

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES/ETHNIC MINORITIES
AND
POVERTY REDUCTION
VIET NAM

Environment and Social Safeguard Division
Regional and Sustainable Development Department
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FOREWORD

This publication was prepared in conjunction with an Asian Development Bank (ADB) regional technical assistance project for *Capacity Building for Indigenous Peoples/Ethnic Minority Issues and Poverty Reduction*, covering four developing member countries (DMCs) in the region, namely, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Viet Nam. The project is aimed at strengthening national capacities to combat poverty and at improving the quality of ADB's interventions as they affect indigenous peoples.

The report was prepared jointly by Ms. Huynh Thu Ba, Ms. Duong Bich Hanh, and Mr. Bui The Cuong, ADB consultants based in Viet Nam, under the guidance of Mr. Roger Plant, leader of the consultants team. The findings contained herein are the result of several activities under the technical assistance, including a provincial workshop in Kon Tum on 31 May–1 June 2001, and a national workshop in Hanoi on 17–18 September 2001. Extensive fieldwork and consultations with government representatives and indigenous peoples were also undertaken. The findings of this study were shared at a regional workshop held in Manila on 25–26 October 2001, which was attended by representatives from the four participating DMCs, nongovernment organizations, ADB, and other finance institutions. The program was coordinated and supervised by Dr. Indira Simbolon, Social Development Specialist and Focal Point for Indigenous Peoples, ADB. The assistance of Mr. Jay Maclean in editing and of Ms. Anita L. Quisumbing and Ms. Lily Bernal in production is acknowledged with thanks.

The publication is one of a series of documents produced by the project. They comprise four country reports (on Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Viet Nam, respectively), a regional report covering these four countries, and the proceedings of the regional workshop which resulted in recommendations for a regional action plan for indigenous peoples/ethnic minorities. In addition, a regional report on the subject in Pacific DMCs was prepared under a separate consultancy.

It is hoped that the information in this publication series on the issues and concerns of indigenous peoples/ethnic minorities will help guide national governments and other development partners in improving future interventions to recognize, promote, and protect the rights of these peoples.



ROLF ZELIUS

Chief Compliance Officer and
Deputy Director-General
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We would like to express our sincere thanks to CEMMA and the Steering Committee for facilitating the field research and providing valuable comments and suggestions. We are also grateful to local authorities at all levels as well as the commune residents in the research sites for their support and assistance. Our warmest thanks go to Mr. Roger Plant, consultant team leader, and to Dr. Indira Simbolon and Ms. Anita L. Quisumbing of ADB for their responsible and effective assistance. Generous cooperation and input were given by the participants of the provincial and national workshops.

Huynh Thu Ba, Duong Bich Hanh, and Bui The Cuong

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	-	Asian Development Bank
CEMMA	-	Committee on Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas
CSP	-	country strategy and program (ADB)
GDP	-	gross domestic product
NGO	-	nongovernment organization
VBA	-	Viet Nam Bank for Agriculture
VBP	-	Viet Nam Bank for the Poor

CURRENCY EQUIVALENTS

Currency Unit	-	Dong (D)
\$1.00	-	D15,106 at the end of 2001

The value of the Dong has eased over the period described in this report. Following are exchange rates per dollar since 1996.

End-1995	-	D11,025
End-1996	-	D11,050
End-1997	-	D11,175
End-1998	-	D13,892
End-1999	-	D14,024
End-2000	-	D14,541

In this report, "\$" refers to US dollars.

1

INTRODUCTION

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) implemented in 2001 a regional technical assistance project for capacity building for indigenous peoples/ethnic minorities and poverty reduction in four Asian countries, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Viet Nam. This was the first capacity building initiative undertaken by ADB at the regional level since it adopted its Policy on Indigenous Peoples in 1998. Under this policy, ADB has pledged to work with borrowing member countries to support and assist the development of capacities for addressing indigenous peoples' matters. The policy focuses on the participation of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in development and on the mitigation of any undesired effects of development.

The specific objectives of the project are threefold:

- to conduct a poverty assessment of indigenous peoples/ethnic minorities and examine in each of the participating countries the relevant national policies and legislation, programs, projects, and initiatives pertaining to indigenous peoples as these address the multifaceted dimensions of poverty;
- to evaluate and assess the impact of ADB interventions that address the vulnerability and poverty of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in the countries concerned; and
- to provide capacity building for governments, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and indigenous and ethnic minority groups so that they can participate actively in the formulation of action plans and ADB-sponsored programs and projects.

The Government of Viet Nam agreed to participate in the study and named the Committee on Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (CEMMA) as the official implementing agency. Three Vietnamese

consultants carried out the project activities. The methodology was similar to that adopted in the other participating countries.

First, a review was made of pertinent legislation, statistical data, and other available information on the poverty trends and situation of ethnic minorities. Attention was given to the methods used for the classification of ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam and to the possible need to revise these methods in order to have a fully comprehensive picture of the different ethnic minority groups. A review was also made of official programs that seek the economic and social upliftment of ethnic minorities.

Second, participatory poverty assessments were conducted in different parts of Viet Nam. The main emphasis was on the province of Kon Tum in the Central Highlands. Two researchers visited 10 villages in 6 communes of 4 districts. Consultations were carried out with government officials at provincial, district, and commune levels. The perceptions of these officials on the poverty situation of ethnic minorities were carefully documented and analyzed. Next, meetings were conducted with ethnic minority representatives—of different age, gender, and economic status—at the village level in order to gain a better understanding of their socioeconomic situation and their involvement in existing projects in the area. Additional fieldwork was also carried out in Gia Lai Province in the Central Highlands, and Lao Cai in the Northern Highlands. Case studies from these regions were used to support the analysis.

Third, a review was made of programs and projects implemented on behalf of ethnic minorities at the provincial level in Kon Tum. Meetings were held with officials from different provincial departments, including the Department of Ethnic Minorities and Religion; the Department of Planning and Investment; the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development; the Department of Education and Training; the

Department of Health; and the Office of Fixed Settlement, Fixed Cultivation, and New Economic Zones. Documents on programs and projects implemented in areas where ethnic minorities live were collected.

Fourth, a review was made of some projects implemented by international organizations, with particular reference to ADB. Relevant documents were collected to examine the strengths and constraints of the projects, as well as the involvement of local ethnic minorities. Emphasis was given to the Central Region Livelihood Improvement Project of ADB, at an advanced stage of preparation at the time of this study. Meetings were held with consultants from international agencies and with provincial officials where these projects were being implemented. Attention was given to the way in which ethnic minority concerns were being addressed in ADB's overall country strategy for Viet Nam, and in the preparation of an overall poverty partnership agreement.

Fifth, a provincial workshop was conducted in Kon Tum Province on 31 May–1 June 2001, which focused on the poverty situation (especially for ethnic minority communities in the province); programs/policies with special focus on ethnic minorities; needs and aspirations of local ethnic minority communities; and suggestions for a national workshop and a country action plan. Twenty-two provincial and district officials participated in the workshop, as well as 12 representatives from ethnic minority communities, members of the project steering committee, and the consultants.

Sixth, a 2-day national workshop was held in Hanoi, on 17–18 September 2001. It aimed at building awareness of ethnic minority and poverty issues among stakeholders, developing an action plan, and making preliminary guidelines on estimating the impact of ADB's interventions on ethnic minorities.

A Vietnamese delegation headed by the Vice-Chairman of CEMMA also participated in the Regional Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Poverty Reduction at ADB in Manila on 25–26 October 2001.

For Viet Nam, this project has taken place at an important and opportune moment. In recent years, the Government has expressed a strong commitment to poverty reduction and has a particularly good record in the Asian context for reducing overall poverty

levels. While poverty levels for ethnic minorities have also been reduced, concerns have been expressed that the rate of poverty reduction has not been as fast as for majority ethnic groups, and also that there have been some significant differences between ethnic minority groups in terms of the level of acculturation and integration within the market economy. Moreover, there are indications that ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands (where there have been high levels of recent settler immigration from lowland regions) have benefited less than other ethnic groups from market-oriented reforms such as land privatization and the growth of commercial agriculture.

Some government policies that aim to achieve a faster rate of integration for “backward” groups, such as the “sedentarization” programs, have been subject to criticism in this context. There have been some calls for new approaches based on more detailed understanding of the cultural aspirations of the different ethnic minority groups, enabling them to retain aspects of their traditional livelihood while at the same time benefiting from economic modernization.

ADB has also had to grapple with these issues as it increases its loan portfolio in Viet Nam, with a strong emphasis on geographically targeted poverty reduction projects in such areas as the Central Highlands where there is a large concentration of ethnic minority peoples. As it pursues the goals of inclusive social development, ADB has indeed suggested in its new country strategy for Viet Nam that the Government should carefully review the impact of past policies and programs on the development of ethnic minorities and remote areas.

The present report, based on a few months work and some brief participatory poverty assessments, can only be a starting point in such debates. Issues and recommendations for a draft national action plan are put forward in the hope that they can provide some guidance for future initiatives by the Government of Viet Nam and ADB.

The report has seven chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the ethnic minorities and their distribution. It is followed by a chapter that summarizes the government's policies related to ethnic minorities and describes the major programs in their areas. Chapter 4 outlines the key issues that affect the lives and

environment of ethnic minorities, the major one being poverty, discussed in detail including case studies in the following chapter. Chapter 6 describes ADB's activities in areas of Viet Nam where ethnic minority groups are present, with particular reference to the Central Region Livelihood Improvement Project. The last chapter summarizes the main issues affecting

ethnic minorities, which cover a range of topics related to the government's policies on agricultural land, forests, and migration, and on official development programs and projects. Recommendations, including several addressed to ADB, are put forward, couched in terms of a proposed national action plan.

