not only in Muot village but also in the entire Muong community. Muong mention his name with pride as an example to learn from and follow. He has challenged the misconception that poor minority people have no chance of achieving higher education and

an elevated social status. He also serves as an example to younger generations of Muong that educational achievement can help lift people to a higher position in society.

Mr Quach Le T has made a tremendous contribution to local social development as an exemplary case of what can be achieved by hard work, determination and applying ones intelligence to learning. His story will be told from generation to generation, and according to Muot villagers. He is loved and respected by all.

### 6.3. Muong Students' Attitude toward Education

#### 6.3.1. Increased awareness of the importance of education for career development

Unlike other minority groups who live in communities quite separated from the Kinh majority, Muong have a very close relationship with Kinh. They are more readily affected by external socioeconomic conditions and friends (Huynh et al., 2002) and it is to be expected that their attitude towards education should be close to that of Kinh.

From the findings presented in Table 6.13 above, 89.3% of Muot village students think that a good education provides more opportunities for a future career. Only 6% think that education costs too much money and promises little for the future. 1.3% gave a neutral response. The focus group of students who took part in the survey were from 12 to 18 years old, who are considered mature enough to realize what is important for their future. Given that most Muot students believe education could help them find a career, what sort of career were they interesting in pursuing?

**Table 6.13. Preference indicated by Muot students**

Student Response (N=75)	What kind of job do you plan for your future?						
	Teacher	Doctor	Farmer	Administrative worker	Engineer	Business sector	Others
Male	2	3	0	0	9	14	0
Female	17	6	1	13	3	5	2

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

In my survey I asked about their preferred future career, most indicating that teaching is the most attractive job for female students (22.6%), and business sector work most attractive for male students (18.6%). The second most attractive job for female students was an administrative position in a government department. For males, engineering is the second choice as they believe it is a profession in which they can earn more money as well as allowing for greater physical activity than an administrative role. Only one student (1.3%) selected farming.

From these results, it appears that most of Muot village's more academic children plan to leave their home village to search for a better future in urban areas. If female students who want to be teachers or administrative/government officers, keep to their current preference and achieve the necessary qualifications, they could well return to the commune or their home districts after they finish their education. The critical question is why do 98.6% of Muong children reject their parent's farmer status? Clearly, a higher income earning capacity has a lot to do with it, but it must also involve a consideration of the comparative quality of life.

### **6.3.2. Parents' role in school performance**

Parents have the most influence in both orienting and motivating their children to achieve better grades.

In many societies, children may be financially independent by the time they reach 18 years and can decide the future for themselves. In Vietnam, most children continue to rely on their parents for both financial and psychological support well beyond this. Parents can also direct or decide what career path their children will take. For example, if parents want their children to achieve academically and they can invest money and time on their education then they are unlikely to insist that they help out with daily production activities. Parental encouragement positively affects children's school performance no matter how poor or wealthy they are.

Vietnamese culture was significantly influenced by Confucianism during the one thousand year period of China's domination in Vietnam. Confucianism allowed parents to have supreme power to educate their children. Parents were always right and children rarely had an opportunity to speak out their opinions. This cultural influence has remained until the present. However, children have started to voice their own ideas and decide what they want to do. Vietnamese law strictly prohibits parents from using violence on their children, though most parents continue to hit their children when they make a mistake.

**Table 6.14. Muong parent's attitude toward education for their children**

How do you evaluate the role of education in your child's future?	Number of responses	Percentage
Very important	17	11.0
Important	132	85.7
Not very important	3	1.9
Not important at all	1	0.6
Total	153	99.4
Invalid data	1	0.6
Total	154	100.0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

The findings in Table 6.14 point out that 85.7% of Muot village parents consider education important to their children's future; 11% consider it very important. An awareness of the contribution education makes to increasing their chances in life is growing because people



see how the gap between socio-economic groups is getting wider. Most rural farmer householders now recognize that they are the poorest and the most disadvantaged. They also know that education can help their children change their social class and have a better life. As discussed in Chapter Five, most parents are well aware of the difficulty they have to face when their children pursue higher education. Having a low and unstable income makes it a real challenge to afford children's education. In order to have a better understanding of Muot parents' willingness to support their children's education, they were asked to answer the question stated in Table 6.15 with different options.

**Table 6.15. Parental support for children's education**

Do you think you will support your children through to higher education?		
Parent response	Number of response	Percentage (N=154)
I can afford my child to pay for education from the family's income.	12	7.8%
I will encourage my children to enter higher education even though I may have to borrow money.	95	62%
I really want my children to have higher education but it is beyond my financial capability	38	24%
Education is not necessary for my children because it will not make a positive contribution to their prospects.	8	5.2%

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

In a multiple choice question designed to find out what parents were able or prepared to do to support their children's higher education I posed the alternatives above (Table 6.15). 94.8% of parents in Muot village expect their children to be able to achieve a higher education; however, only 7.8% anticipated being able to pay for this out of their family income; 62% are willing to support their children's educational opportunities even if they have to borrow money to do so; and 24% expected their children to qualify for advancing their educational achievement but answered that they would be unable to support them.

The Muong's positive attitude toward education was the principal finding of the research and this was again evident in their willingness to, if necessary, go into debt to support their children. Most Muot families are poor (with an average annual income of \$ US 200-\$ US250 per person), and can rarely afford university expenses. The magnitude of this challenge is made clear by a study of a group of university students carried out by Ha Noi National Economic University (2008). Their results show that each university student in Ha Noi spends an average of \$US850-\$US1,200 per year. This means that each Muong family whose child wants to study at university level in Ha Noi could expect to pay five times their annual income for each year their child studies. The question is where can they get the money, and how can they make up the missing amount? From my fieldwork diary I see that 90% of households whose children study in Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, and other cities have to borrow money from the bank. Some of them borrow money from relatives. They all believe that when their children graduate, they will get good jobs in a city and send money back home to pay off the debt.

#### **6.4. NGO's programs and actions**

There is a well-known nationwide Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) World Vision Vietnam (WVV known as *Tầm Nhìn Thế Giới* in Vietnamese) that works in Thanh Hoa province, and has an office in Cam Thuy district town. WVV started work in Vietnam in the early 1960s when it was active in South Vietnam. In the early days it provided support for homeless people then extended into health and education services for poor children and orphans. However, following the end of the war in 1975 it was closed down. In 1990 it

officially opened again and was allowed to set up an office in Ha Noi. Since then WVV has undertaken a wide range of development work in which it has collaborated with the Vietnamese government and other national NGOs.

In Thanh Hoa province the WVV has made a considerable contribution to poverty reduction and hunger eradication, especially in northwestern districts. The local office in Cam Thuy district town focuses on three main areas of development: livelihood, social development, and community participation. The Area Development Program (ADP) of World Vision Vietnam (WVV) in the Cam Thuy district focuses on:

- **Agriculture:** ADP works with the poor and the sub-poor identified by the Ministry of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). Cam Thuy has a population of 110,250 made up of 23,546 households of which 90% are farmers. Through ADP, WVV aims to increase incomes in the target communes and villages through agricultural and non-agricultural activities.
- **Education:** As part of its acknowledgement of the importance of education to socioeconomic development for remote mountainous communities, Cam Thuy ADP targets access to quality education for children, especially poor children and those who are highly vulnerable: children living with disabilities, and children living in especially difficult circumstances. The program attempts to create an effective and healthy educational environment by raising parent awareness of the value of education.
- **Health:** Cam Thuy ADP works to improve the health status of the community especially that of children and women.
- **Capacity building and sponsorship:** Through Leadership Development projects, the ADP works with communities to help local people develop their skills and confidence. It assists 4,784 registered children, who are considered to be representative of their communities, to build enthusiasm for community work, develop living skills, and promote pride in achieving distinction.

#### **NGO-World Vision's role in Cam Thanh commune and Muot village**

Cam Thanh is one of the poorer communes in a relatively remote mountainous area which gets support from World Vision Vietnam. Cam Thuy Area Development Program has carried out many projects to improve education and healthcare, secure a clean water supply, and has contributed to livelihoods development. The project provides money for equipment and training. The vice-chairwoman of Cam Thanh commune provided me with the following information regarding World Vision Vietnam's, Cam Thuy ADP activities over the past ten years.

**Education:** From the early 2000s to 2010, Cam Thuy ADP has provided Cam Thanh commune with \$US 35,000 to buy school equipment such as blackboards, student desks, build school laboratories and libraries. The fund has also been used to provide professional training for local teachers. World Vision is particularly well-known in the entire Thanh Hoa province as well as indigenous poor districts because of its focus on education. Local people highly appreciate the contribution of World Vision's programs.

**Table 6.16. Evaluation of Muot villagers on World Vision Vietnam**

In all of the areas in which WVV has invested, which do you believe is the most valuable development?			
		Number of responses	Percentage
	Education	50	32.7
	Healthcare service	65	42.5
	Human rights	2	1.3
	Livelihood skills and development	34	22.2
	Very limited contribution	2	1.3
	Total (number of households)	153	100.0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

The survey found that the area in which WVV investment was most appreciated was healthcare services, followed by educational support. By providing funds for education and healthcare, World Vision is considered to be the most practical and hands-on NGOs in Thanh Hoa province. The survey also acknowledged that most programs and projects have been implemented through the local district administration or commune committees. However, World Vision is rarely able to work directly with their focus groups and come to grips with their needs, and filtering aid through state agencies does not guarantee that optimum procedures will be followed.

***Healthcare projects:*** World Vision has given special attention to healthcare improvement, especially for infants, the disabled and poor children, women especially pregnant women. Between 50 and 80 women in Muot village have received support from the project which has provided medicine and critical equipment for the commune medical centre. Each year the Cam Thuy ADP provides vaccines for infants and pregnant women. The project also organizes workshops to spread healthcare knowledge to young and pregnant women to increase their awareness of sexual health issues and how to protect themselves from infection.

Their clean water program organizes workshops to instruct local people on how to manage water, get clean water, operate water purifiers, protect water sources, and other scientific information concerning drinking water. However, the equipment is not cheap and not all poor rural households can afford to buy the recommended equipment. Muot villagers continue to use natural water from the mountains around them.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented data collected in the course of fieldwork from adults and students, using a questionnaire and conducting focus group discussions. The questionnaire was handed to students at the end of each discussion. All the students were willing to participate in the exercises; they were outspoken and active. They found the exercises useful. The information collected shows that both Muong students and their parents are clearly aware of the role of education and its importance for the future. This awareness has

increased over recent years and owing to the rapidity with which economic development has advanced, the Muong of Muot village have willingly accepted socioeconomic integration into majority Kinh society. It is now much easier for people to compare the level of education and living conditions of the Kinh and the Muong. The study also indicated that there many factors affecting the school performance of Muong students; however parents have by far the biggest influence. The lack of money to pay for education can be overcome in different ways. In order to allow children to advance their studies, poor families are willing to borrow money from banks or seek other funding sources. Their willingness to invest in their children's education indicates that Muong are trying to change their status. Muong also share a strong belief that not only can education help them to improve their quality of life, it can also secure a better future for their children.

# **CHAPTER SEVEN**

## **LIVELIHOOD VULNERABILITY AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN MUONG'S FUTURE**

### **7.0. Introduction**

In previous chapters I have presented information relating to the livelihood structure and educational situation of farmer households in Muot village within the framework of sustainable livelihoods. In this chapter I extend this analysis to discuss the main issues facing the rural poor of Muot village and the wider national situation characterized by the increasing socioeconomic gap between rich and poor, urban and rural areas, and the majority Kinh and minority peoples, as a significant manifestation of a deeply rooted problem.

As argued by Sabrina Tavernise (2012) in a study of the educational gap between the rich and poor, the gap in schooling achievement between these two groups is widening while education remains an essential tool to earn a better living. Pickett and Wilkinson (2009) argues that it is not only poor people who suffer from the socioeconomic inequality, but also the majority of the population. People in a society where incomes are relatively equal have a lower level of stress, higher levels of trust, better health, are more secure and more readily enter into cooperative behavior.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part I discuss imbalances in the livelihood structure; how poverty, unemployment, and a sense of cultural loss keep people back. In the second part I discuss the potential contribution that could be made by education to Muong socioeconomic development. In the third part, the conclusion, I outline the contribution made by the study. This is divided into two parts: advantages and challenges arising out of the research; and the personal benefit, that I have gained from the research.

In this chapter I present the principal findings of my research, that education is critically important if Muong are to improve their standard of living and achieve socioeconomic

development. My argument in this chapter is based mainly on the findings presented in previous chapters; what I have learnt from fieldwork in Muot village, and the analysis of the situation made possible by the sustainable livelihood approach. Muong cannot develop without education. From this viewpoint, my next step is to formulate my research in such a way that it will convince local administrators (from village to provincial level) to provide additional support for education for poor children living in remote areas. I hope more investment in human resource improvement through education will be an outcome of this study.

## **7.1. Vulnerable livelihoods and the issue of poverty issue for Muong in Muot village**

### **7.1.1. Lack of balance between livelihood resources and vulnerability context**

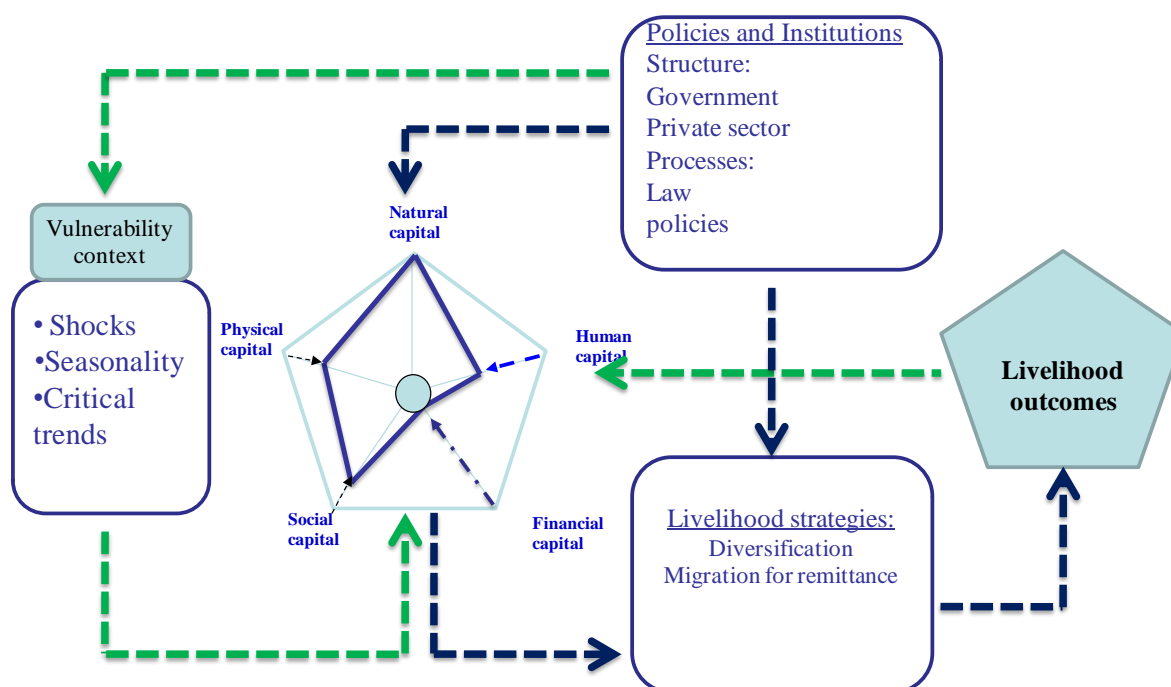
The term livelihood does not only mean what people do in order to make a living, but also access to, and the use made of resources that provide them with the capability to secure a satisfactory living. This is subject to several risk factors they must consider if they are managing their resources successfully. They must also take into account the institutional policy context that will directly or indirectly affect their livelihood achievement (Ellis and Allison 2004). In my research I have come to consider poor human capital as the principal cause of Muong poverty and argue that human capital can be improved by better education.