2

ETHNIC MINORITIES OF VIET NAM

An Overview

DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION

In a multi-ethnic country like Viet Nam, issues related to ethnic minorities are inevitably at the center of attention of policymakers, researchers, and the public. However, the apparently straightforward question *Who are the ethnic minorities in Viet Nam?* still awaits a satisfactory answer. A clear understanding of the concept and coverage of ethnic minorities, although essential to improve the implementation of existing policies in Viet Nam, has yet to be provided by policymakers and development agencies. There have been ample discussions and numerous workshops organized by various ethnological institutions.

Since recovering part of the country from the French colonialists in the 1960s, the Government of Viet Nam has been interested in the identification of ethnic minorities. Under government requirements, a National Program of Ethnic Classification was first conducted by Vietnamese ethnologists based in the Institute of Ethnology. The principal investigators defined an ethnic group (*dan toc*) as a stable or relatively stable group of people formed over a historical period with common territorial ties, economic activities, and cultural characteristics. It was on the basis of these common ties that there arose an awareness of ethnic identity and a name of one's own.¹ A stable community was one formed over a historical period, involving relationships of identity in regard to language, habitat, socioeconomic activities, and cultural characteristics, and was also conscious of a shared ethnic identity.²

The Program acknowledged for the first time an officially recognized ethnic classification in Viet Nam, which has been used until now for administration, development, and research purposes. The Vietnamese population was classified into 54 ethnic groups, of which

the Kinh, the vast majority, account for about 87%. The remaining 13% are divided into 53 other groups, officially called the ethnic minorities (*dan toc thieu so, dan toc it nguoi*) (Table 1). Throughout this report, the term *ethnic minority*, which has been recognized by the Vietnamese Government, is used instead of *indigenous peoples*.

The weakness of this classification is widely recognized among Vietnamese researchers and policymakers.³ Some researchers propose that the present list should be classified into more groups and subgroups. Sometimes, the cultural difference between groups of the same ethnicity is even greater than between two separate ethnic groups. Field studies indicate that many small ethnic groups are dissatisfied to have been merged with larger ethnic groups, because their historical and cultural backgrounds are very different. In reality, administration, development, and research activities require more adequate ethnic identification. To this effect, the Institute of Ethnology is currently conducting a new project on ethnic classification.

A similar need has been expressed at the local level in the course of project and program implementation. For example, the 1997 Statistical Yearbook of Kon Tum lists seven ethnic groups and those not included are considered to belong to "other ethnic groups." In the 2000 Statistical Yearbook, there is no ethnic classification of the Kon Tum population. Similar situations have been found in the northern mountainous region. The ethnic data section in a proposal submitted by provincial authorities for the Viet Nam Northern Mountainous Region Poverty Reduction Project funded by the World Bank, refers to some major ethnic groups but ignores others, particularly small groups. In other provinces, either there are no data on ethnic groups or the data are too general to be included in the official census classification for ethnicity.

Table 1. Ethnic Groups in Viet Nam, 1998

No.	Ethnicity	Subgroup	Population (person)
1	Ba-na	Ro Ngao, Ro Long (Y Lang), To Lo, Go Lar, Krem	189,500
2	Bo Y	Bo Y, Tu Di	1,750
3	Brau		245
4	Bru-Van	Van Kieu, Tri, Khua, Ma Coong	44,000
5	Cham	Cham Hroi, Cham Pong, Cha Va Ku, Cham Chau Doc	114,000
6	Cho-ro		18,000
7	Chu-ru		11,450
8	Chut	May, Ruc, Sach, Arem, Ma Lieng	2,800
9	Co		24,500
10	Cong		1,480
11	Co-ho	Xre, Nop (Tu Nop), Co Don, Chil, Lat (Lach), To Ring	98,000
12	Co Lao	Co Lao Xanh, Co Lao Trang, Co Lao Do	1,900
13	Co-tu		40,500
14	Dao	Dao Do, Dao Quan Chet, Dao Lo Gang, Dao Tien, Dao Quan Trang, Dao Thanh Y, Dao Lan Ten	650,000
15	E-de	Kpa, Adham, Krung, Mdhu, Ktul, Dlie, Hrue, Bih, Blo, Kah, Kdrao, Dong Kay, Dong Mak, Ening, Arul, Hwing, Ktle, Epan	240,000
16	Giay		42,000
17	Gia rai	Chor, Hdrung (Hbau, Chor), Arap, Mthur, Tobuan	320,500
18	Gie/Trieng	Gie (Gie), Trieng, Ve, Bnoong (Mnoong)	33,000
19	Ha Nhi	Ha Nhi Co Cho, Ha Nhi La MY, Ha Nhi Den	14,500
20	Hmong	Hmong Trang, Hmong Hoa, Hmong Do, Hmong Den, Hmong Xanh, Na mieo	710,000
21	Hoa	Quang Dong, Quang Tay, Hai Nam, Trieu Chau, Phuc Kien, Sang Phang, Xia Phong, Thang Nham, Minh Huong, He	1,100,000
22	Hre		101,000
23	Khang	Khang Dang, Khang Hoac, Khang Don, Khang Sua, Ma Hang, Bu Hang, Ma Hang Ben, Bu Hang Coi	4,650
24	Khome		1,050,000
25	Kho-mu		49,200
26	La Chi		9,780

continued next page

Table 1. (cont.)

No.	Ethnicity	Subgroup	Population (person)
27	La Ha	La Ha can (Khla Phlao), La Ha nuoc (La Ha ung)	1,600
28	La Hu	La hu na (den), La-hu su (vang), La-hu phung (trang)	6,310
29	Lao	Lao Boc (Lao Can), Lao Noi (Lao Nho)	11,200
30	Lo Lo	Lo Lo hoa, Lo Lo den	3,350
31	Lu	Lu Den (Lu Dam), Lu Trang	4,200
32	Ma	Ma Ngan, Ma Xop, Ma To, Ma Krung	27,800
33	Mang	Mang Gung, Mang Le	2,740
34	Mnong	Mnong Gar, Mnong Nong, Mnong Chil, Mnong Kuenh, Mnong Rlam, Mnong Preh, Mnong Prang, Mnong Dip, Mnong Bu Nor, Mnong Bu Dang, Mnong Bu Deh	70,900
35	Muong	Ao Ta (Au Ta), Moi Bi	1,150,000
36	Ngai		1,790
37	Nung	Nung Giang, Nung Xuong, Nung An, Nung Inh, Nung Loi, Nung Chao, Nung Phan Slinh, Nung Quy Rin, Nung Din	900,000
38	O-du		204
39	Pa Then		4,040
40	Phu La	Phu La Lao-Bo Kho Pa, Phu La Den, Phu La Han	6,820
41	Pu Peo		410
42	Ra-glai	Rai, Hoang, La Oang	77,100
43	Ro-mam		286
44	San Chay	Cao Lan, San Chi	165,000
45	San Diu		106,000
46	Si La		620
47	Tay	Tho, Ngan, Phen, Thu Lao, Pa Di	1,350,000
48	Ta-oi	Ta Oi, Pa Co, Pa Hi	29,500
49	Thai	Nganh Den (Tay Dam) Nganh Trang (Tay Don or Khao)	1,200,000
50	Tho	Keo, Mon, Cui, Ho, Dan Lai, Li Ha, Tay Poong	58,500
51	Kinh		61,200,000
52	Xinh-mun	Xinh Mun Da, Xinh Mun Nghet	12,500
53	Xo-dang	Xo Trng, To Dra, Mnam, Ca Dong, Ha Lang, Ta Tri, Chau	108,000
54	Xtieng	Bu Lo, Bu Dek (Bu Deh), Bu Biek	54,400

Source: Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas/Central Ideology-Culture Department (2001).

ETHNICITY AND DEMOGRAPHY

Since the revolution in August 1945, and especially after *Doi Moi* (Renovation) in 1986, ethnic minorities in mountainous areas of Viet Nam have had a significant role to play in the country's economic and social development activities. Among other things, they are a sizeable proportion of the overall national population. According to the national census in 1999, the 53 ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam total 10,527,000 people, accounting for 13.8% of the total population of the country. This represented an increase of 1.82 million over the decade 1990–1999.

Table 2 points to the high population growth after *Doi Moi*, especially in the Central Highlands. The population in this area increased by a factor of 1.6 over a decade. This is the result of both natural growth and the migration policy of the Government. Ethnic

minorities and Kinh people have been relocated from the northern mountainous regions as well as from the Red River Delta. The relocation process has caused significant changes in the population composition in mountainous regions. Kinh people accounted for 5% of the total population in the Central Highlands in 1945, 50% in 1975, and more than 70% at present. Kinh people have become the majority inhabitants in some areas previously dominated by ethnic minorities. Other ethnic groups have also settled in the Central Highlands.

These demographic trends and the resulting pressure on lands and natural resources provide at least some explanation of the recent tensions and disturbance affecting the Central Highlands. Some researchers suggest that the mountainous regions should no longer be considered sparsely populated with an abundance of natural resources for further exploitation.⁴

Table 2. Population Dynamics in the Mountainous Regions of Viet Nam

	Year	Nationwide	Northeast	Northwest	Central Highlands
Population	1990	66,017,000	7,709,000	1,885,000	2,682,000
	2000	77,686,000	8,952,000	2,288,000	4,248,000
Population growth (%)	2000/1990	17.7	16.1	21.4	58.4
Population Density	1990	200	118	52	49
	2000	236	137	64	78

Source: National Department of Statistics (2000).

3

LAW AND POLICY FRAMEWORK AND MAIN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

There has been substantial academic work on ethnic minorities in Viet Nam, carried out both by Vietnamese scholars in the Institute of Ethnology and Institute of Sociology and overseas scholars. Some of the research work has been of an ethnographic and descriptive nature, rather than analytical studies that either review in depth the policy framework, or examine in any depth the impact of policies and programs on the development and poverty situation of different ethnic minority groups. Views are sometimes expressed that there have been inadequate studies on policies related to ethnic minorities in Viet Nam.

Nevertheless, such studies have a long history, beginning with research carried out by French scholars during the colonial period. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the State paid special attention to promoting research on ethnic minorities with regard to national development programs and highland development plans. The 1990s marked a new development stage in these research activities with the increasing involvement of international organizations and scholars. Many recent studies have included an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the state of poverty as well as its causes in mountainous and indigenous communities.

In the following section the main principles of state policy toward ethnic minorities, as embodied in the Constitution, laws, and policy documents, are summarized; the evolution of more recent policies is examined; and some key issues of development policy in ethnic and mountainous areas are detailed.

BASIC POLICY PRINCIPLES

Government policies related to ethnic minorities encapsulate the following broad principles:

- promoting the policy of equality, solidarity, and mutual help among ethnic groups;
- creating favorable conditions for ethnic groups to develop and advance toward mainstream society, progress, and the common development of all Viet Nam's ethnic groups;
- respecting the interests, traditional cultures, languages, customs, and beliefs of all ethnic groups; and
- matching socioeconomic policies with the special characteristics of the regions and ethnic groups, particularly ethnic minorities.

These principles have been reflected in all constitutions of the Viet Nam nation since its creation. Further general principles related to ethnic issues, as identified in the present Constitution and basic laws, include the following.

- Viet Nam is a united nation of all ethnic groups living within the country.

- The State protects, strengthens, and consolidates the unity of all ethnic groups and prohibits any behavior that looks down upon and sows division among them.
- All ethnic groups are in a position of equality.
- All persons of all ethnic groups should automatically be citizens of the Vietnamese State. They are equal in their rights and obligations.
- All ethnic groups have the right to use their own languages and writing systems, and to encourage their traditional customs and culture.
- The State should carry out plans to narrow the gap between ethnic groups in terms of their economic and cultural development.

A review of the law and policy framework for ethnic minorities suggests that this may be more favorable for ethnic minorities in Viet Nam than in some neighboring countries. The Government has emphasized integrating the minorities into national society. Ethnic minorities are often described as “fraternal nationalities” that “have lived together for a long time and have a tradition of solidarity, or relying on one another, and of working together in order to survive and develop and to build and maintain the country against foreign aggression.”⁵ However, the emphasis has been on integration within mainstream society rather than on special treatment that might enable ethnic minorities to strengthen their own institutions. Such questions have recently been addressed in policy debates on ethnic minorities and poverty reduction.

EVOLUTION OF ETHNIC POLICY DURING THE 1990S

The 1990s saw important law and policy changes as part of the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy. Table 3 lists some of the key policies and programs related to ethnic minorities and mountainous areas since the late 1980s. There have been more than 90 relevant decrees and other official documents passed by the central Government since the

inception of *Doi Moi*. Several policies have aimed to boost the socioeconomic development of ethnic minorities in mountainous areas.

MAJOR POLICIES AND PROGRAMS FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

The focus of this section is on the policies and programs with long-term goals and on sensitive issues that are arousing debate. There have been comprehensive programs for hunger eradication, targeted to some extent at ethnic minorities. Some policies, such as the land and forest policies during the *Doi Moi* period, have inevitably had some impact on ethnic minorities although the policies may not have been designed specifically with these groups in mind. Policies such as “sedentarization” have been designed more specifically for ethnic minorities, with the intention of changing certain traditional practices that have been considered as “backward,” environmentally unsound, and a constraint to modern agricultural development.

New Economic Zones and Resettlement for Sedentary Cultivation

Major socioeconomic changes in the mountainous areas in Viet Nam are closely linked to the migration process and the development of new economic zones. It is estimated that between 1968 and 1998, the Government organized the migration of 6 million people to set up such zones. The migration process can be divided into three periods, 1960–1975, 1976–1986, and 1987 to the present.

1960–1975

In the early 1960s, the Government formulated a comprehensive program to develop the mountainous areas where new economic zones were to be established. These zones were considered as the development centers of the areas. They could be organized in the form of state agricultural and forest enterprises or new economic villages. Government staff, soldiers demobilized after the war of resistance against the French colonialists, Kinh migrants from densely

Table 3. Examples of Policies and National Programs for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas

Year	Activity	Thrust
1989	Resolution 22-NQ/TW	Orientation and policy framework of socioeconomic development in ethnic minority areas
1990	Resolution 72-HDBT	Objectives and strategy of socioeconomic development in ethnic minority areas
1990	Directive 1/HDBT	Program against illiteracy
1991	Code of Forestry Protection	Laws on management, protection, and exploitation of forests and other natural resources
1991	Code of Primary Education	Policy and laws for education for all citizens
1991	Directive 1450/GD-DT	Program of consolidation and development of education in mountainous, remote, and difficult areas
1992	Decision 69/CT	Program of socioeconomic development for northern mountainous areas
1992	Decision 327/HDBT	Program of reforestation
1993	Land Code	Identifying rights and obligations of landownership and use
1993	Decree 525/TTg	Policy of further socioeconomic development in mountainous areas
1993	Decision 270/TTg	Strategy of population and family planning to 2000
1994		Program for ethnic minorities in especially difficult circumstances
1995	Decision 556/TTg	Resettlement to promote sedentary cultivation
1995	Decision 525/TTg	Establishment of a bank for the poor
1995	Decision 743/TTg	Comprehensive plan of protection and control of opium trees
1995	Decision 164/TTg	Program of forestry development, 1995–2000
1995	Circular 7464/KTTH	Policy of subsidies for prices and transportation in mountainous areas
1995	Decision 576/TTg	Program of nutrition, 1995–2000
1996	Decision 138/TTg	Program of rural clean water and environmental hygiene
1996	Directive 393/TTg	Planning of residence, infrastructure, and production in ethnic minority and mountainous areas
1996	Decision 960/TTg	Long-term orientation and plan of socioeconomic development in northern mountainous areas
1996	Decision 656/TTg	Long-term orientation and plan of socioeconomic development in the Central Highlands
1996	Resolution 37/CP	Strategy for health care for people in northern mountainous and middle areas for 1997–2000 and 2000–2020
1997	Decision 35/TTg	Building commune centers in mountainous areas
1997	Circular 1/GD-DT	Guidelines for teaching ethnic minority languages
1998	Decision 135/1998/TTg	Socioeconomic development of especially difficult communes in mountainous and remote areas
1998	Decision 133/1998/TTg	Program of hunger eradication and poverty alleviation
1998	Decision 7/1998/TTg	Program of forest development (5 million hectares)

populated northern lowland villages, and ethnic minority groups were resettled in these villages. During this period, 920,000 people from the Red River Delta were settled in the Central Highlands and the northern mountainous areas. Another 80,000 people were resettled in coastal and mountainous areas to establish state forest and agricultural enterprises.

1976–1986

In this period, the Government embarked on a major resettlement program affecting the whole nation. Rural migration and migration from north to south, to the Central Highlands and Mekong Delta, became the major trend. The goal was exploitation of land for food and industrial crop cultivation. The Government produced more than 30 policies and documents related to migration. State forest and agricultural enterprises continued to be set up. Some 710,000 people migrated to the Central Highlands within the program and 200,000 people were resettled in the northern mountainous areas. Toward the end of this period, planned migration took place at a slower pace due to the shortage of funds and an economic crisis. Thereafter, there was an increase in spontaneous migration.

1987 to the Present

Spontaneous migration has been rapidly increasing since 1987 and has become the main mode of internal migration. There were more than 2.3 million spontaneous migrants in the late 1980s. During the 1990s, 300,000 people were migrating each year to the Central Highlands and the southeast. Also, ethnic minority groups from the northern mountainous areas started migrating to the Central Highlands. These uncontrolled movements have posed serious problems for authorities, especially at the provincial level.

Sedentarization Policy

Government Resolution No. 38/CP of 12 March 1968 officially launched a campaign for shifting cultivators to practice sedentarization and fixed cultivation. Since then, sedentarization has been considered to be one of the most important steps in poverty reduction and hunger elimination in the

mountainous regions. The strategies of the sedentarization policy include providing support for agricultural production and livelihoods to facilitate fixed settlement and cultivation; and providing assistance for technical training, capacity building, technology transfer, and awareness raising.

According to statistics of the National Department for Sedentarization, by 1990, after 20 years of implementation of the sedentarization policy, 2.8 million people had been resettled in 26 mountainous areas.

In 1998, activities within this program became parts of the national Program 135 (for socioeconomic development in the most disadvantaged communes; discussed below). According to the result of a survey by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 3.8 million people had been resettled by that year. The Government invested D (Dong) 1,100 billion in this program in the 1990s. On average, each household was to receive D3.5 million.