Livelihood resource availability and use are the most important factors for improving standards of living and form a necessary precondition for the prosperity of any household. In Chapter Five, I analyzed the livelihood resources of Muong households in Muot village and presented the imbalance between different forms of capital. Figure 5.8 (p.168) documented that 97.4% Muong households have sufficient natural capital; 63.4% evaluate their human capital as standard; while social capital remains quite high. However, financial and physical (infrastructure) capital remain the most vulnerable assets. The findings from Chapter Five indicated that 81.7% Muot households have very poor financial capital; 12.4% are poor; and only 5.9% have achieved a medium standard of living.



The livelihood assets of Muong illustrated below in Figure 7.1 show the basic imbalance between the five forms of capital: natural, human, financial, social, and physical. The lack of financial and human assets can render their plentiful natural resources less significant than they are because they lack the capacity to make full use of them. In a developed country, the labour force is very highly educated and skilled. This means the quality of human capital is high which leads to high productivity.

**Figure 7.1. Sustainable Livelihoods framework for the Muong in Muot village**



Source: *Adapted from Sustainable Livelihood Approach. Tool for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction – DFID, 2000.*

Muong and other ethnic minorities in Vietnam face a high vulnerability context (ADB 2002; Huynh et al., 2002). Vulnerability is characterized as a basic insecurity in the well-being of individuals, households, and communities in the face of changes in the external environment (ADB, 2008). In this section, I would like to discuss the details of the vulnerability context of Muong with reference to the sustainable livelihoods framework, with data collected in Muot village.

**Shocks:** This aspect of the vulnerability context refers to unexpected conflict, illnesses, floods, storms, droughts, and diseases. Like other ethnic minorities who live in the steep forested mountains, Muong face many natural disasters such as floods and a reduced year round availability of ground water as a consequence of deforestation. Most deforestation is caused by Kinh loggers and traders coming in from outside, but unfortunately it is the local residents who suffer most of the impact. Illness and disease are also a significant hazard especially as Muong do not always have adequate knowledge of healthcare or access to healthcare services. Minority people in remote mountainous areas find it difficult to get to the nearest hospital and healthcare center because transport is not readily available in their communities. Poor financial capital also creates a high health risk because people cannot afford to pay the fees for healthcare services. Although it is a socialist state, people in Vietnam, regardless of their social class, whether poor or rich, have to pay for treatment in hospitals and medical centers. Although the poor<sup>23</sup> are provided with poor-household insurance (*Bảo hiểm hộ nghèo*) to help with part of the cost of hospital treatment, it is still difficult for poor householders to find treatment, especially in provincial and state hospitals.

**Seasonality:** Seasonality refers to the fluctuation of prices and employment opportunities in the community. For the Muong this is the most critical aspect of livelihood vulnerability. As mentioned in Chapter five, Muong find it difficult to secure employment, especially in the agricultural off-season when surplus rural labour from all over the country is looking for paid employment. After planting, women are left in charge of the main rice crop. Women irrigate and fertilize the fields and the men move to urban areas to find jobs. However, this temporary migration is not always rewarded. The costs of transport and living are high and only low wages are paid for unskilled labouring work. Because they lack the money to acquire better paid skills they have no choice but to accept low paid work wherever they can. Here, a system of inter-generational circular causation operates.

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<sup>23</sup> With certain criteria set up by the state government to evaluate poverty, the status of poor households is determined by their local community (village or town).

Because they lack the money that would enable them to get a better education and to acquire better skills they must accept low paid, unskilled work. Because they never get enough money together to pay for a better education for their children, their children in turn fall into this poverty trap. Unless the system of circular causation can be broken, generation after generation will be adversely affected.

***Critical trends:*** This refers to demographic, environmental, economic, governance, and technological trends. Recent studies argue that the gap between rich and poor is widening. According to the report of General Statistics Office of Vietnam in 2007, 78% of the poor in Vietnam are from rural areas, especially remote and mountainous communities. The inequality of economic distribution separates the majority Kinh and minorities into two different worlds in terms of economic, demographic, and technological well being. This trend works against the best interests of the Muong.

***How government policies and institutions can change the vulnerability context:***

In a country where sovereign power is centralized, policies and institutions play an important role in socioeconomic development. With reference to the sustainable livelihoods framework (Figure 7.1), we can see how government policies and institutions can directly influence the vulnerability contexts of Muong. Policies and regulations imposed upon Muong farmers can affect their opportunities to earn a living. For example, for many years Muong managed their forest resources before the government had any interest. In contemporary times the government has imposed a forest preservation policy which limits access to forest resources (Nguyen, 2006). This has impacted directly on what could be a major source of income.

Government programs for poverty reduction and hunger eradication have also been criticized by the Asian Development Bank (ADB 2002) because not enough participatory work is done to get a better understanding of what the poor need. This is another illustration of how the government can influence the vulnerability context. If poverty elevation policies were better focused, there would be a positive impact on reducing vulnerability.

### **7.1.2. Poverty of Muong**

The poverty of the Muong is one of the most important issues in my research. The household survey in Muot village (Table 7.1) conducted with 154 households documented the fact that 85.6% live below the poverty line. A report from the government online news in December 2011 stated that families in rural areas with per capita incomes per month of between VND401,000 and VND520,000 (USD20.05-USD26) are considered to be in a state of poverty. At the same times, households in urban areas with per capita income of between VND501,000 and VND650,000 (USD20.05-USD32.5) have been given the same status even though their standard of living is far higher than that of most Muong. The findings from the household poverty survey (2010) shows that 51.6% Muong households in Muot village earn VND83,000 (USD4.1) to VND166,000 (USD8.3) per person per month.

A report of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) on Vietnam's poverty in 2002 stated that ethnic minority people in Vietnam are amongst the poorest and the most vulnerable. Ethnic minorities make up 14% of the population but account for 29% of the poor.

There are many ways of explaining the poverty of ethnic minorities but the vision adopted here is that people in mountainous areas often have the worst access to public services and lack basic infrastructure. The following list identifies factors associated with the persistent high levels of poverty amongst ethnic minority groups including Muong.

- Limited access to land, forests, and water sources.
- Limited education, vocational training, livelihood skills and knowledge.
- Lack of financial capital for livelihood strategy investments and healthcare treatments.
- Passive attitude toward accessing information, technology, and other knowledge.

**Table 7.1. Muot per capita income in 2010 (million/year/person)<sup>24</sup>**

Income status	Income Groups (Unit: million VND/person/per year)							Number of households
	1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	7.00	
Very poor	9	72	39	5	0	0	0	125
Poor	1	5	5	5	1	2	0	19
Standard	0	0	0	4	3	1	1	9
Good	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	10	77	44	14	4	3	1	153

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

The government has performed many programs and policies to help indigenous minorities in remote and especially difficult areas. During the “*Đổi mới*” period, the government implemented hundreds of programs to reduce poverty by providing loans at very low or no interest rates, preparing a long-term orientation and socioeconomic development plan for

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<sup>24</sup> The Vietnamese Prime Minister has approved a higher poverty threshold for the period between 2011 and 2015. In urban areas the poverty line has been changed from VND450,000 (USD22.5) to VND500,000 (USD25) per person per month. In rural areas it is now VND400,000 (USD20), instead of VND350,000 (USD17.5).

northern mountainous areas (Decision 960/TTG and 656/TTG in 1996), and planning for improved residences, infrastructure, and production in ethnic minority and mountainous areas (Directive 393/TTG 1996). According to a 2000 ADB report the Vietnamese government's programs for hunger eradication and poverty reduction focused on the following areas:

- Infrastructure for poor communes.
- Subsidies for disadvantaged ethnic minorities.
- Assistance in health care and education for poor people.
- Job creation and production development.

The most practical and effective was Program 135. This program started in 1998 under Government Decision No. 135/1998/TTg, which covered 1,715 communes (1,568 communes in mountainous areas and 147 communes in the Mekong delta). The program was designed to improve roads and irrigation systems, and to provide clean water, schools, and health care services. The program made some significant contributions to indigenous communities. However, local indigenous minorities were not the only ones to benefit. Migrants, mostly Kinh who moved into beneficiary areas from rural lowland, benefited much more (Baulch et al., 2007). Migrants were found to be better off than those born in the area, either indigenous or Kinh, suggesting that migrants usually brought in better paid skills and knowledge, including knowledge of markets and government services (ADB, 2002).

What need to be taken into account in strategies for poverty reduction in Vietnam are the special conditions faced by minority communities. A study by ADB (2002) identified significant differences between the situations of ethnic minorities in different regions. For example the poverty situation of Muong in Muot village is different from that of the Muong who live near the Laos border. The further people live from the centre, the more disadvantaged they are and the more difficulties they face. Therefore, policy needs to be built on national realities, with particular attention being given to the needs and aspirations of ethnic minority groups. It is also important to understand the organizational and social

structure of ethnic minority communities. It is not only individual households but whole villages and who should be targeted.

### **7.1.3. Unemployment**

There is a tight relationship between poverty and unemployment and this can be traced back to the consequences of poor education (Ayres & Simon, 2003). A higher rate of unemployment creates more poverty. Muong and other ethnic minorities are likely to be more vulnerable because they are less competitive than majority Kinh in seeking jobs.

One of the key livelihood strategies is livelihood diversification through which rural farmers can perform farm and non-farm activities (Brown et al., 2006). In a remote mountainous area like the Muong community in Cam Thuy district where income from wet-rice agricultural activities is very limited (as discussed in Chapter Five) non-wet-rice activities should play a more important role in livelihood outcomes. However, this does not happen in most Muong communities. Besides Muong's low educational level and skills, there is no production factory in or near their community. Most industrial and economic zones where workers congregate, are located in urban areas. The main labour in these economic zones is Kinh and only those minority people who have better education and skills are employed. Farm activities of Muong include food and vegetable cultivation on wetlands and drained land. It also includes forestry resources. However, Muong have very limited access to wetlands for food and vegetable production owing to their upland location. Moreover, the government policy of forest conservation has banned local indigenous people from utilizing their forests even though they are assigned and obliged to plant and protect these forests. Lack of employment opportunities makes a high rate of unemployment inevitable.

As discussed in previous chapters, Muong men who make up the principal source of family labour, usually find themselves under-employed after the seed-sowing seasons (from February to May and from July to November). Scattering fertilizer and attending to vegetables are not considered to be an appropriate job for men. That is why they often leave their home village for urban areas in search of jobs. However, the low education and labour

skills of Muong means they can hardly compete with urban cousins. As already mentioned, they rarely earn enough money to send any home.

Unemployment is not only a matter that affects men but also women in Muot village. Most Muot women are not satisfied with the nature of their daily work. Going to the forest to collect vegetables and fallen trees for firewood can be repetitive and boring. They think that they have to do it because they have no choice. Besides, collecting firewood even from dead trees is illegal as it is considered to be against the best interests of maintaining healthy forests. Anyway, as mentioned in Chapter 5, the income derived from collecting firewood is largely unprofitable and mostly carried out to secure a household supply.

#### **7.1.4. Cultural loss and acculturation of Muong**

The loss of the distinct cultures of ethnic minority groups appears to be an inevitable consequence of socioeconomic integration. In the open market economy, people, regardless of their ethnicity, are free to live, trade, and seek the jobs they want. An increasing number of Muong labourers who have moved to urban areas to earn money to send home as remittances, have in the past few decades dropped distinct characteristics of their indigenous cultures. Acculturation is happening fast and it has a massive impact on people's identity. Cultural change or acculturation is a selective and collective process through which people tend to adopt new behaviours, ideas, beliefs, and norms from other cultures (Royd & Richerson 1994). And where economic gains can be made by doing so, change runs all the faster.

The process of acculturation of Muong has occurred fastest in the past two decades. The movement of indigenous Muong to urban areas and the immigration of Kinh to Muong communities facilitates cultural exchanges, and in the face of a more rigorous Kinh tradition, Muong indigenous culture has declined. There are two main types of acculturation: cultural maintenance - to what extent the cultural identity and good relationship with the native culture should be maintained; and contact and participation - to what extent the host cultural identity and good relationship with the host groups should be developed. Government policy officially supports maintenance, good relations, and not



standing in the way if people want to change. People make up their own minds about what they want. For example, many of the norms relating to traditional Muong weddings or funerals have been given up and replaced by easier and more convenient Kinh practices.

The cultural assimilation of Muong is easy to recognise in the way people dress. Traditional Muong dress (shown in picture below, left) are no longer widely worn and nowadays Muong women tend to dress like Kinh because they think it is more convenient and fashionable.

**Figure 7.1. Traditional dress of Kinh and Muong women**



Traditional Muong women's dress



Muong in Vietnamese traditional long dress

Source: <http://camthuy.thanhhoa.gov.vn/vi-vn/camthuy/Pages/Article.aspx?ChannelId=1&articleID=3>

Cultural anthropologists argue that most minority groups tend to ignore their original languages, norms, and other values in favour of the customs of the economic and political majority (Lu et al., 2011). Mass media is dominated by Vietnamese language and all radio, television and newspapers accept this monopoly. Education is also heavily biased in favour of Kinh culture. All ethnic minority groups in Vietnam share the same educational curriculum with Kinh.

How do the Muong react to this process of acculturation? My survey of 154 households in Muot village indicated that Muong tend to ignore their traditional culture (presented in Chapter Five) because they are more concerned with the material conditions of their lives

than keeping to old behaviours. Muot villagers are aware that significant cultural changes are underway; however they believe that these changes do not adversely affect their lives.

## **7.2. The potential of education for Muong livelihood development**

### **7.2.1. Education for human capital improvement**

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in 2008 stated that “education is fundamental for just, peaceful, adaptable societies without poverty, and that none of the international development goals can be achieved without education” (UNESCO, 2008, p.3). There is much evidence to show that a higher level of education is correlated with a higher level of economic development (Oxaal, 1997). This positive correlation is illustrated by the way in which fruitful returns can be gained from education as an economic investment. It is obvious that more developed countries, where poverty is minimized and human rights are promoted, have a higher level of education than less developed countries. This also holds for uneven development within the same country, where more developed regions (normally urban areas) provide a better quality of education than less developed regions (rural and remote areas).

Agenda 21 of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) asserted that “education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people” to address environment and development issues (Sumner, 2008, p.90). There are also many debates on education and sustainable development. In this section however, I wish to focus on the role of education for building human capital. Human capital theory asserts that education creates skills and knowledge which improve productivity and social equality (Oxaal, 1997). The evidence found in many studies documents the fact that people with higher education usually have higher incomes and achieve higher positions in their society (Stephen et al., 2008).

Muong human capital in Muot village is still very poor as I discussed in Chapter 5. This is because the educational level of adults remains low: 11.8% of heads of households are illiterate, totally unable to read or write; only 23.5% have completed primary school; and

47.7% have completed secondary school. Only 1.3% of Muot villagers who remain resident have achieved a higher education qualification. Most of those who have completed a higher degree have already relocated and work in urban areas where they have been more likely to get a good job. Particularly, anthropologists argue that indigenous tribal people in highland areas are skilled and; owing to experience accumulated over generations, do not need schooling or formal education.

**Table 7.2. Level of education of Muot household heads**

Status	Number of responses	Percentage
No schooling at all; illiterate	18	11.7
Finished primary school	36	23.4
Finished secondary school	73	47.4
Finished high school	24	15.6
Has earned a college degree or certificate	2	1.3
Total	153	99.4
Invalid data	1	0.6
Total	154	100.0

Source: *Data from fieldwork in Muot village, 2010.*

This argument only holds for the limited context in which their traditional skills are relevant. For indigenous people living in very isolated communities where they must provide the large part of their subsistence needs, their indigenous knowledge is perfectly adequate but once they want to compete in a complex national economy, needs and expectations change rapidly. In such a situation the need for literacy, numeracy and other skills places new demands on people and they must be given access to modern education so they can help themselves.

Muong have a very close relationship with Kinh in terms of both socioeconomic participation and geographic location. There has been much socioeconomic integration of the Muong into main stream life in recent years. In order to compete with Kinh for employment, Muong are now obliged to actively seek an adequate education to learn the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to find well paid jobs.