Sedentarization in Kon Tum Province

As of April 2001, 29 projects under the sedentarization policy were being implemented by the Office of Fixed Settlement and Cultivation in Kon Tum. Activities of these projects included (i) infrastructure such as roads, small irrigation dams, schools, and health centers; (ii) support to individual households in land exploitation and house construction; (iii) providing plant seedlings and technical training; and (iv) introducing new cultivation methods through demonstrations. A recent report ⁶ stated:

The Fixed Settlement and Cultivation work has contributed to the limitation of deforestation for cultivation, and the living standard of the ethnic minorities has dramatically improved. It has stabilized their lives. It is an appropriate policy that meets people's wishes. It presents an opportunity to exploit local natural resources and introduces ethnic minorities to new and scientific methods of production. Fixed Settlement and Cultivation has provided the province with conditions to improve agroforestry profitability, and at the same time restore the environment. The Fixed Settlement and Cultivation policy has mobilized people to divide extended households into nuclear units and set up

home gardens. It provides support with accommodation and organizes the communities in a new cultural style. The ethnic minorities have stopped nomadic grazing and started using manure for cultivation of rice and other staples, and they have clean water for a more hygienic lifestyle.

[It has] contributed to the transformation of economic structure, improved the living standard of the minority communities step by step, and truly participated in poverty reduction programs, contributing to the socioeconomic development in the province.

Despite all the efforts of staff from the provincial to the local level, there are still more than 39,000 people living in fixed settlements who practice shifting cultivation, and another 8,500 in shifting settlements practicing shifting cultivation. Fixed settlers and farmers are still poor or even suffer from hunger. A number of these people have returned to shifting cultivation.

The capacity to make full use of the government's investment is low. There is a lack of good demonstration models, and local natural and human resources are not adequately utilized. Agroforestry extension activities are inadequate and investment on infrastructure is insufficient and fragmented.

According to the authorities in charge of this program, the unsatisfactory results are due to the remoteness and low awareness of the target groups, and the lack of staff and facilities. Allocation of the government's investment is also to blame. Only 13–15% of the scheduled budget is provided for actual projects.

Land and Forest Policy

The overall aim of the government's land policy is to legalize people's ownership of land and transfer the management and use rights to forest and agricultural enterprises or collective units. This policy requires elimination of private landownership set up during the French colonial period, establishment of agricultural cooperatives and land-use rights to these organizations, and movement of people from plains to mountainous areas to set up new economic zones.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s in the northern mountainous areas, landownership was given to farmers for a short period and then transferred to state

agricultural cooperatives. Forests were managed by state agricultural and forest enterprises. During the 1970s and 1980s, almost all forest areas in the Central Highlands were managed by these entities. In 1998, in Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces, 79 agricultural enterprises and 83 forest enterprises controlled 3 million hectares (ha) of forestland accounting for 70% of the total forest area of both provinces. In Dak Lak, these state organizations managed more than 86% of the total forest area; the staff working for these organizations accounted for 20% of the total population.

To deal with forest degradation, the State issued in the 1980s a policy of land and forest allocation to cooperatives and households. This policy was expanded during the late 1980s and especially after promulgation of the Land Code in 1993. In mountainous areas, the Government started allocating arable land to households and collective units. A large area of land that previously belonged to state organizations is being transferred to the people to manage. In the Central Highlands, the land area managed by the State has been reduced by 26%. However, the State still manages 44% of the total forest area.

Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction

For the past few decades, the Government has been strongly pursuing poverty reduction in rural and mountainous areas. This thrust is reflected in all its development programs.

The Eighth Communist Party Congress, held in 1996, set a goal of reducing the proportion of people living in poverty from 25% in that year to 10% by 2000. The Congress also emphasized the need to reduce poverty in ethnic minority areas. The national program targeting poverty reduction for 1998–2000 had 9 major projects:

- Infrastructure for poor communes.
- Subsidies for disadvantaged ethnic minorities.
- Sedentarization.
- Migration and new economic zones.

- Agricultural, forestry, and fishery extension.
- Credit for poor people.
- Assistance in health care and education for poor people.
- Job creation and production development.
- Capacity building and training for staff working to reduce poverty and staff working in poor communes.

There are other socioeconomic development programs for disadvantaged communes and a national program for employment. The latter includes the following activities.

- Revising and renewing policies.
- Transforming investment structure.
- Supporting agricultural product distribution.
- Supporting establishment of commercial farms.

The credit policies aim at subsidizing interest rates for the poor. In the health care sector, family planning and medical services are provided free of charge. In education and vocational training, the goal is to ensure primary education for all children with provision of free books and free tuition for ethnic minority children. The Government plans to extend the coverage area of TV and radio programs in an attempt to raise national awareness among ethnic minorities. The housing policy stipulates provision of land to landless households. For farmers without agricultural land, the aim is to create funds and raise capital for land exploitation, provide vocational training and equipment for off-farm activities, and allocate land.

Projects designed to implement these policies can be grouped as essential infrastructure, technology transfer and vocational training for the poor, fixed settlement and cultivation, support for disadvantaged ethnic minority communities, and capacity building for staff working on hunger eradication and poverty reduction.

Program for Socioeconomic Development in the Most Disadvantaged Communes (Program 135)

Program 135 was launched in 1998 under Government Decision No. 135/1998/TTg. The focus is on mountainous and remote areas. It covers 1,715 communes in Region 3⁷ (1,568 communes in the mountainous areas and 147 communes in the Mekong Delta). Most of the inhabitants in Region 3 are ethnic minorities. At present, 2,000 communes in total participate in Program 135.

The focal activity of Program 135 is building infrastructure (roads, small irrigation dams, clean water systems, schools, health centers, etc.). The program was designed to work in collaboration with other development projects in ethnic minority areas in a participatory manner. The program invested 40% of its 1999 budget in more than 300 poor communes. Other programs being implemented in the same geographical areas include the 5 million hectare forest plantation program, of which 25% is in this area; and the clean water program, which has invested 40% of its total budget in the same area. Ministries and other government agencies participate in this program by contributing human and financial resources.

Regarding infrastructure building, the program requires local participation to create employment for local people. The construction process is designed to meet local needs and encourages contributions from the local people in order to increase their independence.

By the end of 2000, more than 4,000 infrastructure sites had been developed within the framework of this program, costing more than D3,000 billion, of which the Government provided two thirds. In Kon Tum, 31 communes were selected under Program 135 (26 communes in Region 3 and 5 communes in the border area). In March 2001, another 20 communes were selected.

Communal Centers Program

The Communal Centers Program was launched under Decision No. 35/TTg of 13 January 1997 by the Prime Minister. The objective is to promote sociocultural activities and enhance interaction between villages, communal centers, and urban towns. It also aims at mobilizing the communities to manage socioeconomic

activities, preserving and promoting ethnic identity, and contributing to the establishment of new rural models in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

Communal centers in mountainous areas are designed to become focal points for trading and cultural purposes for ethnic minorities. In the future, the centers are expected to become small towns. The Government has invested in initial infrastructure projects such as roads, schools, cultural buildings, health centers, extension centers, and markets. The total investment of the program from 1996 to 2000 was D12,900 million.

Rural Clean Water and Environmental Hygiene Program

The national program of clean water and rural environmental hygiene was launched in 1996. In Kon Tum, 10 water supply projects were carried out initially, with a total investment of D5,525 million. During 1999–2000, another 34 water supply projects were completed, in which 101 wells were dug. Through this and other programs, the proportion of households in Kon Tum with access to clean water increased from 18.3% in 1996 to 30% in 2000.

Program to Support Ethnic Minorities with Special Difficulties

A program for ethnic minorities in especially difficult circumstances has been operating since 1994; it was active in Kon Tum. In 1998, the program was merged with the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Program.

There are two main activities of this program: support for agricultural production (seedlings, young animals, production tools, small irrigation projects, etc.) and support for essential materials such as mosquito nets, dishes, etc. In its early years, the program contributed greatly to the life of small ethnic minority groups with special difficulties (in particular the R'Mam, the B'Rau, and the Chau), helping them to integrate with other minority groups in the area. The total investment by the program during 1992–2000 was D7,144 million, as well as interest-free loans to more than 7,000 households.

Subsidized Merchandise Program for Mountainous Areas

This program began in 1996 and includes subsidies for iodized salt, kerosene, seedlings, school materials, medical materials, fertilizer, coal, pesticide, and radios. The program also subsidizes the purchase of agricultural products in Region 3. The total investment to 2001 was D22,793 million.

This program appears to be very important for the livelihood of the local communities. However, the products channeled to the villages fall far short of the demand from the local ethnic minorities. In the end, many people often have to buy essential goods from small stores run by Kinh at much higher prices. The experience of the subsidy mechanism shows that this policy can create loopholes for corruption and that the poorest people might not benefit from the policy.

Saving and Credit Program

The Viet Nam Bank for Agriculture (VBA) and Viet Nam Bank for the Poor (VBP) are the major agencies providing credit and saving schemes in the provinces. In Kon Tum, many loans are channeled from the VBP or other sources through the Women's Union, Farmers' Association, or the Veteran Association. Their responsibility is to ensure that the borrowers repay on time. The Women's Union provides loans to members whose household income is below the poverty line set by the Government. Borrowers also have to be committed to improve their livelihood, be in good health, lack funds, and volunteer to apply for the loan. The interest rate set by VBP is 0.6%. The province subsidizes the rate in Region 1 and Region 2 by 0.1%, and in Region 3 by 0.3%. The maximum loan for each household is D3 million, and the term is 3 years. Women's Union members often borrow money to grow cash crops and for animal husbandry. Total loans provided in this scheme are D20 billion, to more than 10,000 household beneficiaries. Loan defaulters number about 5–7% of the total.

The Women's Union also has programs funded by the Government of Belgium, Caritas (an Australian NGO), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). However, these programs are not exclusively for ethnic minorities. On average, 60–70% of the borrowers are Kinh.

Development of the Health Care System

The health program in Kon Tum includes infrastructure improvement (construction of well-equipped health centers), provision of training for staff at the district and commune level, and provision of free medicine to ethnic minority peoples. There are several projects under this program focusing on malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, malnutrition, food hygiene, potential epidemics, health protection for mothers and children, and family planning.

Development of the Education System

The government's education policies have two major objectives: to eradicate illiteracy among ethnic minorities; and to develop a cadre of trained ethnic minority officials. The official policy states that "all nationalities living in the territory of Viet Nam should learn and use the national language, the common language of the whole country." Vietnamese is the key language used in the school system as early as kindergarten. Special ethnic minority boarding schools have been established in many mountainous areas, but the reality is that only a few ethnic minority students from better

connected families have access to these schools.

In Kon Tum, students are given free notebooks; for students in Region 3, free textbooks and pens are also provided. In each district there is one combination of a high school and a secondary boarding school. Fifty-one of the 79 communes in the province have their own secondary school. Communes with high populations have two or three elementary schools, while small communes have one. Villages distant from the center of the commune also have a subschool, where students can attend first and second grades. In Kon Tum town, there is one boarding high school, for which students receive a scholarship worth D120,000 per month. Nearly 2,000 students attend this school.

The number of ethnic minority students, especially girls, decreases in higher grades. The main reason given is family poverty. Ethnic minority parents are too poor to support their children's education.

Half the teachers in Kon Tum come from the lowlands. Ethnic minority students not only have difficulty speaking another language (Kinh versus Bana, for example) but also, in many cases, students who do speak some Vietnamese have difficulty understanding teachers speaking a different dialect. (Many teachers come from Nghe Tinh Province, where people speak with a very strong accent.)

4 KEY ISSUES IN ETHNIC MINORITY AND MOUNTAINOUS AREAS

This chapter attempts to analyze the four key issues with regard to ethnic minorities: poverty, environmental degradation, changes in landownership of forests, and the impact of development interventions.

POVERTY

The data in Chapter 3 show that although the living standard of ethnic minorities in mountainous areas has improved, the poverty rate remains high. According to statistics from the Central Institute for Economic Survey in 1998, ethnic minorities accounted for 28% of the poor people in the nation while they accounted for only 14% of the total population. The northern ethnic minorities alone account for more than a quarter of the nation's poor. The Institute also predicted that if the current economic model is applied for the next 10 years, the proportion of poor ethnic minorities will increase to 34%.

There is a discrepancy between the poverty of the ethnic minority people and the overall population living in mountainous areas. The increasing investment in infrastructure has resulted in better facilities in mountainous areas. However, while some aspects of material life of the ethnic minorities have improved, the social gap in mountainous areas has expanded. Resources intended for ethnic minorities have not effectively reached them. The beneficiaries are mainly the people living in small towns, government staff, and Kinh living in mountainous areas. Box 1 illustrates the point that improving infrastructure does not necessarily reduce poverty.

Box 1. Quang Nam Province

Quang Nam Province has paid considerable attention to ethnic minority issues. Funds allocated for related work account for 25% of the total provincial budget. As a result, the infrastructure of the mountainous areas in this province has remarkably improved. Of the 62 mountainous communes, 43 have roads accessible by cars and 12 have access to the national electricity grid. Almost all communes have schools and health centers.

Despite the better facilities, the life of ethnic minorities does not seem to be improving. The question of food security remains unanswered. The average food consumption per capita is continuously decreasing. In 1976, consumption per person per year was 375 kilograms; in 1998, it was 272; and in 2001, it was 180. Hunger is a regular phenomenon in the area. Another dilemma is that although the information facilities are all in place in the ethnic areas, cultural life is stagnant and traditional practices are fading away. The number of people attending schools increases while the literacy rate remains unchanged.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

The environment of the ethnic minority groups in the mountainous areas has been drastically and rapidly degraded over the past 50 years.

Only three of the 53 ethnic minority groups, the Cham, the Khmer, and the Hoa, live along the central coast and the Mekong Delta. Some other groups with higher populations and lowland rice cultivation skills (e.g., Tay, Thai, and Muong) live in low areas or valleys, along rivers and streams, where they can grow rice and have access to water resources and transportation. The majority of the ethnic minority population in Viet Nam inhabits remote or mountainous areas. Over the past half century, the mountainous areas have suffered from serious environmental degradation because of such interventions as war, migration, and development programs. In 1943, the forest cover was 57%; by 1979, it was 39% and in 1990 was 26%. In some provinces, forest cover is now only 8–9%. It is estimated that in these areas, 3 to 235 metric tons of soil wash away per hectare of land every year.⁸

A number of studies have pointed out that in these areas, ethnic minority groups now have limited access to timber to build their houses, have to travel far to collect firewood, and have dwindling natural resources (fish, wild animals, and other forest products) for their daily needs. Agricultural land and forest, the basic components of sustainable ecosystems of the indigenous communities for thousands of years, have been seriously depleted, leaving the ethnic communities a barren landscape.

CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP OF FORESTS

The traditional structure of ownership of land and forest has been replaced, resulting in limited access to them by ethnic minorities.

In the past, between and within communities, ownership of land and forest was regulated by a system of highly effective customary laws and traditional rules. Recent studies on customary laws of highland indigenous groups show that this system harmoniously and effectively regulated the relationship between the communities and the ecosystems as well as the social relationships between communities.

There are three main characteristics of traditional landownership of forests in the Central Highlands. Although large tracts of land were required for extensive cultivation, all ethnic families were able to obtain

enough land for cultivation in the past. Thus, they did not have a concept of private landownership. In their view, land belonged to communities and had no monetary value. The customary laws were respected. Their strong beliefs were based on good and bad spirits that have absolute control of all natural resources.

Since the early 1960s, there has been a different structure of ownership and use of land and forest nationwide: state and collective ownership. Land and forests have been managed by state agencies or state-owned farms and enterprises or agricultural cooperatives. In the agricultural reform process, land and part of the forest were allotted to or transferred to households or groups of households. From 1975 to the 1980s, the Central Highlands underwent this process with drastic changes. Many indigenous communities in the mountainous areas now face reduced living areas including their farmland and the forest areas that acted as reserves for resources that provide essential products for their daily lives. The legal and management systems of land and forest are now unclear, do not consider traditional heritage, and lack solutions to protect disadvantaged groups. Thus, ethnic minorities are losing their lands; land disputes are increasing.

Upland cultivation as practiced by many ethnic minority groups is a production system that uses the slash-and-burn technique and discontinuous cultivation in each piece of land. The cultivation period in each field is very short, about 2–3 years; the field is then left fallow for many years until the trees have regrown and the land has recovered before it can be burnt for cultivation again. This technique requires large areas and low population density. The campaign on fixed settlement and cultivation has limited the mobility of ethnic minority communities, but progress in improving their crop yields has not matched their population growth rate and the decreasing size of their farmland. Recently, allocation of land and forest to individual households has transformed much of the former common property of the community. Households of the groups that practiced shifting cultivation were also allocated a few hectares for cultivation, with ownership for 20 to 30 years. The result is very short fallow periods and consequent impoverishment and erosion of the soil. This has been the case, for example, in some villages in Ia Mngong commune (Box 2).

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

Development interventions have dramatically changed the social structure and the traditional cultures of ethnic minority communities. Many positive cultural changes have taken place. For instance, the suppression during the feudal period has been eliminated (mainly in more developed ethnic groups such as the Tay, Thai, and Hmong) and some customs that were proven to be harmful to human health have been eliminated. However, development activities have broken down or weakened the traditional social and cultural structure including systems of values, religious beliefs, standards (customary laws), languages, and local knowledge; also affected are village intellectuals, the traditional family form, and village organization.

Studies on the general situation and changes in the lives of upland ethnic minority groups show that the development policies themselves have brought about achievements as well as the current problems. With basically correct principles, development policies have been implemented with insufficient resources, incorrect guidelines, poor management, and lack of long-term monitoring. Some aspects of the general development policies in Viet Nam that have resulted in the present state of poverty of ethnic minority groups are discussed below.

- (i) *There exists the notion that different ethnic groups have a lower or higher civilization, a concept based on evolutionary theory.*

According to this theory, the “less developed” ethnic groups will change toward to the model of the “more developed” ethnic groups, although the former may still maintain their cultural identities. The expression “model of the most developed ethnic group” implies the majority group in a nation. Development evolution is often considered to be the only correct path.

In Viet Nam, the Kinh, the majority, is the group that ranks highest in this scale, with 4,000 years of lowland rice cultivation. Some groups with large populations and similar rice cultivation history rank immediately below the Kinh. Groups with less developed agriculture follow. This notion has not only existed among government managers but also among ethnic minorities. The result is that on the one hand,

policymakers cannot avoid planning and implementing development activities “taking the majority culture and thinking model as the center.” On the other hand, ethnic minorities tend to accept “development from outside,” giving up their traditional cultural values and neglecting their own strengths and resources. Field studies show that an inferiority complex is often found among ethnic minority groups, especially in the northern mountainous region, where one group is often dominant (like the Thai or the Hmong) and other groups are submissive. “We are stupid” or “we do not know how to organize the household’s economy” is very often heard during interviews.

If the above comments apply generally, a logical conclusion is that developers at all levels (policy, program, and project) should reconsider the basis of their development models. Development of a community should not be conducted by imposing an external model that does not consider the community’s innate strengths and resources. Such reconsideration is a long-term and difficult process but development projects will always face difficulties if people of small ethnic minority groups consider themselves inferior to the “developers.”