Education not only equips people with working skills but the capability to manage their own vulnerabilities (Bebbington, 1999). It enhances people's ability to cope and solve their problems. This is the reason why nowadays most parents assert that they never give their children "fish" (money, land, or any other materials) they would rather teach them "how to fish" (invest in education). Human capital is an important component of any livelihood strategy and it is no longer sensible to ignore the assumption that those with higher levels of education have higher levels of productivity. Although education is costly, it brings associated benefits which compare favorably with its costs. In his report, Oxaal argues that "the earnings by age of the more educated not only start at a higher level, but increase more rapidly to a peak later in life – than is the case with the earnings profiles of the less educated" (Oxaal, 1997. p.3). This trajectory is not followed by the earning profiles of the less well educated.

### **7.2.2. Education is important for social development and equality**

In order to understand the relationship between education and social development, some important questions need to be addressed: What are the goals of social development? How is literacy related to the growth of social complexity? What is the relationship between individual learning and the societal context? In what ways does the acquisition of literacy contribute to the social development process such as empowerment, socioeconomic development, social equality and political accountability?

Adams and Adams (1968) define social development as "social change which is marked by an emphasis on planning mechanisms to achieve a process desired type of complexity" (p.248). This definition is difficult to work with. Aron and Hoseltz (1965) who describe social development as the increasing moralization of human behaviour and thought,

perhaps come closer to the everyday truth. When we talk about social development it is not just a matter of anthropology, but everything that refers to the conditions in which people live to improve the material well-being (Estes, 1994). In a more precise way, the author also argues that social development refers to a process through which people are helped to realize the fullness of their social, political, and economic potential, a potential that already exists within them.

The following are the goals of social development practices adapted from Estes (1994):

- More balanced approaches to social and economic development.
- Assigning priority to the fullest possible human development.
- Poverty elimination.
- Eliminating all barriers to development and providing support to disadvantaged groups such as poor children, women, disabled people.
- Building institutions and capacities.

Freier (1970) argues that education is essential for social development. However, he also addresses that education should be considered as the practice of freedom in which people are helped to understand what they actually need. The author convinces that “a deepened consciousness of their situation leads men to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation” (Freier, 1970, p.58).

Social development is the capacity of individuals and communities to pursue their own goals and objectives, to make decisions for their own direction. In such an understanding, human resource development becomes central to social development. Human resource development refers to the growing capability of people to deal with and solve vulnerability challenges and it cannot be achieved if people are illiterate. The transformation of people’s knowledge and skills is a process which requires that they be able to read and write.

In a multitude of ways the acquisition of literacy makes a significant contribution to the social development process. In my understanding, social equality and political accountability are primary factors that must be taken into account. Literacy has become

more and more important to Muong as well as other ethnic minorities in the last few decades. It has become the means of achieving access to news about policy, and programs from central government. When social media becomes the bridge to connect different cultures and ethnic groups, individuals enhance their capacities by actively engaging in the exchange process. More importantly, Muong and other ethnic minorities have to accept the fact that this transformation needs to be conducted in the Vietnamese language.

### **7.2.3. Skills and literacy training for better livelihoods**

Nowadays the livelihood of minority households, who traditionally depended on the natural environment, are willing to approach and use new technologies and production practices. Technology and livelihood skills do not come automatically; they must be learned. Without a sufficient mastery of reading, writing, and calculation, learners are unable to take advantage of possibilities to enhance their knowledge, skills, and capabilities. Before restrictive forest-land policies were introduced in the late 1990s, Muong and other mountain dwelling minorities practiced shifting cultivation as their main livelihood activity. However, the new policies of forest protection because of a rapidly increasing population, have limited the area of land available for farming. This situation has forced villagers to improve and intensify productivity on the same or even smaller areas of cultivated land and if they are to continue to make a living they need new technologies. An agency familiar with appropriate technology needs to be brought into play to establish links between indigenous knowledge and outside scientific knowledge (Pauli & Bjerregaard, 2012).

Just as I am sure my Muot study would hold for larger samples, my findings presented in Chapter 5 indicate that there is a positive correlation between educational level and the income of Muot household heads. It is obvious that literacy plays an important role in livelihood development. Muong benefit from acquisition of literacy in the following ways:

- ***Livelihood strategies:*** being able to read, write, and calculate will help Muong to consider what, when, and how much they should invest in livestock, paddy rice, vegetables, and forests. For example, Muong traditionally raised pigs for meat and manure (waste used as an organic fertilizer). They used available produce to

raise pigs. However, their pigs grew so slowly and consumed so much that the producers did not get high value returns. In contrast, Kinh, who raise pigs on the lowlands get good returns by using modern technology such as feeding them high weight gain processed bran and confining pigs to small cages. Moreover, poor knowledge of animal husbandry does not help Muong protect their livestock from disease. If livestock get sick and die they count this as a serious loss but they do not always know inoculations are available. Literacy can help Muong in their daily farming practices by getting medicine for sick livestock, reading the instructions on products (seeds, fertilizers, breeds and so on) so that they purchase the appropriate commodity.

- ***Another practical gain from literacy:*** In order to acquire a motorbike driver's license, the candidate must first pass a theory test. People who cannot read cannot pass the first post. Without a driver's license, it is extremely difficult to set up or manage even the most basic business enterprise such as selling local produce on the urban market.
- ***Literacy and livelihood training:*** In less well off communities, villages like Muot are often supported by NGOs (in this case World Vision, Vietnam) and government programs set up to improve the effectiveness of production, health care, and education. From what I saw in Muot village it was clear that those who were illiterate found it difficult to gain anything from attending training courses or using documentary materials.

### **7.3. The returns from investment in education**

#### **7.3.1. Education as the best way for Muong to get out of poverty**

Many studies by government and non-government agencies including the ILO, UNICEF, WHO, World Bank, and UNDP, indicate that around the world about 1.3 billion people live in poverty (less than USD1.5 a day) and this number is growing steadily. Education can play an important role in changing this.

In recognition of the importance of education in poverty reduction in poor mountainous minority communities, the government has provided financial support for human resource development by reducing school fees for ethnic minority students, encouraging them to go on to higher education, and has provided financial incentives to Kinh to work in remote communities that face a lack of qualified teachers.

There is a positive correlation between the educational level achieved by the heads of households and their income. There are two main reasons for this:

Firstly, regarding the income from agricultural production, people with higher school level training are better at analyzing their livelihood strategies: what, how, and when to invest in agricultural production. They are more willing to adopt new technologies. The data indicates that people who have completed secondary and high school have an even better record of earning a higher income. Not all household heads who are either illiterate or failed to complete primary school fail as earners. In fact several have medium-high incomes, but most of these are either particularly hard working or inherited considerable assets from their parents.

Secondly, results from the survey in Muot village indicate that most of these people who achieve higher education generally have better life prospects and are more likely to get a good job in urban areas where they enjoy a competitive advantage. The story I provided above of the successful Mr Quach Le T who, although born into a very poor family, eventually became a general government inspector. His achievement has helped highlight for Muong that education can prepare them for better careers.

### **7.3.2. Improved quality and access to formal, non-formal, and informal education for Muong.**

Recent development studies have indicated that a single method of education is not enough to ensure achievement of development goals (Wedgwood, 2007), especially poverty reduction and hunger eradication in poor rural regions. In this section, I will discuss the necessity to improve the quality of formal, informal, and non-formal education for Muong



to cover all aspects of knowledge and skills both for adults and children, and provide informal and non-formal education through vocational training and practical subjects which are not part of formal academic education.

Formal education refers to academic learning, an educational model that is highly structured and administered by the government. In Vietnam it follows a given set of laws and norms, is focused on a set curriculum in which is laid down a specific set of objectives, content, and methodology. In a broader sense, formal education is a process that involves students, teachers, and institutions at a national level. Students graduate through a series of steps that reach from primary, secondary and high school through to university. Throughout this process students are progressively exposed to scientific, linguistic and cultural knowledge and periodically assessed to get a measure of their performance. Job opportunities depend very much on the level of education achieved by a candidate, and young people who are good enough to get a tertiary degree are better placed than others to get a job.

There are more than 200 students in Muot village between the ages of three to eighteen. They are the future generation of Muot village. The socioeconomic development of the village depends on these students but not all do well. There are three distinct groups:

Group 1: the students who do not complete high school;

Group 2: the students who complete high school but are not able to continue to higher education (undergraduate and postgraduate);

Group 3: the students who go on higher education.

Students in Group 1 make up a small proportion of the total (4% - 6%). They leave school early and tend to remain in their home village for the rest of their life. Their income is from domestic agricultural production. Group 3 is quite different. The members of this group have a higher education qualification (normally bachelor's or master's degree) and they rarely return to their community. They usually migrate permanently to an urban area. The members of this group are successful migrants whose achievement can be measured by the

nature of the jobs they get and the money they earn, usually enough to cover their urban life expenses and send remittances home. Unlike the two groups above, students in Group 2 seem to face more challenges and difficulties. Data from Muot village on this group indicates that most high-school graduates who do not continue to university level studies, leave home to look for employment in urban areas but experience difficulties finding a good job, and often end up in hardship. They tend to leave their home village after completing high school not primarily because of a sense of failure but largely because of the attraction generated by urban areas and because migration has been made easier by the government open-door policy enacted in the mid 1990s. Movement from urban to rural areas has become a trend. Those who leave remote mountainous areas believe that they will be better off in the cities than those who remain on the farm.

Unlike formal education, non-formal education may take place either within or outside of educational institutions, and caters to persons of all ages (UNESCO, 1997). It may offer educational programs to impart adult literacy, basic education for children who have left school, life skills, and work skills. Unfortunately, Muong parents, children, and educators in general often underestimate the importance of non-formal education. They see education as the formal academic system conducted in official classrooms or schools and anything other than that as second class. In fact, non-formal education can provide children not attending school with access to structured learning, reinforce their self-esteem and help them to find ways to contribute to their communities and household economies. For example, villagers who cannot read or write, find it difficult to learn new technology designed to increase agricultural production. As already pointed out, if they cannot even read the names of seeds and fertilizer products available in the market, their capacity to change is dramatically limited. Non-formal education that provides courses in basic literacy can make a considerable contribution by helping them to acquire verbal and visual literacy skills. To some extent illiteracy is a generational matter; most illiterate Muot people are elderly. For them, formal courses are difficult and take too long. On the other hand, vocational training is always much more effective because it is linked to everyday reality and their daily livelihood activities. Non-formal education can organize participatory exercises in which local people (including illiterate elders) can actively engage in

discussion and the learning process. This combines their own practice (inside their village) and scientific knowledge (outside world).

Together with formal education focused on school-age students, non-formal education can become a critical intervention in which adult Muong villagers are helped to improve their livelihood skills and enhance their social capacities. Poverty reduction and hunger alleviation goals cannot be achieved if local villagers lack basic knowledge and livelihood skills.

## **7.4. Possible contribution and significance of this study to local Muong community**

### **7.4.1. Theoretical and practical contribution**

Like much other research, this study has both theoretical implications and practical suggestions.

***Theoretical contribution:*** The study brings a new viewpoint in Vietnam to the interrelationship between education and rural livelihood development. Material inputs such as improved infrastructure and banking services have received much more attention. Unlike other development studies in which the role of education has been given general treatment, this research attempts to investigate the role of education in a specific minority group in a remote mountainous community (Muong).

Some literature is critical. It is important to maintain indigenous culture. However, the current socioeconomic integration requires local people to learn and adapt new knowledge from outside. This study argues that education will lead Muong to the main stream of society and it links the case study to modernization theory.

***Practical contribution:*** More than 90% of people in Thanh Hoa live in rural areas. The challenge of how to improve the quality of life of this section of the population, especially those living in mountainous areas, presents a huge problem. The Thanh Hoa state government is committed to improving the life of the poor and has carried out many

programs of support that focus on education, healthcare and livelihood enhancement, but little has been done to critically evaluate what has been done and what has been achieved. This study suggests that the impact of what has been done so far falls short of what remains to be done. There is a clear need for development agencies to pay more attention to poor remote communities. This study has helped to raise issues facing local villagers and attempted to articulate their expectations and opinions. In discussion results, Muong villagers were encouraged to speak up and express what was on their minds.

The results of this study and its likely impact on local development could well be taken up by Hong Duc University as the only provincial university providing education and training to all the province's citizens, especially those who live far away from population centers and lacking livelihood skills. Part of the mission of Hong Duc University is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the local people in order to provide suitable educational and training programs. This study has found that education plays an important role in the socioeconomic development of the Muong. Despite the fact that very few Muong students currently enrol at university, this could well change in the near future. The data from Hong Duc university's student enrolment records show that minority students (including Muong, Tay, Thai, Nung) made up only 1.8% of the student body in the 2000s, which increased to 6.8% in the 2010s. The small number of minority students in university study presents a major shortfall in the effectiveness of government support for minority education development.

As a lecturer of Hong Duc University, my ambition is to see that an increasing number of Muong and other minority students are given access to higher education. This study has indicated very strongly that a good education can make an important contribution to improve the living standard and social status of minority people.

## **7.5. Conclusion**

There is a clear case for enhancing the indigenous knowledge of Muong with scientific know-how. It is likely that this will enable them to sustain their livelihoods and improve their quality of life.

In the context of rapid economic growth, minority people in remote mountainous areas have been left behind. Scientific knowledge, technology and public services are relatively inaccessible. It is important to reduce this isolation and get people to engage more actively in the main stream of national life. Muong people understand clearly that their living conditions are lower than those of people in rural lowland areas, especially those in urban areas. The qualitative data on Muong livelihoods indicate that there is a positive relationship between educational levels of attainment and income. If livelihood skills could be enhanced through general and vocational training, both the Muong and society at large would benefit.

# **CHAPTER EIGHT**

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **8.1. Summary of the study**

Education for sustainable livelihoods has become a focal point of concern in the rural development debate over recent years (Scoones 1998; Betts 2000; Bonnett 2002; Behrman 2010). However, to answer the questions posed by the sustainable livelihoods approach has not been easy. Scholars argue that a sustainable livelihood “refers to a livelihood that can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base” (IDS Working paper 69, p.3). My study of 154 Muong households in Muot village in the northwest mountainous district of Thanh Hoa province has provided some insights into how Muong cope with and recover from stress. Muong general stresses in this study refer to their reaction to poverty and cultural loss. I also learnt how Muong can enhance their capabilities and livelihood resources, and how education can contribute to enhancing their livelihoods skills.

This thesis was divided in eight chapters:

Chapter One introduced the structure of the thesis as well as the background of the study. I outlined the significance of the study to Thanh Hoa local rural development.

Chapter Two addressed the current literature on sustainable livelihoods and related it to the Muong in Thanh Hoa province. The Muot livelihood features were judged to be different from others in lowland rural areas because of their lack of education which has impacted directly and adversely on the availability of livelihood skills. In this chapter, I argued that education needs to be more carefully considered as a potential investment in livelihood development. In fact, in the last decade, NGOs and government organizations in Vietnam have paid special attention to ethnic minority development through education and training programs.

Chapter Three outlined the theoretical framework that I used to conduct the research. The underpinning theoretical framework of the study is the sustainable rural livelihood development model refined by Scoones (1998) and his colleagues Carney and Ashley (1999). This framework identifies the critical factors that form the context of vulnerability, stresses and shocks, policy settings (institutions and organizations), agro-ecology (natural resources and other resources), and how livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes are generated out of these interactive components. Within this general framework my focus is the specific socioeconomic condition of Muot village. I used the framework to investigate how education affects the indigenous people's livelihood skills.