- (ii) *Most government programs and projects use a top-down approach and do not fully address the needs of local ethnic minority communities.*

Program 135, considered to be the most participatory development program to date, does not adequately address the concerns of poor people. Community consultations in villages take place in village heads’ houses with the participation of village heads. Representatives from communities are told to identify their priorities for small-scale infrastructure projects designed with a list of items set by the Government. Their needs and concerns, in many cases, do not match the needs and concerns of the rest of the community.

Many other programs and projects that have been evaluated show that they have been strongly affected by the top-down approach and lack participation of local people, or even of local authorities. Often, commune authorities do not know the details of projects. Ethnic minorities refuse to borrow money because they do not feel the need and they are afraid of not being able to pay back the debt. Some are said to volunteer to borrow the money, but they take it home and keep it in a secret place until the term ends. Similar situations occur with

Box 2. Ia Mnong Commune

Ia Mnong commune in Chu Pah district is about 30 minutes away from the district center by motorbike. The total area of Ia Mnong is 22,400 hectares (ha) with only 3,093 ha of agricultural land. The total population is 10,800 people, of which Gia rai account for 70%. The commune, on the main road, is comprised of 15 villages. Six of them are about 40 kilometers (km) from the commune center. Transportation and access between the villages are difficult and complicated, especially in the rainy season.

Although 7 villages have electricity, most ethnic minority people do not use it. The cost is around D4,000 a month for the amount consumed by one low-wattage light bulb in the evenings.

Twelve villages had access to clean water through the gravity water system. The water was filtered in wells and transported to each village. However, 9 villages no longer have clean water because of the breakdown of the filtering system.

There is a health post with 3 doctor assistants and 5 nurses. There are only 6 beds, which are often not occupied due to the lack of medicine and equipment.

There are 54 classrooms with 1,300 pupils, most of whom are ethnic minorities. One third of the 60 teachers in the commune are indigenous people who can teach in the local and national languages. The primary and secondary school in Ia Mnong was built by funding from a French nongovernment organization as a part of their project for bilingual education. The aim of this project is to facilitate the transition of young primary school children to studying in Vietnamese. For the first three or four years, both their mother tongue and Vietnamese are to be taught in classes. However, the project is being implemented slowly.

According to the commune leader who is an ethnic minority person from the northern mountainous area, most families in the commune would like to send their children to school. They are aware of the opportunities for a better life through education.

Doch 1 Village

Doch 1 village, one of the three poorest villages in the district, is about 40 km away from the commune center and the road is almost inaccessible in the rainy season. It is a 2-day walk to the nearest trading point during this time. District authorities have been trying for the last few years without success to reallocate these villages to the main roads.

Before the resettlement program, villagers at Doch 1, as in many other villages, used large areas of forest to cultivate upland rice and cassava. According to the villagers, their life is getting worse in terms of food security. In the past, the land was much more fertile. The thick jungle that surrounded them was destroyed by bombing. They said that after the war, the land was poisoned and rocky. Besides cassava, their former diet included tubers, bamboo shoots, a wide range of vegetables, and wildlife meat. Kapok trees, now almost all gone, grew densely in the forests, providing cotton for weaving clothes. The villagers view this loss of resource as a contributor to poverty. "Nowadays, clothes are not from the forest, they are from your purse."

Doch 1 does not have suitable land for paddy rice cultivation and the local people depend completely on shifting cultivation. The only fertile land is on the hill called B6, which is now under the management of the Yali State Forestry Enterprise. The villagers have been hired by the Enterprise to plant trees. Land and forest have not yet been allotted to

continued next page

Box 2 (cont.)

households in the area. Poor households often own the less fertile plots of land.

Almost all the informants reported that the change that has made the most serious impact on their life is the land demarcation and zoning by the Government. Land availability and land fertility have decreased. Forests have been degraded. Primary forests have given way to regeneration forests. As a consequence, the yields of upland rice have declined. A cash economy has entered the communities. Key informants from this village agreed that almost all the people in their village are poor. They often live in hunger and are sometimes given rice by the Government. The villagers expressed their concerns over the plan to build a hydropower plant on the Se San River, which runs through their village and waters their ricefields. The ricefields and other land would be inundated.

Poor women in this village voiced the need for a kindergarten in the village. Most of these women have to take their infants to the field immediately after birth.

Who is looking after our babies? We have to half bury baskets with our babies inside so that they cannot crawl anywhere during field work.

Mun Village and Kep 1 Village

Mun village and Kep 1 village are located near the Yali dam. Life in the villages is constantly changing because of their proximity to the Yali hydropower plant with its thousands of Kinh workers and foreign experts. The wooden houses of the villages are between concrete housing, restaurants, and shops along the road. The market in this area is the most popular in the whole district. The workers, with their high level of consumption, have helped to

boost the fruit orchards and livestock husbandry of villagers. The villagers sell pineapples, jackfruits, mangoes, and custard apples in this local market. A pineapple is sold for D1,000, equivalent to almost half a kilogram of rice. Entrepreneurs also visit the village frequently to buy products wholesale. However, the villagers prefer to travel and sell their own products in the markets. This gives them opportunities to further engage in and learn from trading with the Kinh. At the same time they can purchase household goods and necessities.

Mun villagers seem to have a better life than villagers elsewhere in view of the ease of selling produce and providing labor to the nearby plant. In the past, indigenous people there used to eat upland rice with vegetables, tubers collected from the forests, and salt from burning a certain kind of bamboo. Today, they spend money on spices and other cooking ingredients. Young children are exposed to different lifestyles and to the diets of Kinh people in the area, which is gradually changing their perceptions of and demands for foods.

My children ask me to buy ice cream for them like their Kinh friends. What can we do? We cannot afford it but feel obliged to do so.

In both villages, arable land has drastically shrunk. In Kep 1 village, most of the ricefields now belong to the State Forestry Enterprise. In Mun village, according to the village head, most of fertile land has gone under water or become part of the Yali dam factory. The paddy ricefields are full of rocks. A poor household in this village owns on average less than 0.5 ha of agricultural land and about 3,000 square meters of garden. Given the low fertility of the land in this area, one family would need at least 1 ha to be self-sufficient in terms of rice.

the fixed settlement and sedentary cultivation projects. In some Thai resettlement villages, for example, the loss of good agricultural land has meant borrowing for rice, without good prospects of paying back the loan (Box 3).

Needs and concerns of the local ethnic minorities should be carefully studied before the design of each project. Without understanding the aspirations of the target people, a project can never achieve success.

- (iii) *The top-down approach does not give ethnic minority communities a sense of ownership of the project and at the same time creates dependency on the project.*

The results of surveys in many communes show that there is a high level of ignorance of the operation of development programs/projects. Persons interviewed in the villages and most ethnic minority representatives, despite their being part of the government structure, are not aware of what programs/projects are being carried out within their area. Under the fixed settlement and sedentary cultivation project, much free agricultural input and sometimes food are given to the local community. A Xa Pho community visited by the present study team in Nam Sai Commune, Sa Pa district, Lao Cai Province, has been the recipient of a 5-year fixed settlement and cultivation project. Residents, asked whether they would spend money to buy fertilizer, seedlings, etc. for the next crop after the project finished, hesitantly said they would. But, in fact, the harvest from the project crops was insufficient for them to survive until the next crop, let alone spare money to buy further agricultural inputs. Commune officials also expressed doubt that the community would be able to become independent.

The same dilemma occurs in credit and saving projects. The provincial authority often provides subsidies to decrease the interest rate on loans for the communities in Region 3. Such subsidies give incentives to borrow money, but there remains the question as to whether it creates dependency on external aid.

- (iv) *There does not seem to be any coordination between the programs and projects implemented in ethnic minority areas.*

There is much overlap among components of different projects in an area. A thorough study should be done before a project is implemented, to make sure

the proposed activities are not already being undertaken or planned. If there is some overlap, it may be preferable to strengthen the existing project rather than to start a new one.

- (v) *The Vietnamese language has been used as the communication tool for program and project purposes.*

Use of Vietnamese creates obstacles in communication and understanding because most ethnic minority people do not speak Vietnamese well. There have been no policies, programs, or projects that consider using the local language as a requirement. Absence of a common language prevents project staff from gaining a thorough understanding of the situation in an area and prevents the ethnic minorities themselves from expressing clearly their concerns and wishes.

- (vi) *Most development programs and projects do not focus on cultural aspects of ethnic minority life.*

The fixed settlement and cultivation project motivates people to settle down to a sedentary lifestyle. In order to make people feel more settled, a *nha rong* (communal house) is built in each commune. However, there is a great difference in the materials used for the construction of the traditional and the new *nha rong* (called *nha rong van hoa*; cultural communal house). The construction of the traditional *nha rong* in the past was a participatory process by all villagers in order to increase community bonds. In many projects today, this is not the case.

There has been an accompanying loss of respect for sacred trees and other natural resources, which are now sold for cash, instead of for subsistence as in the past. The situation of Po Y commune is a good illustration (Box 4).

- (vii) *Most programs and projects focus on construction of buildings, roads, etc., while paying little attention to activities for capacity building, human resource development, and legal framework development.*

Training seems to be the most important need in saving and credit projects. At present, training on how a loan should be used and managed is almost nonexistent or inadequate, monitoring systems are not yet in place,

Box 3. Thai Villages in Ya Xier Commune

The first Thai families moved to Ya Xier area, Sa Thay district, Kon Tum Province, only a few years ago, because a dam was being constructed in their former area, the Xuan My commune in Thanh Hoa Province. They have not given proper names to their villages, which are simply called Hamlet 1, Hamlet 2, and Hamlet 3. They share their commune with two other ethnic groups, Gia rai and Kinh, who are also mainly immigrants from Thai Binh and Binh Dinh provinces.