In the second part of Chapter Three I described the methods of data collection and data analysis which are consistent with the theoretical framework of sustainable development theory. The methodological approach to the study made necessary by conditions in the field, is a mixed research design in which both qualitative and quantitative methods play a part (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The actual tools used replaced the preferred PLAR techniques I had first planned to use, and the bias of fieldwork shifted from qualitative to quantitative methods. The principal qualitative methods used included informal conversations and interviews conducted with individuals as the opportunity arose, a planned observation schedule, and focus group interviews that often snowballed into subsequent discussions with specific participants. Throughout my time in the field I kept careful field notes and a diary in which I recorded meetings and events that unfolded around me. During my six months in the field, I took part in the daily activities of the villagers, joining hunting expeditions, planting wet-rice and corn, collecting herbs in the forest, being activities in which villagers regularly engage.

I grew to enjoy the hospitable Muong drinking and eating culture. Conversations conducted over shared lunches and dinners with families helped me understand what made up the detail of their lives, what most concerned them, and how they saw the world. As a participant I directly observed the ways they organize their meals and drinks. The quality of daily nutrition could be measured by the amount of protein, fats and vitamins consumed; their meals mainly consisted of just rice with a few condiments added to enhance the taste.

On some days, I chose to just go along with people going about their daily activities such as walking in the forest, working in the fields, sitting and talking with friends. Through participation I learnt how the land is cultivated, how the water reticulation system is constructed from bamboo pipes. By attending village meetings in the common house and collecting wild vegetables around irrigated fields I caught up on the gossip of the day. I even joined a group of teenagers playing billiards, snooker and pool to learn that most of them were of secondary or high school age, and that they spent at least two hours a day amusing themselves rather than studying at home or helping their parents.

These everyday contacts and interactions with Muot people gave me a real sense of how they organize their lives, exercise their traditions and celebrate different cultural events. Observations I was able to make helped me to understand how they approached challenges and how to form and phrase the questions I asked when I visited families to conduct informal conversational interviews.

Over the period of my fieldwork I arranged visits to all the families in the village. This was done with the help of some volunteers who mapped the separated clusters of households and in some cases took me and introduced me to some of the families. I tried to make ‘family visits’ relaxed and friendly so that people would feel free to talk about matters such as children’s schooling, raising cattle, cultivating rice and controlling water; stories about planting and investing in their forest allocation which were particularly interesting. I did not record these sessions because the thought that what they might say in passing would become fixed in a manner they could not control was simply too inhibiting. If I wanted people to talk freely I could not also record verbatim what they said. I completely respected their sensitivity and made no recordings that were anything more than people wanting to hear their own voices. Instead I made extensive and detailed notes afterwards.

Their stories revealed that the Muot people in my study live in poverty and do not know how to take advantage of new technology to enhance their livelihoods and participate more profitably in the wider developing economy. Many acknowledged that in all of this the lack of education is a central issue. One of the most positive findings from these informal



conversations was the widely shared opinion of parents that in order for their children to get ahead they would have to commit to spending more money and time on education. They know that education plays an important role both in poverty reduction and building qualifications that will enable their children to enter the developing economy.

In addition to the informal conversations with parents and householders, I organized focus group discussions to gather data on children (students at secondary and high school level) concerning their perception of how important education is and achieving higher education. These students gathered in groups and in discussion explored prompts and probes given by me. Many agreed that education, especially higher education, brings the promise of well-paid jobs and higher incomes. They also discussed the factors affecting their schooling and the challenges they might face in the course of getting access to higher education.

As part of my quantitative methods in data collection, I used two questionnaires, one for householders and another for students. Fortunately I was allowed to take part in a poverty survey carried out by the provincial government and was given privileged access to the results. I accompanied the research team to every house to ask them to fill in a survey form. I later took photocopies of these completed forms and incorporated the data into my own research. My own questionnaires were delivered to every household close to the time focus group discussions were held and these were sent back to me some days later. I also handed out questionnaires to the children who gathered for group discussions. A few children helped me to collect the filled in questionnaires and encouraged other friends who had also participated in the discussion groups to complete the questionnaires.

My questionnaires were designed to show me how the people of Muot rated the different factors that make up their livelihoods and how they view sustainable development. The data also served to triangulate information provided in the course of informal conversations. To the Mout villagers, investment capital, the availability of productive land, and guidance on how to use new technology were found to be rated very highly.

Data recorded in student questionnaires indicated the importance of learning about specific matters and of education in general. Most want access to higher education and to secure a

tertiary level qualification because they believe that this will help them very much in the future including a well-paid job. Householders also know that even if they achieve the grades to gain entry, their parents may not have the money to support them. They also acknowledge that parental encouragement is one of the most important factors effecting school performance and achievement.

Based on the qualitative data, I coded the themes that emerged from interviews, focus groups and discussions. The quantitative data was analyzed by using SPSS software to help highlight emerging themes. These themes were critically reviewed and triangulated before being placed under a sustainable livelihoods framework lense for analysis.

Chapter Four describes the overview of ethnic minorities in Vietnam and in particular the Muong. This chapter addresses the socioeconomic background of the Muong and the government programs and policies that support them. The chapter starts with a discussion of the nature of ethnic minority livelihoods in highland and mountainous areas of Vietnam including a special note on the challenges and difficulties faced by Muong. Over hundreds of years the traditional practice of subsistence production has relied on shifting cultivation or swiddening which is now considered by the government to be a major cause of deforestation. Shifting cultivation is still practiced widely throughout the tropics and most farmers have few alternatives to which they can turn; therefore it is likely to continue as a major livelihood source. Under situations of low population density shifting cultivation is not necessarily the major cause of the loss of forest, and in many highland areas of Vietnam timber logging by Kinh is more likely to be responsible for deforestation. This opinion is well supported in the literature that has become available over the last decade (Lawrence et al., 1998; Fox et al., 2000; Bruun et al., 2006; Jepsen et al., 2006). This literature is also critical of Vietnamese government policy that has passed much of the responsibility and few of the advantages for maintaining forests on to ethnic minority households.

Chapter Five presented an analysis of Muong livelihoods placed in a sustainable livelihoods framework. The categories in which I conducted my analysis included the five principal livelihood assets, livelihood strategies, and outcomes. Two types of data, both

qualitative and quantitative were brought to the assessment. The qualitative data was collected through informal conversations, participant observation, and focus group interviews. Opportunities to participate in Muong daily activities helped me understand how they organize their lives. As a participant I had the chance to catch up with daily gossip and observe their real lives. I have learnt that most of the Muong in Muot village do not have clear idea about something as complicated as livelihood strategies; they simply referred to it as what they have to do to earn a living. They passively accept their situation and depend on agriculture, principally wet rice cultivation and what they can collect in the forest around them. They also raise poultry and cattle. Besides collecting the specific figure of total income as part of the household survey, I learned from direct observation what poverty means for the Muong. When, by chance and at random, I joined their daily meals, the food people ate consisted mainly of rice and wild vegetables collected in the forest. It was extremely unusual to see protein, lipids which provide dietary fat necessary for humans to absorb fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and B) and carotenoids (vegetable oils, nuts), or other necessary nutrients. As part of their culture the Muong know very well what kind of wild vegetables in the forest are edible but the range does not give them access to a full range of necessary nutrients. The Muong feed poultry (chickens, ducks, geese) and livestock (buffalo, cows, cattle and pigs) which are usually slaughtered to celebrate special occasions but are principally raised for sale. Chickens and other birds are infrequently killed for domestic consumption.

The quantitative data was collected in the course of two surveys: my personal survey and the provincial government survey. My questions were focused primarily on criteria drawn from the sustainable livelihoods framework. The provincial survey questionnaire was designed by a provincial committee following a standard form provided by the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finance. As both questionnaires addressed matters relating to livelihood analysis they were not entirely dissimilar. Questions about income and expenditure were shared. The data collected showed that a large number of Muong households face poverty on a daily basis. They lack access to financial capital for investment in livelihood development from either savings or credit. Even if they could secure loans their financial turnover would be so low they would find it difficult to service

them. Available credit is very expensive and arrangements are only entered into reluctantly. The small amount of money earned from the sale of forest products is not enough to enable them to save. A model of the Muong economy would reveal a heavy bias on self sufficiency and production for domestic consumption, with marginal engagement with the market. The findings also documented the availability of human capital, people's special skills, qualifications and so forth. I found that people have a wide range of practical skills that have little value in a labour market overcrowded with people who have the same skills. Those who have tertiary level qualifications have mostly left the village already and those with reasonable levels of literacy clearly make up the larger number of better – off households.

Finally in this chapter, I attempted to argue that Muong's poor human capital is the consequence of low education and limited access to education. Informal conversations and interviews with Muot villagers allowed me to affirm however that the Muong are changing their attitudes towards education and are looking at the value to be gained in a much more realistic way. They realize the importance of education not only for their socioeconomic development. They are also becoming more willing to invest in education for their children and for the benefit of future generations.

Chapter Six made a critical assessment of current Muong student education. For this I used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect information. The focus group was school age children; informal conversations with the children and their parents helped me to understand their situation. The questionnaire was designed for me to find out what children think about education, how much effort they put into their studies, the results of their school performance, and what they expect from education. The questionnaires were handed to 75 students from grade 6 to grade 12 (secondary and high school) in the course of group meetings held with the students themselves. Most of the group meetings were conducted in the evening and the students only attended with the permission of their parents.

The findings from my survey and informal interviews conducted in focus groups documented the fact that 98% of the sample believed they were getting a good education and that this would provide them with the prospect of a good future career. Female students perform better than males by getting higher grades and better reports. What I found that was most unexpected, was that students from financially less well off households were more likely to achieve better educational results.

As mentioned earlier, the group dynamics affecting adolescent boys made it more likely for them to be engaged in playing snooker than studying. Many boys preferred going out at night instead of staying at home to do their home work. Those students who preferred going out were likely to have low school performance, were poorly self disciplined and more likely to resist parental control.

Chapter Seven is the discussion of the findings of Muong livelihoods and their vulnerability contexts. The principal vulnerability discussed in this chapter referred to the imbalance between human resources, poverty and unemployment in the Muong households. The chapter also advocated that the government give more support for education.

Chapter Eight is the summary, conclusion and recommendation. In this chapter, possible implications of the study to the local community are addressed.

## **8.2. Conclusions**

In recent years the modernization of the rural sector has continued at an increasing pace. Vietnam has given priority to the mechanization of agriculture, rural electrification and infrastructural improvements. Significant advances have been made in irrigation, drainage, and flood control (Huynh et al., 2002). Market reforms which commenced in the early 1980s have been extended to include opportunities that endorse household contracts to sell agricultural produce, promote agricultural decollectivization, and grant permission for farmers to sell, purchase and transfer land and other factors of production (Taylor, 2007). Although these reforms have helped to reduce poverty, the gap between rural and urban and between lowland regions and highland areas where ethnic groups reside has grown.

My study has found that government policies set up to help rural people, especially in remote mountainous places like Muot village have not been as effective as they could be. Vietnamese ethnic minority groups who live primarily in highland and mountainous areas face many difficulties, especially when trying to seek jobs and achieve higher education. Since the Open-door policy came into effect in 1995, dozens of projects and programs have been introduced to help ethnic minorities improve their standard of living, education and healthcare. However, these policies are more likely to benefit majority Kinh who have newly migrated to minority communities rather than the indigenous local citizens themselves (ADB report, 2002). Partly for this reason, the socioeconomic status of ethnic minorities has not improved. This is largely owing to historical subordination, lack of Vietnamese language and literacy skills and geographic isolation. Vietnamese ethnic minority groups live primarily in highland and mountainous areas where they face a lot of difficulties in finding jobs, getting access to and achieving higher education. These conditions adversely affect their ability to benefit from the growth of the market economy.

In this study I affirm that education plays a critical role in Muong's livelihood development. I found that the Muong are highly vulnerable to stresses and shocks resulting from the lack of resources to fall back on. The survey found that Muong put lack of financial security as their first concern (Figure 5.18). They see themselves as caught in a cycle of stresses and shocks from which they do not know how to escape. Most Muot villagers agree that while the outside world and the lowland and urban areas with their Kinh majority are fast developing, they are falling further and further behind. The imbalance in the distribution of wealth between rural and urban areas, and the ineffective forestland policies which deny the Muong use of immediately available resources, have been cited as the main causes of mountain people's poverty (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001).

I argue that shortfalls in the availability of human capital is the principal component of sustainable livelihoods development and that provision of better education could play a major role in changing this for the better. I have documented this argument with reference to the interrelationship between livelihoods, financial income and the level of education achieved by Muot villagers. Moreover, the relationship between educational qualifications

and livelihood strategies was also clarified. In this case study of Muot village it was found that the Muong pursue three main livelihood strategies: looking to agricultural intensification/extensification; livelihood diversification; and migration. Of these three, migration was found to be the most important. In the past, like other ethnic minorities, the forest was the key livelihood resource for Muong. However, in recent times the government's forest preservation policy has prohibited Muong from taking timber and other forest resources. This has driven them into under-employment. This in turn has acted as an engine to migration. Unfortunately, unskilled migrants do not compete favourably in a market with a marked surplus of people seeking jobs. Muong migrants in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City can be clearly sorted into two groups: skilled and unskilled. Skilled migrants are those who generally have a higher education in both professional and trade work and are inclined to look for permanent positions rather than temporary jobs. Unskilled migrants normally do not have a high education and many are illiterate. These people tend to migrate temporarily for three to six months during the agricultural off season.

My study found that unskilled Muong migrants do not fare well in this milieu. Their search for labouring work that will enable them to send money home in the form of remittances, all too frequently does not work out. The first challenge is to find employment that pays enough to cover the costs of both living in the city and the money spent in getting there. The experiences of Muot villagers as temporary rural-urban migrants are quite different from those skilled, educated migrants who can comparatively easily get good jobs with an attractive, stable income. The outcome of the latter is an adventure that is more likely to enable them to save money towards the purchase of a house and the ability to send money home to support their parents.

My Muot village survey indicates that 98% of Muong students and all of their parents share the opinion that education provides more opportunities to pursue a better career. A tertiary degree is one of the first qualifications looked for by recruiters, and job applicants are ignored if they do not include this necessary measure of their ability. A study conducted in 2000 by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training indicated that 80% of students

who had completed a bachelors degree got a job within six months of graduation, and 100% after one and a half years<sup>25</sup>.

After all, the study has come to its final conclusion that the government policies which aimed to support poor rural remote people have not been truly effective. Rural livelihoods and educations have not developed adequately. There may be many different reasons. Local people's concerns have not been focused. Projects have been managed ineffectively and funds of the projects have not been properly managed.

### **8.3. Recommendations**

#### **8.3.1. Responding to the practical needs of ethnic minorities**

It is important to identify the perceived needs of ethnic minorities because it allows the government and agencies concerned for their welfare to prepare practical responses. My survey and discussion with Muot villagers in this study found that there is a considerable difference between what Muong villagers expect and what local government gives. A large part of the reason is that local administration and central government impose supportive policies without engaging local people's participation. For example, some government policies that aim to achieve a faster rate of integration for underprivileged groups, such as sedentarization programs, have been subject to criticism in this context (ADB' report, 2002). Indigenous people know what they really want and what will work for them, and policy makers should learn to design better packages of assistance based on these expectations. ADB (2002) has argued that there is a strong case for new approaches to be based on a more detailed understanding of the cultural aspirations of different ethnic minority groups, which would enable them to retain aspects of their traditional livelihood while at the same time benefiting from economic modernization. In a top-down system of administration, where issues are reported from the lowest village level to the highest state

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<sup>25</sup> The above information was viewed from official Vietnamese e-news: <http://dantri.com.vn/c25/giaoduc.htm>



level, reality can often become distorted. Those reporting from lower levels of administration to higher levels tend to exaggerate their own capabilities by overstating their understanding, achievements and performance, and understating their shortcomings. As a consequence the seriousness of situations faced by villagers are often distorted and it is rural people who suffer the consequences of this deception: poor policy analysis followed by misdirected intervention.

I recommend that government and non-government organization should participate more in the activities of local indigenous people and learn from the people, encouraging locals to engage in and share ideas about their needs and expectations with officials. In this case study, Muong's focal concern was how to improve their financial status, which would directly improve their livelihood performance and the chances of their children getting a better education. Most Muong are not satisfied with the forestland preservation policy which is considered a major barrier to enhancing their livelihood.

### **8.3.2. Promoting informal and non-formal education for Muong adults**

There is a high rate of illiteracy among ethnic minorities in Vietnam (Walle & Gunewardena, 2001), especially those who live in isolated areas high in the mountains. A real effort needs to be made to provide informal and non-formal education which would promote literacy and skill training programs to enable local indigenous minorities to acquire a better level of education and participate more fully in the life of the nation. Although in the past Muong and other ethnic minorities have relied heavily on traditional agriculture and forestry, acquiring information about new technology, and what can be gained from more significant participation in the wider economy, would make a significant contribution to their livelihood strategies. This would give them a new way of imagining and experiencing the world, something that cannot be done in the absence of better education and training.

Although the education and training of ethnic minorities has received considerable attention from the government, up to now investments have not provided good enough results owing

to several factors, such as language, isolation, poor facilities and under qualified teachers. In order to improve education for Muong the government should:

- Promote the use of ethnic minority languages at school. For example, Muong students should be able to use Muong language and Vietnamese at school. At the moment because Vietnamese is a second language, they commence their education with a distinct disadvantage. Outside school, Muong students never use Vietnamese. It is advisable for ethnic minority students to be taught initially in their local language.
- Provide adequate teaching and learning facilities for schools in minority regions. Physical capital such as roads to school, classrooms, desks, white/black boards, books, libraries, computers, projectors and so on are necessary for formal education. Many studies of education in minority areas indicate that remote minority communities lack necessary facilities for teaching and learning. In some remote and high mountainous areas schools are located too far away from students' houses and some students even have to swim across streams to their schools.
- Government investment in education for minorities should also include non-formal and informal education to achieve adult literacy. Success in this will create a population that will have more chances to learn and take on new knowledge. For example, district divisions of education could organize study-tours for indigenous villagers to urban areas (or district towns) where they could be introduced to how new technology works, shown how the labour market works, and learn what makes lowland people successful.
- Improve the quality of programs and projects aimed at improving ethnic minority education and livelihoods by making a greater effort to understand their practical needs and how decentralization of industrial enterprises might help. In Vietnam at the moment official programs and projects follow a top-down approach based on supply rather than demand, and well-meaning initiatives fall short of what

they might otherwise achieve because they ignore the real needs of local communities (ADB, 2002). This is the reason why government programs for minorities have not been effective.

### **8.3.3. The active role of Hong Duc University, Thanh Hoa province**

In recent years Hong Duc University has played an important role in Thanh Hoa province's socioeconomic development. As a government provincial university, Hong Duc is responsible for providing Thanh Hoa province with qualified labour resources. Each year the university recruits about five thousand Thanh Hoa province entrants and one thousand students from other provinces.

Thanh Hoa has a large proportion of minority people living in 11 northwest districts. However, very few minority students are recruited into Hong Duc University. There are many reasons why minority students are unable to attend university. Although the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) currently attempts to promote minority education, through positive discrimination by adding bonus points<sup>26</sup> to their entry applications and providing additional financial support, the number of minority students attending undergraduate and postgraduate level courses is still too few. In order to improve this record and promote a better quality of education for minority people in Thanh Hoa province, the university should:

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<sup>26</sup> In order to attend university all students are required to take and pass the university entrance exam. The university entrance exam consists of three subjects which vary depending on what the specialist area of study is. Students including minority and majority have the same exam. However, they are classified into different groups by "region". Region 1 is remote and mountainous area; Region 2 is rural area; and Region 3 is urban area. According to the Decree 30a/2008/NQ-CP on 27/12/2008, students from Region 1 are awarded an extra 1.5 points to the total points of their entrance exam.

- Lower the requirements for minority students so that more students can attend the university (so that the number of those enrolled is in direct proportion to the number of minority people in the province).
- Encourage research in highland minority areas and find out what people need.
- Provide more informal and non-formal education and training courses for illiterate people.
- Provide training courses for livelihood skills such as planting, irrigation works, fertilizer use, and how to approach and use modern technology.

This study is not to change educational system in Vietnam but to raise special attention to policy makers, educators and organizations of poor minority's education. There is a tight relationship between education and earning a living. People who have higher levels of education are likely to have better opportunities of outmigration into wealthier areas. If the government wants to prevent uneven population movement, they should reconsider geographical economic factors to provide job opportunities equally. If not, poverty and remittance for being better-off will lead to uncontrollable urbanization.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: POVERTY HOUSEHOLD SURVEY CONDUCTED BY PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE

#### FORM A – HOUSEHOLD INCOME SURVEY

Question 1: Full name of the householder

Question 2: Address: District/Town ....., Thanh Hoa province

Commune..... Village .....

Region: 1. Urban ..... 2. Rural .....

Question 3: Number of people in the family

Question 4: Total incomes and total expenses for household livelihood in the last 12 months

(from November 2009 to October 2010)

	Total income	Total expense
1. Cultivation (including trading goods and consuming goods of the household)		
- Food crops		
- Industrial crops		
- Horticulture		
- Additional production (hays, firewood, leafs, herbs..)		
- Other cultivation productions		

2. Breeding (including trading production and consuming goods of the household)		
- Cattle		
- Poultry		
- Other productions (including egg, fresh milk, honey, silkworm)		
3. Agricultural services		
4. Forestry and services (including trading goods and consuming goods of the household)		
5. Aquaculture (including trading goods and consuming goods of the household)		
6. Non-agricultural activities		
7. Wages or salary		
8. Others (including: remittance, pension, social commission, interest...)		
Total:		

Question 5: Income of the household in the last 12 months

	Net value
5.1 Total household income  (= Total income in question 4 – Total expense in question 4)	
5.2 Income per person per month  (= Total income in question 5.1 divided by number of people of the	

family divided by 12 months)	
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*Date .....Month.....Year.....*

**Householder or household representative**

*(Sign and full name)*

**Surveyor**

*(Sign and full name)*

## FORM C – POVERTY HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

Question 1: Full name of the householder

Question 2: Address: District/Town ....., Thanh Hoa province

Commune..... Village .....

Question 3: Region: 1. Urban ..... 2. Rural .....

Question 4: 1. Kinh..... 2. Ethnic minority .....

Question 5: Status of poverty

1. Former poverty
2. Re-poverty
3. Out of poverty
4. Nearly poverty

Question 6: Income per capita per person per month (VND) .....

Question 7: Number of people in the family .....

Question 8: Information of household member

No	Full name of the family member	Relati on to the house holder	Year of birth		Ethnicity	Persons in support policy	Persons under Decision 67 or 13	Number of children in school
			Male	Female				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
01								



02								
03								
04								
05								
06								
07								
08								
09								
10								
11								

#### Explanation of the Column

Col 3: 1. Householder; 2. Wife/husband; 3. Children; 4. Father/mother; 5. Grandmother/grandmother; 6. Grandchildren; 7. Children-in-law; 8. Siblings; 9. Other

Col 4 and Col 5: Year of birth

Col 6: Select the number Ethnicity:

1. Kinh; 2. Tay; 4. Chinese; 5. Khme; 6. Muong; 7. Nung; 8. Hmong; 9. Dao; 10. Gia Rai; 11. Ngai; 12. Ede; 13. Ba Na; 14. Xo Dang; 15. Other ethnicity

Col 7: Select one of the following option

1. Wounded and sick Soldier
2. Siblings of war-martyr
3. Chemical-affected soldier
4. Revolution service persons
5. Other

Col 8: Select one of the following option

1. Orphan children
2. Lonely elderly person
3. 85 year old person and over without pension or social support
4. Invalid person without working ability
5. Persons with disease or mental problem
6. Person with HIV/AIDS
7. Poor family without children under the age of 16.

Col 9: Select one of the following option

1. Toddler/preschool
2. Primary school
3. Secondary school
4. High school
5. Intermediate school
6. College/University

Question 9: Housing status (Select one of the following options)

1. Solid and reliable
2. Semi-solid/reliable

3. Temporary house
4. No house

Question 10: Drinking water (Select one of the following options)

1. Clean water
2. Unpurified water

Question 11: Reason of poverty (Select one of the following options)

1. Lacks of capital
2. Lack of land for cultivation
3. Lack of tools for cultivation
4. Lack of labour
5. Too many dependents
6. Employment
7. Lack of livelihood skills
8. Sickness and disease
9. Social evils
10. Laziness
11. Accidents

Question 12: Expectation of the household

1. Low interest loan
2. Provide more land for cultivation
3. Government support cultivation tools
4. Training
5. Introducing jobs
6. Training for livelihood skills
7. Support labour export
8. Social commission

Date ..... month ..... 2010

**Household representative**

*(Sign and full name)*

**Surveyor**

*(Sign and full name)*

## APPENDIX 2: VIET NGUYEN'S SURVEY ON HOUSEHOLD PROFILE AND STUDENT EDUCATION IN MUOT VILLAGE

### (Worksheet 1)

Date/ Ngày ..... tháng ..... năm 2010

Location: Muot village, Cam Thanh commune, Cam Thuy district, Thanh Hoa province

*Địa điểm: Thôn Muốt, xã Cẩm Thành, Huyện Cẩm Thủy, Tỉnh Thanh Hóa*

Name of participant/ *Họ và tên người tham gia:* .....

Age/ *Tuổi:* .....

Gender/ *Giới tính:*

M/ *Nam* ☐

F/ *Nữ* ☐

Occupation/ *Nghề nghiệp:* .....

Contact number/ *Điện thoại liên hệ:* .....

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Part I. 1. Number from 1 to 9 as you think the most important element to the least.

Hãy đánh số từ 1 đến 9 theo thứ tự mà anh/chị cho là quan trọng nhất đối với gia đình anh/chị. (Từ 1 là quan trọng nhất)

<input type="radio"/> Land for production Đất sản xuất 	<input type="radio"/> Livestock feeding Chăn nuôi 
<input type="radio"/> Social security An ninh xã hội 	<input type="radio"/> Social equality Công bằng XH 
<input type="radio"/> Education Giáo dục 	
<input type="radio"/> Investment capital Vốn làm ăn 	<input type="radio"/> Health care Chăm sóc sức Khỏe cộng đồng 
<input type="radio"/> Culture conservation Giữ gìn truyền thống văn hóa 	<input type="radio"/> Leadership capability Năng lực của Lãnh đạo 

2. Which of those elements is the most important for your living conditions' improvement?  
Please explain.

*Yếu tố nào trên đây là quan trọng nhất cho việc cải thiện đời sống của gia đình anh/chị? Xin hãy giải thích rõ vì sao.*

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**Translation:**

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3. Which of those elements do you think the most important for development of future generations? Please explain.

*Yếu tố nào trên đây anh/chị cho là quan trọng nhất đối với sự phát triển của thế hệ tương lai? Xin hãy giải thích rõ vì sao.*

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..... **Translation:**

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4. What elements do you think the government should give priority to support and clear off its problem?

*Theo anh/chị chính phủ nên ưu tiên hỗ trợ và giải quyết các vấn đề của yếu tố nào trên đây?*

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.....**Translation:**

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## Part II.

1. Your income per capita per year is .....VND (.....USD)

*Thu nhập bình quân đầu người hằng năm của gia đình anh/chị là .....Đồng  
(..... USD)*

2. Your main annual income comes from/ *Thu nhập hằng năm của gia đình anh/chị chủ yếu là từ:*

A. Rice/ *Lúa*

B. Vegetables (corns, beans, peanuts, cassavas...)/ *Hoa màu (Ngô, đậu, lạc, sắn...)*

C. Forestry (firewood, wood)/ *Lâm sản (củi đốt, gỗ)*

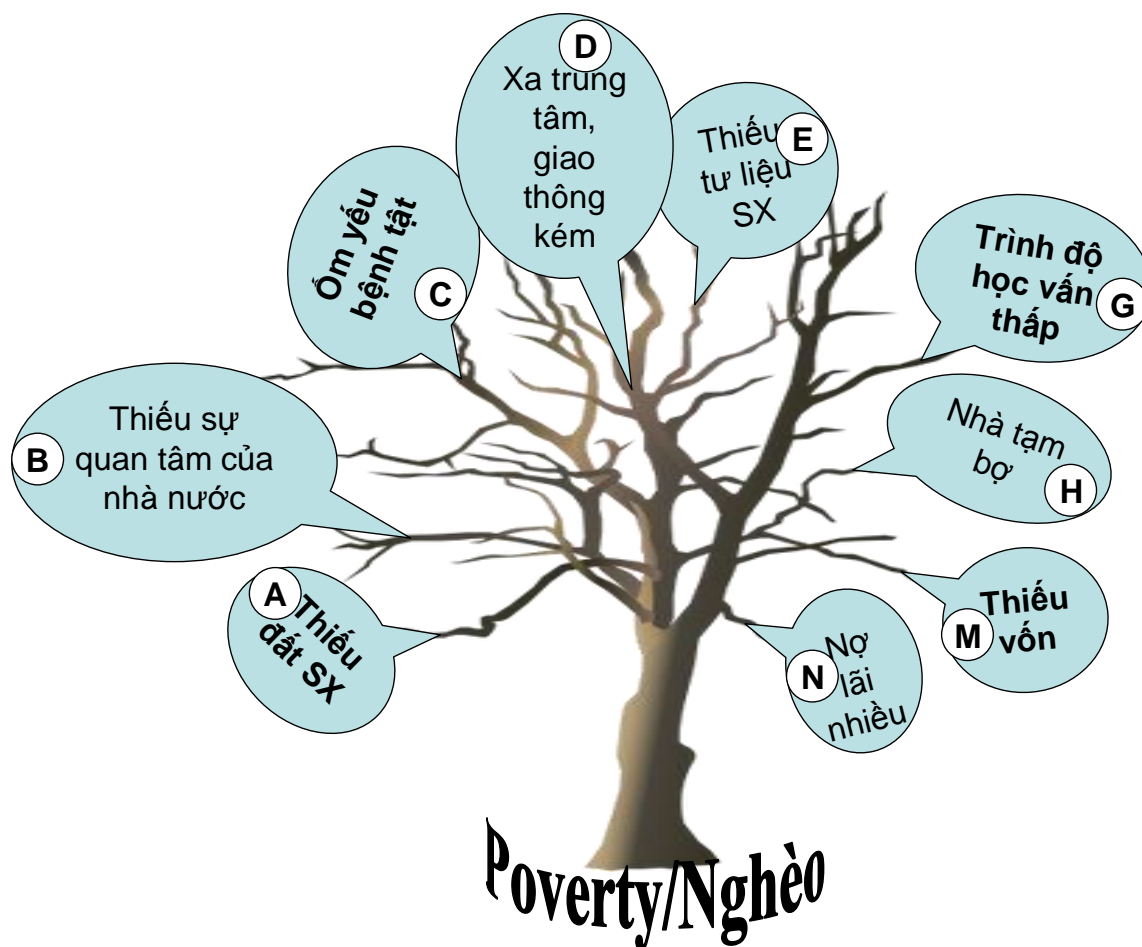
D. Hunting/ *Săn bắt*



E. Handicraft/ Nghề thủ công như đan lát

F. Livestock feeding (cattle, poultry, pond fish)/ Chăn nuôi (gia súc, gia cầm, cá ...)

3. <sup>27</sup>Following is the problem tree of poverty. Dưới đây là các yếu tố dẫn đến sự nghèo khó.



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<sup>27</sup> Note: **A.** Lack of land; **B.** Lack of government concern; **C.** Unable to work; **D.** Poor physical; **E.** Lack of production tools; **G.** Poor education; **H.** unstable housing; **M.** Lack of financial capital; **N.** Too much interest loan

Which of the above factors is (are) the main reason of your poverty? Please explain.

*Những yếu tố nào trên đây là nguyên nhân dẫn đến sự nghèo khó của gia đình anh/chị? Xin  
hãy giải thích rõ tại sao.*

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**Translation:**

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4. What is the most important factor which the government should give priority to deal with?