In their former homeland, each Thai household often owned about a hectare of paddy ricefield. Because they have been resettled, the amount of paddy field allocated to them looks much more generous than the fields of the Gia rai and the Kinh. However, it is not nearly enough for survival because there is not enough irrigation water for the land.

Most of the Thai here live in uniform concrete houses, each about 40 square meters, with a small garden area, usually neglected. Five families share a water tank. Many traditions, like rituals during *Tet* (lunar new year), have been abandoned because there are no resources for the festivities. Some old women still wear traditional Thai skirts; some wear simple black skirts with Kinh shirts because silk thread to weave traditional skirts is not available in the area.

The Thai in these three hamlets in Ya Xier do strive to make their lives better. However, they do not enter the forest to collect forestry products because “we are new here and we are afraid of getting lost.” Whenever they intend to exploit a new piece of land, somebody who is indigenous to the land would claim it to be theirs. Some of the Thais labor for people in the district town for D20,000 per day.

The Kon Tum provincial government also helped. Each family was supported with seeds and food valued at D1.2 million. The families are also given support, as are other ethnic minorities in the area, in terms of health services, agricultural tax, etc. However, the result is still far from desirable. The head of an 8-person household said “we had to borrow one ton of rice already, and we will have to pay back the loan gradually next year.” An old couple had to borrow 100 kilograms of rice and have to pay back the equivalent with an interest rate of 5% per month. Because of these conditions, some informants said

We don't think that we can live here. We want to go back to Thanh Hoa, but if we are given more land, and enough water for agricultural production, we would be willing to stay here.

and regular technical assistance is not provided. For many people, being given a big amount of money without clear instructions poses a difficult problem.

Training is important in other activities also. At a time when most indigenous knowledge is becoming irrelevant to the current situation, ethnic minority groups need deep and clear instruction on new technologies. For example, in order to change from life-long practice of shifting cultivation to paddy rice cultivation, adequate training is needed during the transition process. Respondents in the present study said that usually training is only given once a year and only a small number of people have access to this training, often village heads, clan chiefs, and leaders of mass organizations. These people, after returning from training workshops, refuse to train the rest of the community.

Women should be actively involved in such training because they take part in the everyday agricultural activities. Men are often selected for training because they speak more Vietnamese and tend to be more outgoing than women. However, not all men have hands-on experience and may not understand fully what they are taught in the course. If the training were given in a local language, it would encourage participation of women.

If a project has insufficient capacity to provide thorough training for large groups of ethnic minorities, a system of training of trainers should be established in each area. In this case, a small number might be selected and trained using the Vietnamese language, but these new trainers should be committed to organize training courses in their village in their own language.

Box 4. Po Y Commune

Po Y commune in Ngoc Hoi district, Kon Tum Province, is near the border, about 15 kilometers from main roads. The commune was formed by moving several villages to the site. Access is extremely difficult in the rainy season. Consequently, Po Y receives some special attention from both government and foreign-funded projects. Paddy rice cultivation was introduced in 1986 and immigration of Kinh began at this time. In the early 1990s, immigration from northern upland provinces also started. The result has been a drastic increase in the population of the commune. The immigrants have focused on paddy rice and cash crops, while the indigenous groups continue to rely on upland rice in areas that are becoming less and less fertile. Traditional rules and customs previously regulated and moderated the use of natural resources in the area. For instance, the use of dynamite to catch fish was totally against tradition. Violation of these unwritten laws resulted in heavy penalties including being banned from hunting or trapping. However, a

drastic change in the way of using natural resources is taking place in these communities.

The former religious respect for trees has gone. Wood has become an expensive commodity. Now, the villagers' skills and knowledge about the forest are used by professional loggers and hunters who hire them to find good wood and wildlife.

In the past, other natural resources, such as turtles, wild pigs, tortoises, deer, bears, and wild buffaloes, were hunted by the ethnic minorities for food, horns, and skin. Sometimes these products were used to barter for salt and other household goods. Now, there is an awareness of the profits to be gained from animal products. Income from this source considerably increased in villagers' household economy during the 1980s till the mid-1990s. However, during the past few years, because of forest degradation, most ethnic minority people have been forced to seek substitutes to replace this depleted source of food and income. Some types of vegetables have disappeared altogether from the area.

Staff of development projects should try to incorporate indigenous knowledge into their curriculum of training to make the best use of such knowledge. This would also enable the ethnic minority community to absorb the new technologies better and apply them to their current situation.

(viii) *Some ethnic groups with no special needs might become beneficiaries of development projects.*

The best example of this situation is seen in credit and saving projects. The provincial government intends to subsidize the loan interest rate by 0.3% to support the poorest communities, which cannot afford the 0.6% interest rate set by VBP or 0.8% as set by VBA. However, there is no restriction on who can take these loans. The Women's Union, which administers the funds, uses as its loan criteria persons who are working and who are committed to develop their household's economy. The result, as mentioned earlier, is that 60–70% of the borrowers are Kinh, who are not the group in most

critical need of low-interest loans. Most poor minorities do not take part in this project.

(ix) *In some cases, the wealthy benefit more from development projects than do the poor.*

Within Program 135, many communes make electricity and schools the first priorities for development. The commune people's committee makes the priorities and submits them to the higher administration bodies without consulting the communities. However, although the indigenous people appreciate the presence of electricity poles in their villages, only the wealthy can afford to register and pay the monthly cost for using this luxury. These people use electricity for various purposes, including the operation of rice-husking machines and opening small cinemas to show videotapes (charging D500/person). According to survey data, only 8% of commune households have access to electricity. In some communes, the power distribution lines reached the commune several years ago, but only a few Kinh

households can afford electricity. For many poor ethnic minority communities, electricity is not a priority.

In general, only persons with capital or land can afford to take part in the projects involving a loan. Chu Pah district provides an example (Box 5).

- (x) *In many mountainous provinces, the development of infrastructure and the maintenance of food security remain unbalanced.*

A very common phrase that the present study team heard was *dien, duong, truong, tram*, meaning electricity, roads, schools, and health centers. This is considered to be the social development framework that has to be developed before anything is done about food security. Kon Tum has achieved great success in creating favorable infrastructure at the local level. The province has a relatively good network of roads to villages (only 4 communes of the 51 communes of Region 3 do not have a road to the commune center). All communes have health centers and a network of village health workers. Schools also have been allocated down to the village level. Besides this, many villagers in the poorest communes of the province own tile-roof houses provided by the fixed settlement and cultivation program. Nevertheless, about 40% of population in Region 3 suffer from food shortage for about 3 months each year. Many ethnic minority households have to borrow rice between harvests from Kinh traders at a very high interest rate. This suggests that it is necessary to balance the development of infrastructure and food security.

- (xi) *Many projects face difficulty in fund disbursement.*

Project funds are generally disbursed too late, toward the end of the project cycle. For example, in Program 135, funds are often disbursed at the end of the dry season. This program strongly focuses on infrastructure, but no activities can be carried on after fund disbursement due to the difficulty of building in the rainy season.

- (xii) *Encouragement of plantations and cash crops can seriously conflict with food security for ethnic minorities.*

In Kon Tum, there is a province-wide policy of introducing coffee plantations. The coffee trees, from

seedling to harvest, require attentive care and input for a period of seven years. During this period, poor local ethnic minorities are in danger with regard to their food security. If all the effort and money, and maybe all the fertile land are used for coffee plantations, other aspects of agricultural production will be neglected.

- (xiii) *Marketing of agricultural produce from ethnic minority communities appears to be facing serious difficulties.*

The indigenous people suffer more severe impact than do other groups from the fluctuations in agricultural prices. Credit programs do not seem to take the possibility of price changes into account in their operations. In all villages visited in this study, poor people voiced their concerns over the monopoly of entrepreneurs in selling and buying their products.

When a credit program reaches our village, the entrepreneurs can smell it. Buffaloes become very expensive. But two years later, when we have to return the loan, our buffaloes are worth only two thirds of what we paid for them. And we also have to pay the interest. We always become indebted after a credit program. It is the same with rice. We are encouraged to grow paddy rice but the Government is not interested in buying our harvest. Entrepreneurs manipulate the prices however they want.

Coffee plantations began in Kon Tum several years ago, following the example of Dak Lak and Gia Lai. As well as the plantations and commercial farms (mainly belonging to Kinh), many ethnic minority households also have a hectare under coffee. Most of the trees have not been harvested yet, and the price now has fallen by 450%. Many households cannot keep up with the investment any longer and have decided to cut down the coffee trees in order to grow short-term food crops for food security. This suggests a lesson for future projects.

Another project where a marketing problem can be predicted is the agricultural diversification project, the main activity of which is rubber plantations. No thought has been given to marketing the project output. A similar problem already happens in the northern mountainous region, where large quantities of fruits such as plums and peaches, grown by the local Hmong community, have nowhere to go after harvest.

BOX 5. Chu Pah District

Chu Pah district, on Highway 14, was established in 1997. There are 11 communes and a district town. The district is populated by ethnic Vietnamese (56%) and minority groups of which the largest is the Gia rai and Ba-na group. The total area of the district is 98,129 ha, of which agricultural land accounts for 26,084 ha. According to a recent survey, 26% of the households are hungry and poor with total income and assets per capita of less than D80,000/year. Most of these households are ethnic minorities.

Funding for programs targeting economic development and infrastructure for poor communes comes from two sources: funds for infrastructure development and for subsidized goods including kerosene, salt, and medicine. According a district officer, there is always annual funding available for the poorest communes in the district to upgrade infrastructure. Ha Tay commune has so far received \$43,000 for upgrading a road.