*Yếu tố nào theo anh/chị là quan trọng nhất mà chính phủ nên ưu tiên giải quyết trước?*

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**Translation:**

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5. Do you think you can afford your children higher education?

A. I can afford with my family's income/ Tôi có thể chu cấp cho con học với thu nhập của gia đình.

B. I will certainly afford my children's education even though I have to borrow money.

*/Tôi sẵn sàng cho con học mặc dù gia đình tôi phải vay mượn.*

C. I really want my children to have good education but it is out of my financial ability. /

*Tôi rất muốn cho con học nhưng điều đó nằm ngoài khả năng vì gia đình quá khó khăn*

D. Education is not necessary for my children because it does not help or make any change.

*Giáo dục không cần thiết cho con tôi vì nó chẳng giúp ích được gì hoặc thay đổi gì.*

6. What do you think your about natural resources? <sup>28</sup>

*Anh/Chị đánh giá thế nào về nguồn tài nguyên thiên nhiên của gia đình mình?*

A. Very poor/Rất kém

B. Poor/Kém

C. Standard/Đạt tiêu chuẩn

D. Good/Tốt

E. Very good/Rất tốt

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<sup>28</sup> "Standard" implies that the household have enough land and other natural resources to ensure their livelihoods.

7. What do you think about your human resource?

*Anh/Chị đánh giá thế nào về nguồn nhân lực của gia đình mình?*

A. Very poor/Rất kém

B. Poor/Kém

C. Standard/Đạt tiêu chuẩn

D. Good/Tốt

E. Very good/Rất tốt

8. What do you think about your financial resource?

*Anh/Chị đánh giá thế nào về nguồn vốn đầu tư của gia đình mình?*

A. Very poor/Rất kém

B. Poor/Kém

C. Standard/Đạt tiêu chuẩn

D. Good/Tốt

E. Very good/Rất tốt

9. What do you think about your family's physical conditions?

*Anh/Chị đánh giá thế nào về cơ sở vật chất của gia đình mình?*

A. Very poor/Rất kém

B. Poor/Kém

C. Standard/Đạt tiêu chuẩn

D. Good/Tốt

E. Very good/Rất tốt

10. What do you think about the role of education in your children future/career development?

*Anh/Chị đánh giá thế nào về vai trò của giáo dục đối với sự phát triển tương lai của con em mình?*

A. Not important at all/ Không hề cần thiết

B. very important/ Rất cần thiết

11. What method of making a living is the most effective in your family?

*Phương pháp làm ăn nào là hiệu quả nhất đối với gia đình anh chị?*

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.....

12. What reason do you think villagers tend to migrate to cities?

*Lý do gì anh chị cho rằng ngày càng nhiều người di cư đến thành phố?*

A. Better employment to send money home/ Tìm việc làm và gửi tiền về nhà

B. More job opportunities/ Nhiều cơ hội việc làm hơn ở quê

C. Living with siblings/ Sống cùng anh em họ hàng

D. Gaining experience of urban life/ Muốn trải kinh nghiệm

E. Avoid home-village agricultural works/ Ngại việc đồng áng

13. Do you think migration is important in contribution to your livelihood?

*Anh chị có cho rằng tìm làm ở thành phố giúp cải thiện cuộc sống ở quê nhà?*

A. Not important/ *Không quan trọng*

B. Important/ *Quan trọng*

C. Very important/ *Rất quan trọng*

D. I have no idea/ *Không có ý kiến gì cả*

## WORKSHEET 2

### (Livelihood of Muong household in Muot village)

Date/ Ngày ..... tháng ..... năm 2010

Location: Muot village, Cam Thanh commune, Cam Thuy district, Thanh Hoa province

Địa điểm: Thôn Muốt, xã Cẩm Thành, Huyện Cẩm Thủy, Tỉnh Thanh Hóa

Name of participant/ Họ và tên người tham gia: .....

Age/ Tuổi: .....

Gender/ Giới tính:

M/ Nam ☐

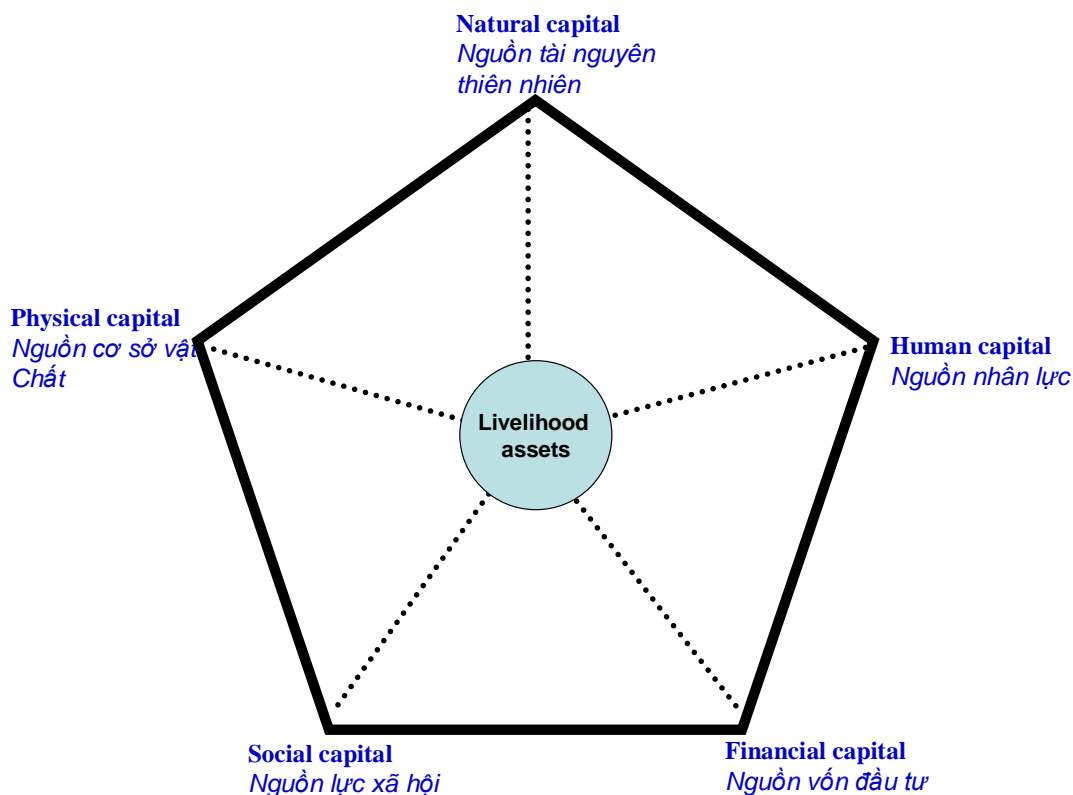
F/ Nữ ☐

Occupation/ Nghề nghiệp: .....

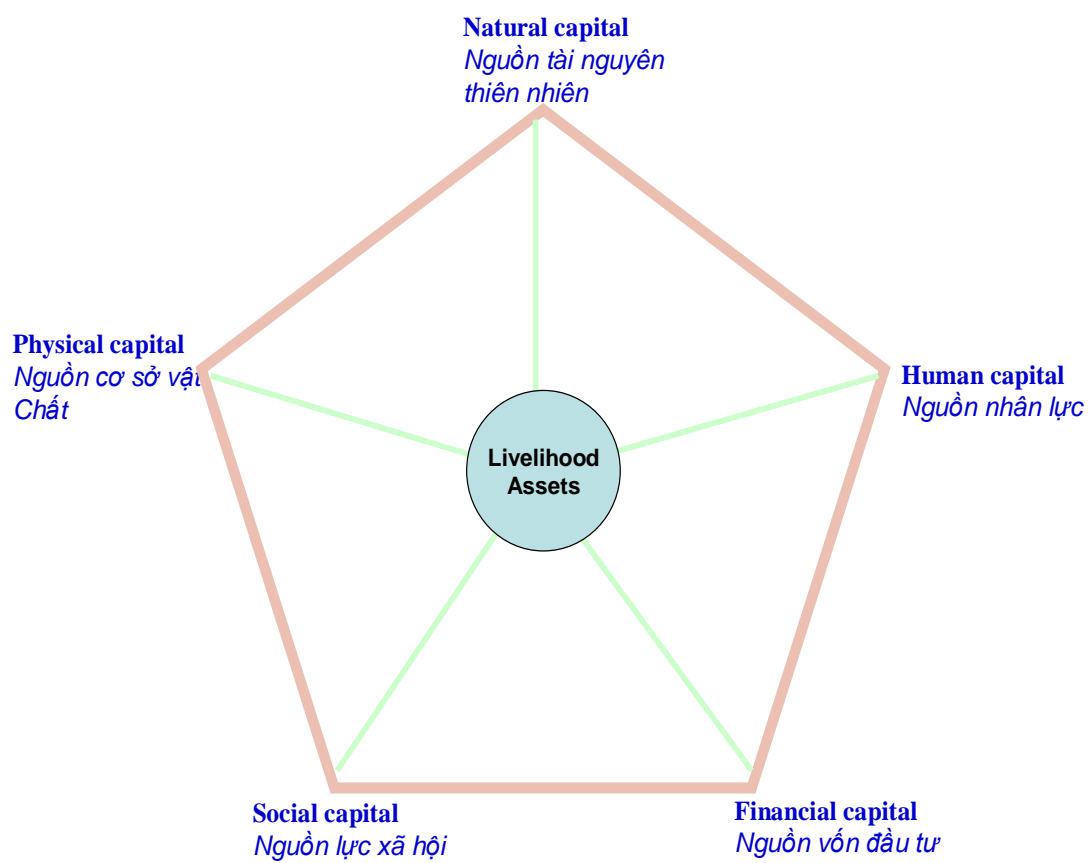
Contact number/ Điện thoại liên hệ: .....

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Following is the typical Livelihood Assets model. Associate with this model to draw your own livelihood assets on the back of your sheet. *Dưới đây là mô hình điển hình của phương thức làm ăn. Liên hệ mô hình này với thực tế của gia đình anh/chị và hãy vẽ mô hình làm ăn đó của gia đình anh/chị*







## WORKSHEET 3

### WORKSHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

#### (Education)

Date/ Ngày ..... tháng ..... năm 2010

Location: Muot village, Cam Thanh commune, Cam Thuy district, Thanh Hoa province

Địa điểm: Thôn Muốt, xã Cẩm Thành, Huyện Cẩm Thủy, Tỉnh Thanh Hóa

Name of participant/ Họ và tên người tham gia: .....

Age/ Tuổi: .....

Gender/ Giới tính:

M/ Nam ☐

F/ Nữ ☐

Occupation/ Nghề nghiệp: .....

Studying at/ Trường: .....

Quitted school since/ Đã bỏ học từ năm.....

Contact number/ Điện thoại liên hệ: .....

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1. What do you think about the role of education? *Em nghĩ gì về vai trò của giáo dục?*

A. Very important/ *Rất quan trọng*

B. Important/ *Quan trọng*

C. Not really important/ *Không quan trọng lắm*

D. Not important at all/ *Không quan trọng chút nào*

2. How many hours do you spend on your home study? *Mỗi ngày em dành bao nhiêu giờ để học bài ở nhà?*

**A.** 30 minutes/*phút*

**B.** 1 hour/*giờ*

**C.** 2 hours/*giờ*

**D.** More than 3 hours/ *3 giờ trở lên*

3. What do you think about the interrelationship between education and your future career?

*Em nghĩ gì về mối quan hệ giữa giáo dục và nghề nghiệp của em trong tương lai?*

**A.** Good education will bring opportunities for future careers.

*Học hành tốt sẽ mang lại nhiều cơ hội cho sự nghiệp trong tương lai.*

**B.** High education costs too much and it reduces opportunities for future careers.

*Học cao tốn quá nhiều tiền và nó làm giảm nhiều cơ hội cho sự nghiệp.*

**C.** Education has nothing to do with future career.

*Giáo dục chẳng liên quan gì đến sự nghiệp tương lai.*

4. In your community do you think peasants have better education than government personnel officers (GPO) do? *Theo em thì ở địa phương em nông dân có trình độ học vấn cao hơn hay công nhân viên chức nhà nước có trình độ học vấn cao hơn?*

**A.** Peasants have higher education than GPO/*Nông dân có học vấn cao hơn*

**B.** GPOs have higher education than peasants/ *Công nhân viên chức có học vấn cao hơn*

5. Do you think GPOs have higher income than peasants do? *Theo em cán bộ công nhân viên chức có thu nhập cao hơn so với thu nhập của nông dân không?*

**A.** GPOs have higher income than peasants do/ *Công nhân viên chức có thu nhập cao hơn nông dân*

**B.** Peasants have higher income than GPOs do/ *Nông dân có thu nhập cao hơn công nhân viên chức.*

6. Do your parents encourage you to study? *Bố mẹ em có khuyến khích em học không?*

A. Yes/Có

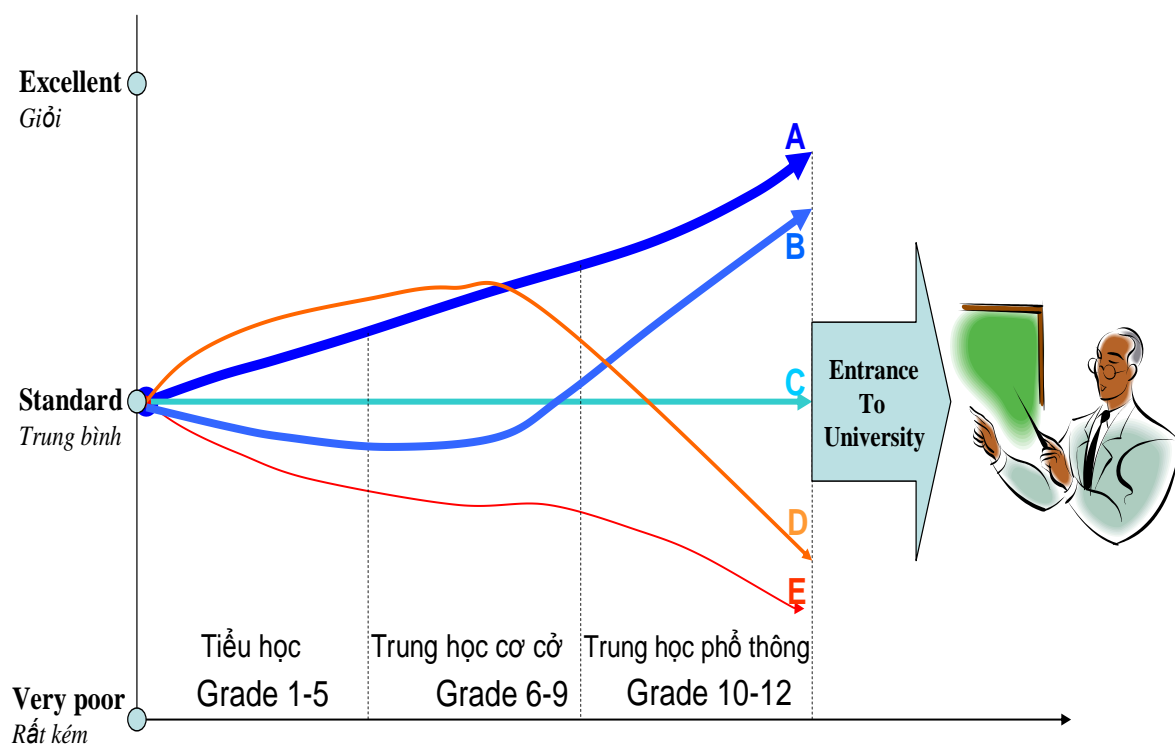
B. No/

7. The curves with the arrows present the school performance. If you are now in high school (grade 10-12), select one of the curve which reflects your school performance. (Select A or B or C or D or E)

*Những hình mũi tên dưới đây thể hiện kết quả và quá trình học tập ở trường. Nếu em đang là học sinh T.H.P.T hãy chọn một trong những sơ đồ trên từ A,B,C,D,E mà phản ánh đúng như kết quả và tiến trình học tập của em.*

*(Hãy khoanh tròn chữ cái mà em chọn)*

**A.                      B.                      C.                      D.                      E.**



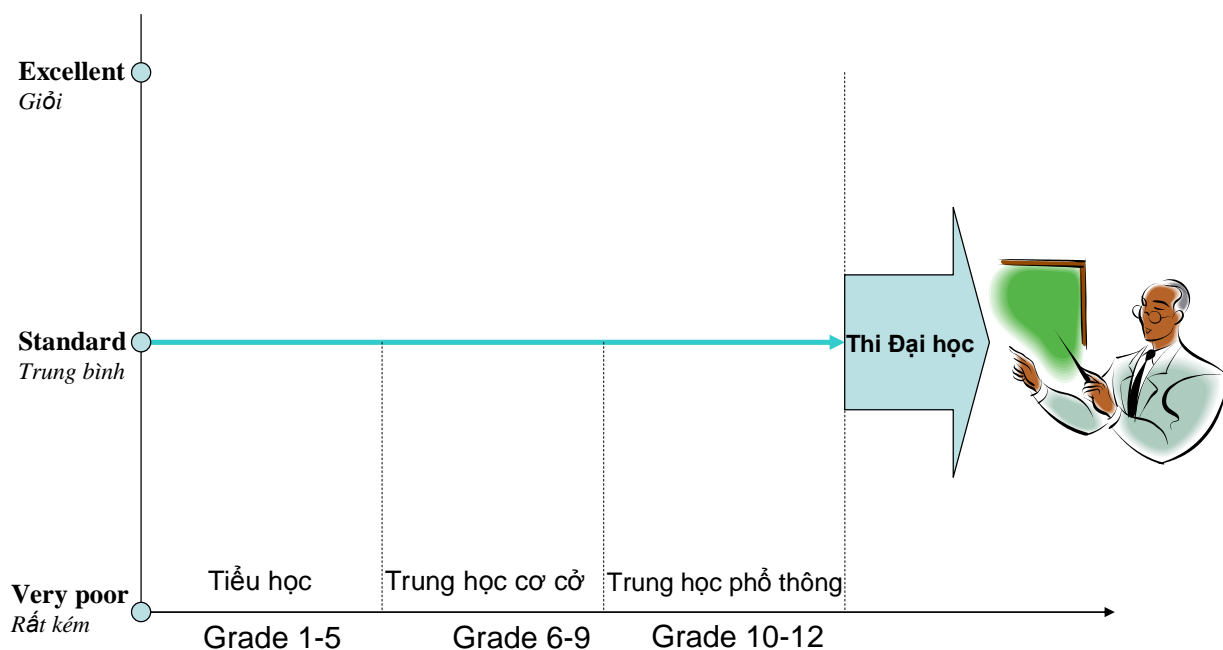
8. Which factors affect your school performance the most?

*Yếu tố nào có tác động đến kết quả học tập của em nhiều nhất?*

- A. Parents' financial ability/ *Khả năng tài chính của gia đình*
- B. Parents' encouragement/ *Sự khích lệ của cha mẹ*
- C. School's facilities and teachers abilities/ *Cơ sở vật chất và năng lực giáo viên*
- D. Peers in the village/ *Bạn bè cùng trang lứa trong làng*

9. Draw up a curve of study progress and performance that you think ideal for your future.

*Em hãy vẽ một sơ đồ thể hiện tiến độ và kết quả học tập mà em cho là lý tưởng nhất cho tương lai sự nghiệp của em.*



### APPENDIX 3: LIST OF HOUSEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

Time (in 2010)	Name of the person interviewed	Brief content of the interview according to the fieldwork diary	Conclusion
14/08/10	Truong Van Thuyet  (Location: Zone G)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- His family is living in a semi-solid house.</li> <li>- He has two children and one in primary school and one in secondary school. His children study well.</li> <li>- His wife is often sick and not skilled.</li> <li>- He has a large home plot garden but does not plant vegetable.</li> <li>- His family has 5 hectares of forest and grow eucalyptus, the family has 4000 square meters for rice and food crops.</li> <li>- Thuyet family has two buffaloes and three cows.</li> <li>- Income per capita per person is about USD35 per month</li> <li>- Mr Thuyet earns additional income by labour job during between two crops.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr Thuyet family is one of the poor families in Muot village.</li> <li>- Lack of financial resource</li> <li>- Need support from government</li> </ul>
15/08/10	Bui Van Vinh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This family has one daughter and one son. The son is in high school, the daughter is in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard working labourers but living in poverty</li> </ul>

	(Location: Zone G)	<p>secondary school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr Vinh works in the forest for the whole day, and his wife collect firewood for additional income.</li> <li>- There is a pond and a large home-plot garden in his house. There are also fruit trees (mango, longan). The pond provides the family with fishes as food source.</li> <li>- His family has three buffaloes, 80 chickens. Chicken is also a main food of his family. Besides, chicken is also traded for other expenses and saving.</li> <li>- Income per person per month is USD40.</li> <li>- Both husband and wife have no salary and social commission.</li> <li>- Mr Vinh strongly confirmed that they will certainly invest in his children's education.</li> </ul>	- Lack of skills and unemployment
16/08/10	Mrs Bui Thi Canh (Location: Zone G)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mrs Canh is a widow.</li> <li>- Mrs Canh lives with her son's family with 2 grandchildren. Her son and her daughter-in-law are main labourers they work really hard to earn a living.</li> <li>- Her daughter-in-law spends</li> </ul>	- Unable to make a living

		<p>all day in the forest to collect firewood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a chicken shed beneath the ground floor of the pole-house.</li> <li>- I saw an old loom at the corner of the house but it seems that the loom has not been used for long time. Mrs Canh said the Muong does not use their loom to weave cloth because they can buy clothes.</li> <li>- The most concern of her is that her son and her daughter-in-law can have more money invest in agriculture and forestry</li> </ul>	
18/08/10	Mr Bui Van Sau (Location: Zone G)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The old couple live in a small and semi-solid house. Mr Sau is 62 years old but he often works in his forest from early morning till late afternoon. He said his children got married and they lives on their own. Now he and his wife work hard to support themselves.</li> <li>- He gathers bamboos and rattans and his wife can knit baskets and sell at local market and commune centre. Each basket she can earn VND5000 to VND7000.</li> <li>- Sometimes he can get</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sickness</li> <li>- Low income and lack of financial capital</li> <li>- Need more investment</li> <li>- Need support from government</li> </ul>



		<p>bamboo shoot or some herbs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He and his wife are too weak to cultivate on drainage land, that is why they allow their children to cultivate on wet land.</li> <li>- Income per person per month is about USD25. This income is mainly from handicraft and forest production.</li> <li>- He has 10 hectares of forest but most of the work in the forest is done by his son.</li> </ul>	
19/08/10	<p>Mr Bui Van Thanh</p> <p>(Location: Zone G)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When I visited Mr Thanh's house, he was helping his relative in the same village build a new house. He is a very helpful and kind.</li> <li>- When I asked him about his children, he said he was very proud of his children because they study very well. He said that his family would try the best to invest in their children education. He and his wife are working very hard to save money for their children schooling because they believe that undergraduate education will cost lots of money.</li> <li>- There was an unforgettable story occurred to his family few</li> </ul>	

		<p>years ago. He cut down some trees in his forest to build his house unfortunately his logging was caught by forestry officer and he was fined VND 6,000,000. His family was so poor that they did not have enough money to pay the fine. They had to borrow money from the bank to pay the fine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He said his family is still in debt.</li> </ul>	
20/08/10	<p>Mrs Tran Thi Hue</p> <p>(Location: Zone G)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- She is a sole mother living with a 10 year old son. She said she has 1000 m<sup>2</sup> of land to cultivate wet rice in two main crops and can grow food crops such as corn, sesame, sweet potato in winter season.</li> <li>- She always tries to complete her work on the wet rice field (sowing, and fertilizing) and she spends most of her time in the forest. In her house I could not see anything valuable. She has a bike-cycle which is very useful because she uses it to carry firewood to commune centre to trade.</li> <li>- Her son is 10 years old but he looks like a 5 year old boy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Living on cultivation and forest production</li> <li>- Poor household with very low income</li> <li>- Need financial support and livelihood skills training</li> </ul>

		<p>Every day when she is working on the field or in the forest, her son goes to primary school. Mrs Hue returns home at noon to prepare lunch. After lunch she continues to work in the forest until sunset. Her son attends school in the morning, after school he stays at home and joins his peer friends in the village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- She said her son is all of her life. She is willing to invest in her son education and she is working hard everyday to save money.</li> </ul>	
21/08/10	<p>Truong Viet Thuong</p> <p>(Location: Zone A)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- His family has five people. He said although home plot garden is very large (2,500 m<sup>2</sup>), he needs more wetland for food crops and rice.</li> <li>- Mr Thuong's family has seven hectares of forest.</li> <li>- His first son took entrance exam to university in 2010 but he failed. His dream is to attend university in Ha Noi, however this seems out of his reach.</li> <li>- His mother is old and sick. He has to spend a lot of money on her medicine and healthcare service.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Living in poverty</li> <li>- Being willing to invest in education for children</li> <li>- Hard working labourers</li> <li>- Poor physical conditions</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Income per person per month is about USD20</li> <li>- His wife spends day time in the forest and food crops, in the evening she makes handicraft (weaving bamboo baskets and other productions).</li> <li>- Mr Thuong wants to go to Ha Noi or Ho Chi Minh City to work for better earning but his mom is sick and his wife could not take care of their children by her own.</li> </ul>	
23/08/10	Cao Minh Nhat  (Location: Zone A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr Nhat's youngest son was taking courses at a vocational training school in Thanh Hoa City. When I asked him how much money his son spent on his study per month, he said it was about VND 1,000,000 (USD50). Mr That confessed that they tried very hard in order to get money to support their son's education, however their income was not enough to support his son. Therefore they had to borrow money from the bank and from the relative.</li> <li>- Mr Nhat used to move to Ha Noi to work for half a year with a hope that he could get additional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being willing to invest in children education (Their first priority)</li> <li>- Lack of financial resource for agriculture and skilled labour</li> <li>- Vocational training needed</li> </ul>

		<p>income to support his children schooling. However, he said he could not save much after six months working in Ha Noi. Owing to his experience unskilled labour like him find it very difficult to get a well-paid job in cities. Income from labour job was just enough his expenses in the city. The rent and foods were too expensive.</p> <p>- He said that urban life was so rich. He said a breakfast of a Ha Noi person cost more than his daily income.</p> <p>- In the last few years his family have tried to raise cattle (cows, buffalo, and pigs) and poultry (chicken, duck). However, most chicken and duck died in a disease (chicken flu) and he lost the investment.</p> <p>- Mr Nhat said that their most remarkable concern is financial capital because they did not have enough money to invest in livelihood and afford children education.</p>	
30/08/10	Bui Van Sy (Location:	<p>- I started surveying Zone D by dropping in Mr Sy's house</p>	<p>- High unemployment</p> <p>- Lack of financial</p>

	Zone D)	<p>owing to the earlier appointment. When I came in he was planting some guava trees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He has three sons. All of them have finished high school but they did not continue university education because they could not pass the entrance exam. His sons work in the forest and on the field. Sometimes they are employed to cut bamboo for other forest owner.</li> <li>- Her sons often joined their friends in the village to play pool in the evening. They also often gathered in group to drink local alcohol.</li> <li>- Mr Sy said that income per person per month was about USD28. His first son planed to get married in August 2010 but he said the food crop in June 2010 was they could not afford the wedding. Therefore the wedding was postponed.</li> <li>- Mr Sy and his wife said that they were upset because their children could earn qualified education. Mr Sy confessed that there would be no chance for his children to improve their social</li> </ul>	<p>resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of livelihood skills</li> <li>- Unstable livelihood strategies</li> </ul>
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		<p>status and living condition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He hoped that their sons could earn vocational education certificate to have better job opportunity.</li> <li>- Mr Sy also expected to get financial support from government to invest in livelihoods.</li> </ul>	
30/08/10	<p>Mrs Cao Thi To</p> <p>(Location: Zone D)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This family lives in a small semi-solid house. She and her husband are old and sick and unable to work. She is 64 years old and her husband is 74 years old.</li> <li>- She said that her family was subsidised VND 330,000 (US\$ 17) per month, one kind of government support for old people. However that amount of money was not enough to buy medicine for her husband.</li> <li>- Her youngest son got married six months ago and they are still living with their parents in the same house. At present, he does not have enough money to buy land and build a new house.</li> <li>- Her son and daughter in-law now work hard all day to take care of the whole family.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor physical conditions</li> <li>- Living in poverty</li> </ul>

30/08/10	Mr Bui Thanh Cham (Location: Zone D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr and Mrs Cham are 54 years old, and they both work in the forest every day.</li> <li>- They grow and conserve 10 hectares of forest but they did not have enough money to invest in their forestland. They had to borrow ten million VND (USD500) from the bank to buy plants and fertilizers. The loan was overdue and he could not pay back the bank. Because his family could not pay back that loan, they would not be able to borrow additional money from the bank.</li> <li>- There was a small pig shed in their garden but there was no pig. The pig shed was closed. Not too far away from the pig shed was the drinking water tank. Drinking water of his family was conducted from the upper tank on the top of the mountain through a pipe. Mr Cham said that they have been drinking that source of water for hundreds of years.</li> <li>- Mr Cham is one of the poorest household in Muot village. Income per person per month is</li> </ul>	
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		about US\$17.	
31/08/10	Mr Bui Van Minh  (Location: Zone D)	<p>- When I visited Mr Minh's house his eldest son was at home and all of his family members were working in the field. His son said he was taking 12 month course at the provincial vocational training. He said he would finish the course in a couple of months but he was not sure if he would be able to find a job. He also said that if he could not find a job in Cam Thuy district town, he would go to Ha Noi or Ho Chi Minh City to find a job.</p> <p>- Mr Minh's son said that during his studying time he did not have to pay tuition fee because he is indigenous minority and he was from a poor family.</p>	<p>- Available natural resources (forest, home plot garden), but ineffective livelihood methods</p> <p>- Low income</p> <p>- Lack of working skills</p> <p>- Lack of education qualification</p>
31/08/10	Mr Ha Thai Nam  (Location: Zone D)	<p>- There are three members in this household. His daughter is studying at Hong Duc University. When I visited his household, his wife Bui Thi Hiem was doing gardening. They have a very big home plot garden and they also plant vegetables and fruit trees in the garden.</p> <p>- Mrs Bui Thi Hiem said that</p>	<p>- Mr Tam's household is very poor and need more financial capital support.</p> <p>- They also need more training of livelihood skills.</p> <p>- They supported their children education.</p>

		<p>they did not have enough money to invest in their forest and food crops. They did not have suitable tools for agricultural production. She said their method of cultivation (using buffalo, and cow) were no longer suitable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each year they invest about USD250 in agriculture and forestry.</li> <li>- Income per person per month was USD11.</li> <li>- Mrs Hiem affirmed that no matter how hard they had to, did they support their only daughter to earn higher education and get a better job. They were very proud of their daughter. She believed that after her daughter finished her study, she would be a teacher and have a better social status.</li> </ul>	
01/09/10	Mr Ha Van Tuan (Location: Zone D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr Tuan got married in 1994 when he was 17 years old and his wife was 15 years old. They had two children and they were both in secondary education level.</li> <li>- In his house I could see nothing valuable except an old motorbike bought in 2009 with VND 5,000,000. It was a Chinese</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young family with hard working labourers.</li> <li>- Lack of financial capital for cultivation</li> <li>- Lack of skills</li> <li>- Unemployment</li> <li>- Being willing to invest in children education</li> </ul>

		<p>motorbike which is not comfortable for lady to ride.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr Tuan was given 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> of wet-rice field by his parent when he separated from his parents. He built a small house in a smaller area next to a stream.</li> <li>- They live on foot crops cultivation and forest production collection.</li> <li>- His family shared a big water tank with Mr Cham, Mrs To and Mr Minh's family.</li> <li>- Mr Tuan said he hope his two children can study well and further their education to get a better life.</li> </ul>	
02/09/10	Mr Ha Thai Phuong (Location: Zone D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This household has very large home plot garden (2 hectares). His house is located on a high slop of the mountain. However, they could not plant valuable vegetables or food crops. His garden is likely a forest.</li> <li>- Mr Phuong and his wife worked all day long in the forest. He has 5 hectares of forest.</li> <li>- His two children were both married and live on their own.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Available natural resource but lack of skills</li> <li>- Hardworking labours but low income</li> </ul>

10/09/10	Mr Bui Van Tram (Location: Zone J)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr Tram (50 years old man) lives with his wife, two sons and a daughter-in-law.</li> <li>- Each day his family members go to the forest to plant trees and collect forest productions.</li> <li>- His wife collected firewood whenever she had time.</li> <li>- Her son and daughter-in-law also spent most of their time in the forest. His eldest son used to go to Ha Noi to find a job but after a few months he had to return home as he could not get a suitable job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low income and living in poverty.</li> <li>- Plentiful natural resources but lack of working skills and investment capital.</li> </ul>
10/09/10	Mrs Bui Thi Dau (Location: Zone J)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Six member family. (2 sons, a daughter, mother-in-law)</li> <li>- Mother-in-law 89 years old is weak and sick, unable to work and no government support</li> <li>- Income per person per month USD19</li> <li>- Youngest daughter was in high school but low performance. She was not willing to study</li> <li>- All family members work in the forest.</li> <li>- 6 hectares of forest,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poverty</li> <li>- Lack of wetland for food crops</li> <li>- Need financial capital for investment.</li> </ul>
11/09/10	Mr Cao Ba Ve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr Ve is 70 years old and his wife is 63.</li> </ul>	

	(Location: Zone J)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Both were unable to work in the forest or crop cultivation</li> <li>- Making handicraft (baskets, home tools) for trading</li> <li>- Mr Ve got a monthly social commission 560,000 VND (USD 28) because he used to serve in the army.</li> <li>- Drinking water was piped from upper tank on the mountain.</li> </ul>	
11/09/10	Mrs Cao Thi Quyen (Location: Zone J)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three generation family. Mrs Quyen was living with her son's family.</li> <li>- In 2010 her family earned 5,000,000 VND from selling bamboo</li> <li>- Her son-in-law is lazy</li> <li>- Her 7 year old granddaughter does not like school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Poor household</li> <li>-Lack skills</li> <li>-Lack investment capital</li> <li>-Lazy</li> </ul>
12/09/10	Mr Cao Hong Phong (Location: Zone J)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three generation family.</li> <li>- Three sons finished study but none of them have higher education.</li> <li>- All family members worked hard in the forests for making their living.</li> <li>- Low incomes and no</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Living in poverty</li> <li>- Lack money to invest in livelihood</li> </ul>

		government salary or payment	
12/09/10	Mr Cao Duc Canh  (Location: Zone J)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very small and insolid house</li> <li>- Mr Canh said his family is in bid debt because they borrowed money from the bank few years ago to invest in livelihood but unable to pay back so far.</li> <li>- Two daughters (12 and 7 years old) were in school. They had good school performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Working hard but poor</li> <li>- Willing to invest in children's education</li> <li>- Need more financial support from the government</li> </ul>
20/09/10	Mr Truong Cong Son  (Location: Zone H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Large home plot garden but very few produce.</li> <li>- Mr Son was doing a part time job as a builder during the seasonal food crop break to earn extra income.</li> <li>- He said they were trying to save money for their children education as he believed that education would help their children improve quality of live and social status.</li> <li>- His family income per month was about US\$85- US\$100.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard working farmers</li> <li>- Had a positive attitude towards education.</li> </ul>
20/09/10	Bui Van	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This family is on a high slop of the mountain, very difficult to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very poor family</li> </ul>

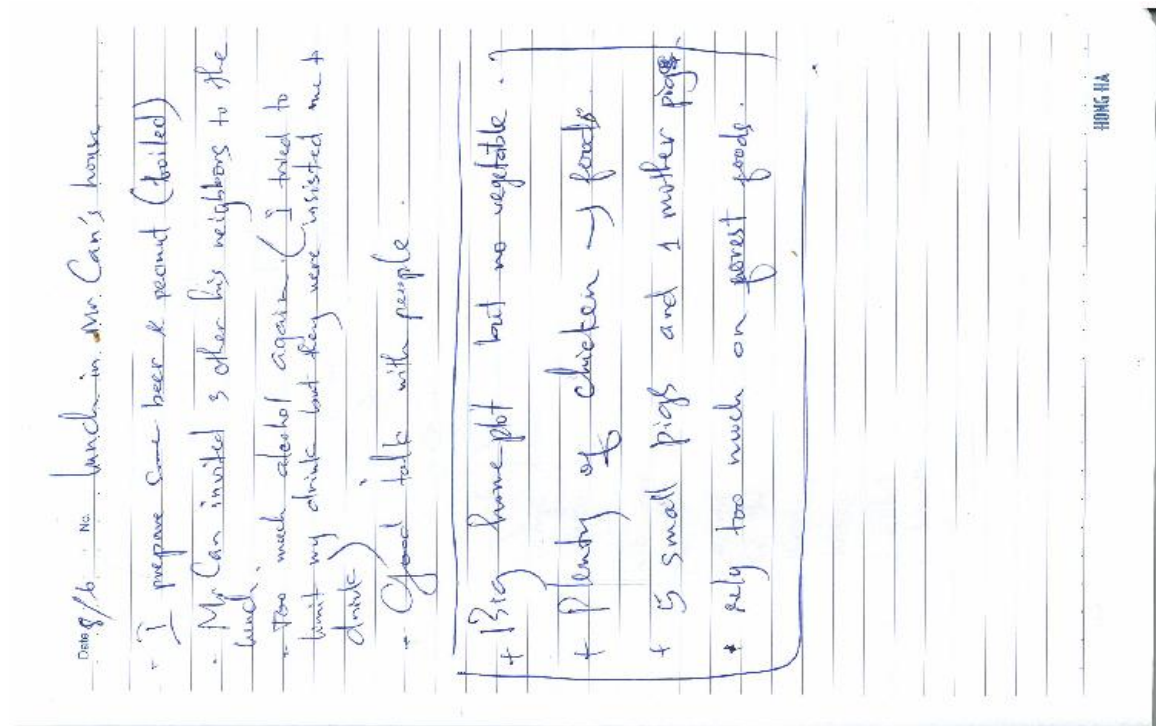
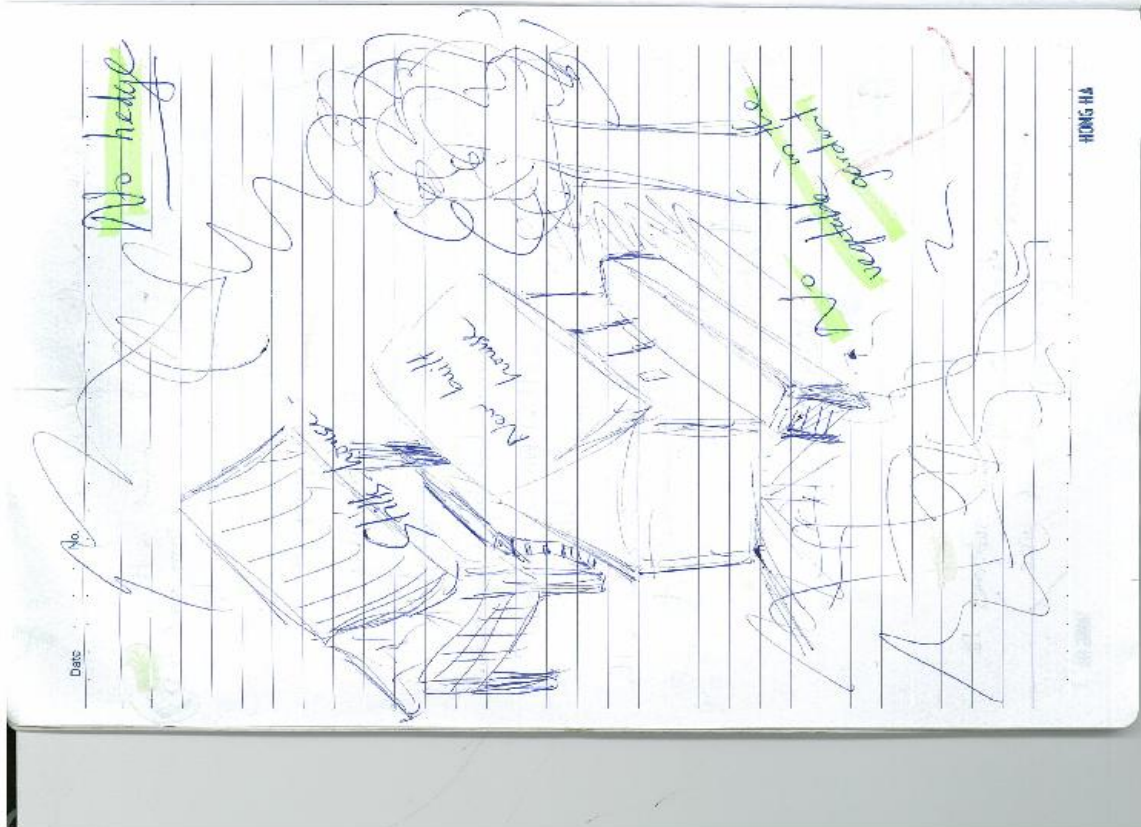
	Tuyen (Location: Zone H)	<p>transport.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Large home plot garden but quite steepy. He raised many pigs and chicken in the garden.</li> <li>- They spent most of their time working in the forest to collect firewood and forest products.</li> </ul>	- Need financial support
21/09/10	Bui Minh Duyen (Location: Zone H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 7 member family (four children and his mother)</li> <li>- His first three children are daughters and he attempted to have a son.</li> <li>- Two first daughters are at university.</li> <li>- This family plant and sell bamboo shoot.</li> <li>- His family earned 3.500.000 VND (USD 160) from selling pigs and chickens.</li> <li>- His mother has 120,000 VND (USD 6) per month</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Many dependents</li> <li>- High expense on children education</li> <li>- Living in poverty</li> </ul>
21/09/10	Mr Truong Van Xuyen (Location: Zone H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Large home plot garden but no vegetables or fruit trees. When I asked why they did not use home plot garden to produce vegetables</li> </ul>	- Need financial support for livelihood investment

		<p>and fruits, he said they they did not need homeplot garden because they had available vegetales from forest. They justed used the garden as an open poultry cage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- His family has five hectares of forest and he planted bamboo and eucalyptus. He harvested bamboo annually but eucalyptus will be harvested in four or five years.</li> <li>- He said he did not have enough money to invest in forests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They need vocational training and job opportunity</li> </ul>
22/09/10	Mr Truong Cong Dong (Location: Zone H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He has one child and he said he did not want to have more children because it was difficult for them to pay for chilren's education. He worked hard and saved money for his son's education.</li> <li>- His family live in a small and temporary house. There is no bathroom or toilet. Drinking water was conducted from a common tank on upper slope.</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very poor family</li> <li>- Limited access to financial source</li> <li>- Willing to invest in children education.</li> </ul>
23/09/10	Mr Bui Van	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very poor family living in a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expect to have</li> </ul>



	Cong  (Location: Zone H)	<p>small house.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Main income from collecting forest productions.</li> <li>- Even though his family is poor, he said he would be willing to invest in his childrens' education.</li> </ul>	<p>more financial support from the government.</p>
23/09/10	Mr Bui Van Vi  (Location: Zone H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard working 46 years old man. He said his family had large forest areas but they did not have enough money to invest.</li> <li>- Most income is from rain fed crop and forest production.</li> </ul>	<p>Need financial support from the government.</p> <p>Look for vocational training and job opportunity</p>
06/10/10	Mrs Cao Thi Huyen  (Location: Zone E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mrs Huyen is a teacher at Cam Thanh Secondary school.</li> <li>- Her family is one of the wealthiest household in the village because she has salary.</li> <li>- She was quite happy with her living condition.</li> <li>- She was also happy with the study performance of Muot children in recent years.</li> </ul>	<p>Wealthy family</p>

## APPENDIX 4: SAMPLES OF FIELDNOTE



Date 1/8 No. Working with Mr. Heng in the  
 common village house  
 Discuss with the village leaders about the trend  
 of socioeconomic performance of the Muoi villages.

### Summary

Type of income	Description
<b>Forestry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The income from forest decreased as the long-term plan.</li> <li>Illegal to explore forest production without permission of local authority.</li> </ul>
<b>Planting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase income from plantation &amp; crops.</li> <li>better method of cultivation people start to use technology in cultivation.</li> </ul>
<b>livestock</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muoi households start to breed pigs &amp; poultry more.</li> <li>The income from livestock increase.</li> </ul>
<b>additional income</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>additional income has increased significantly in the recent years because more &amp; more men leave the village to work seek for jobs in urban areas and send remittance back home.</li> </ul>

HONG HA

Date 1/8 No. Participating in the field of rice.

- \* wet rice has been planted for almost a month.
- \* Now is the time for Muoi villagers to fertilize and irrigate.
- \* Most of the village women take care the wet rice field while their husbands seek for other additional income.
- \* From this time, women also start to go to the forest to collect firewood for trading.

### Summary

Name of fertilizer	How to fertilize
<b>Nitrogenous fertilizer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8-10g/500m<sup>2</sup> to scatter 2 times during the crop</li> <li>Note: 5000 VND/kg of nitrogenous</li> </ul>
<b>Potassium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-5kg/500m<sup>2</sup>: Mix with nitrogenous fertilizer or scatter separately. Best to scatter when the field has 4-5 m water height from the ground.</li> </ul>
<b>Muck</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most of Muoi villagers use muck more than other chemical fertilizers because it is easy</li> </ul>

HONG HA



Date 22/08/1980

Mr Ha Van An

When I came to Mr An's house, he was not at home. His wife offered me some fresh green tea and we had a short conversation.

Mr An was working in the forest. He told me they have some chickens, some ducks, wild geese, etc. in their home plot with a small road to the village road and the family keep walking on this path but no need to charge or cut off the road.

In the house, there are two bamboo beds (bed made of bamboo) with small table and stool, nothing else valuable.

One special thing is the "studying corner" of their sons. They put a wooden box on two stools and their sons study at home on that table.

They have large home plot but I could find any vegetables. Mrs. Loi said they can pick up some wild vegetables near the stream, or in the forest. Sometimes they have chicken or pork (buy in market) but most of the meat without meat.

HONG HA

Date 23/08/1980

Mr Cao Minh What

Mr Nhoat has his youngest son who is attending in a vocational school in Thanh Hoa City. When I asked him how much ~~the~~ he had to send his son for a month for his tuition fees, living cost, etc. He said about 100,000 VND.

He also said that they don't have to try their best to support their son and sometime he has to borrow additional money from his relatives to send to his son. Then, he has to find some temporary job like such as teaching job to save money to pay ~~his~~ relatives back / return money to his relatives.

His eldest daughter works as needlewoman in an industrial zone in Binhua centre. ~~She is~~ ~~not~~ ~~enough~~ ~~for~~ ~~her~~ ~~to~~ ~~survive~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~city~~ ~~so~~ ~~she~~ ~~can't~~ ~~help~~ ~~her~~ ~~parents~~.

He said last few years he tried to raise cattle (cows, pigs, chickens) and ~~failed~~ but he failed. The chickens were died because of epidemic and the pigs couldn't bear. Then he had to sell his cows to leave money to pay for ~~the~~ ~~school~~ ~~fees~~ ~~he~~ ~~got~~ ~~to~~ ~~invest~~. After that he didn't want, even didn't dare to invest. But the important thing he learnt that he didn't know the techniques in raising & taking care his cattle. So I think that if the agricultural-technologist can guide the Nhoat's villagers, they can earn their livelihood much easier.

HONG HA

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