The annual education allocation is more than \$20,000 for building schools and classes. Apart from this core funding from the central and provincial governments, the district also receives support in kind from the Ministry of Culture and Information, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Health.

In the past, most development components within these projects were the result of a top-down approach. In 2001, there was a change in Program 135, such that now each commune is responsible for planning and identifying its own development

directions and priorities. These priorities are then submitted and considered by higher authorities before funds are allocated.

A new government decree for supplementary investment in poor communes has also promoted this change. Each commune is given D100 million for infrastructure. The whole commune has to meet and map out the most feasible and effective investment plan for this fund.

The key constraint in poverty reduction projects is the limited number of target groups. The projects only reach people who have available capital and own land because these factors guarantee the loan repayment. Although the loan period is three years with low interest, poor ethnic minority people are often not engaged in suitable activities. This emphasizes the importance of building the capacity of ethnic minorities for them to participate confidently in these programs.

With regard to landownership, a land use-rights certificate (the "red card") has been granted for only 21% of the total agricultural area of Chu Pah. The high cost, D100,000/ha, was cited as a reason for this slow process. However, this fee has been removed by the Government. A district officer explained that when the price of agricultural products was high, people wanted the red card, because it helped them to sell land more easily. Now, however, even with 2 ha of agricultural land, people are still poor in Chu Pah.

This problem, however, appears to be much more critical when the Government has a policy of encouraging ethnic minorities to diversify their agricultural production, changing from food-crop production to plantations and cash crops of higher economic value. A long-term strategy should be developed to prevent the local people from becoming poorer after engaging in such diversification.

(xiv) *Development workers face a dilemma of wanting successful projects and having these projects reach the poorest of the poor.*

Projects have set objectives and goals that their project staff need to achieve during the project time frame. This goal-seeking process sometimes prevents project staff from targeting the poorest groups in a community because it always takes a much longer time to work with those people. It is, therefore, important to create a balance between achievement of project goals and reaching the poorest target groups. A new system of monitoring and evaluation should be developed that would prevent conflict between goal-seeking and the value of development projects for ethnic minority people.

5

POVERTY AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

GENERAL ISSUES

The poverty situation and trends among ethnic minorities need to be viewed in the context of overall strategies for poverty reduction in Viet Nam and their implementation.

Viet Nam's record in reducing poverty has been impressive, in particular during the 1990s. Poverty incidence declined by more than 20% during 1993–1998, from 58% in 1992–93 to 37% in 1998, and the country has by now exceeded some of its international targets in such important areas of poverty reduction as primary school enrolment. Poverty reduction nevertheless remains a serious challenge: almost 40% of the population remain below the poverty line, and many are only marginally above it.

Poverty is now concentrated in rural areas of the country, where some 94% of the poor now live. The incidence of rural poverty has been registered at 45%, whereas in urban areas it is only 15%. The depth of poverty, measured by the poverty gap index,⁹ is also far more severe in rural areas. During the 1990s, the overall living standards of ethnic minority groups in mountainous areas also improved. The relative poverty rate nevertheless remained high, and the level of improvement was much lower than in other parts of the country. Indicators show that the gaps between ethnic minority and Kinh and Hoa groups increased rapidly. During 1993–1998, the national average expenditure per capita increased by 35%, but only by 20% for ethnic groups in the Northern Highlands and 7% in the Central Highlands. While the incidence of poverty in the country as a whole decreased from 55% to 36% during this period, it remained high in the Northern Highlands, decreasing from 84% to 73%. The poverty rate in the Central Highlands was hardly reduced at all, remaining at very high levels: 92% in 1993 and 91% in 1998.

Although there has been an improvement in the economic growth of ethnic minority communities, this growth remains much lower than in other parts of the country. In the 1990s, the GDP of ethnic minorities accounted for 15.4% of the national GDP; in 2000 it was only 11%.

A recent World Bank study¹⁰ used Viet Nam Living Standards Survey data and the 1999 Population and Housing Census to examine the difference in living standards between the Kinh/Hoa majority and other ethnic groups, and how these changed between the 1993 and 1998 surveys. The findings are that ethnic minorities are indeed disproportionately poor. Despite constituting just 14% of the population, ethnic minorities now make up 29% of all the poor in Viet Nam. Moreover, of 14 provinces with rural poverty rates of over 60%, 12 of these have populations in which ethnic minorities make up more than half the total. Ethnic groups found to have performed best economically were those most assimilated within Kinh society, while the least assimilated groups (particularly those in the Central Highlands and the Hmong in the Northern Highlands) have been left behind. Thus, the study observes that the most difficult challenge of public policy is to bring those groups most unlike the Kinh into the economic mainstream.

The study also aimed to detect differences among ethnic minority groups by examining such items as expenditures and schooling. It was hampered by the fact that the living standards surveys did not sample enough ethnic minority households to allow for much disaggregation. Moreover, the 1992–93 survey only allowed for 10 different ethnic groupings, rather than the official list of 54 different ethnic groups. However, a distinction between three broad categories (the Kinh, Hoa, and Khmer; one composite category for ethnic minorities that traditionally live in the Central Highlands; and another for those that originate in the Northern

Highlands) did shed some light on the major differences. The poorest groups were unambiguously the minorities of the Central Highlands. They saw their relative position fall, with an expenditure level that was half the national average in 1993 but little more than a third of the national average by 1998. The researchers identified significant differences between the situations of ethnic minorities in different regions. Northern highland minorities had benefited from economic growth in the 1990s, whereas the position of the central highland minorities had stagnated. The researchers then tried to derive policy prescriptions from their analysis, arguing that diversity in the socioeconomic development experiences of the different ethnic minorities indicated the need for a similar diversity in policy interventions designed to assist them.

Social assessment carried out by ADB, in the context of project preparation in Viet Nam's central region, similarly identified higher than average poverty levels for "indigenous" ethnic minority groups. Studies have shown that the rural poor are predominantly from indigenous groups. Indigenous households, together with female-headed households, are poorer than the average. Indigenous peoples' households suffer an average of 5.5 months food deficit compared to 3.3 months for Kinh groups, and appear to have less access to irrigated land than the Kinh immigrants. Immigrants are better-off than those born in the area, either indigenous or Kinh, suggesting that immigrants usually carry skills and knowledge, including knowledge of markets and government services,¹¹ that allow them to prosper even if they suffer a few initial years of poverty.

A paper on poverty reduction among ethnic minorities, conducted for the Poverty Task Force, aims to identify structural and other factors behind the growing poverty gap between mainstream Kinh/Hoa groups and certain ethnic minorities. Minorities have a lower maximum educational attainment level and substantially less access to water sources and benefits from remittances. They may actually have more agricultural land, but it is unlikely to be irrigated. Geographical location, involving remoteness and poor access to infrastructure, is an important explanation for lower consumption compared with that of local Kinh. Infant mortality, child mortality, and under-five mortality rates show enormous geographic differences, which correlate with high concentrations of ethnic minorities. In the Central and Northern Highlands, the regional

figures are above the rural average for Viet Nam and there are indications that in some parts, infant mortality actually increased during 1989–1994, while the national average remained the same.

QUANTITATIVE ASPECTS

Analyzing poverty within ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam is difficult because of the lack of systematic figures. Different statistics are published by various institutions and organizations. In this report, only government statistics are used.

At the provincial level, the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs in Kon Tum Province conducted a comprehensive poverty assessment in April 2001. As indicated in Table 4 based on data provided on the "Report of the Situation of the Poor" in Kon Tum, ethnic minority households account for a very high proportion of poor households compared with that in the total population.

National and economic growth improved during the 1990s both in the lowland and mountainous regions. In a study on living standards of the rural population, 85% of interviewed families felt that the quality of life had improved and only 4.4% felt it had worsened. The statistics are even more positive in mountainous areas (Table 5). Nationwide, the average monthly income per head in 1999 was D295,000. In the northeast and northwest mountainous parts of Viet Nam, the income level was 70% of the national average. In the Central Highlands, the income level was 17% higher than the national average.

Poor people account for only 16% of the total population, but 20% in the northeast and northwest and 27% in the Central Highlands (Table 5). This poverty rate in the Central Highlands combined with the higher than average income level there means that the discrepancy between wealthy and poor households in this area is 1.5 times larger than the national average level.

Infrastructure in mountainous regions has received most investment and attention (Table 6). However, the capacity to access and use newly-built infrastructure varies from one ethnic group to another. Ethnic minorities have much less opportunity to access and make full use of these resources. Earlier, it was noted that in remote areas where the national electricity grid

Table 4. Incidence of Poverty in Kon Tum Province

District	Proportion of Poor Households (%)	Proportion of Kinh Poor Households (%)	Proportion of Ethnic Minority Poor Households (%)
Kon Plong	49	10	60
Dak Ha	29	13	52
Dak To	48	21	61
Ngoc Hoi	36	13	42
Sa Thay	33	29	37
Dak Glei	42	1	44
Kon Tum Town	18	9	47
Average	32	12	50

Table 5. Self-evaluation of Poor Households in Viet Nam on the Status of their Livelihoods in the 1990s

	Nationwide (%)	Northeast and Northwest (%)	Central Highlands (%)
Poor households in 1999	16.0	19.8	26.6
Households with improved livelihoods	84.5	90.1	87.0

Source: National Department of Statistics, 2000.

Table 6. Rural Infrastructure, 1999

Area	Communes with Electricity (%)	Communes with a Road Passable by Cars (%)	Communes with a Primary School (%)	Communes with a Health Post (%)
Nationwide	85.8	92.9	98.8	98.0
Northeast	78.1	94.8	97.8	96.9
Northeast	54.6	85.4	95.8	99.4
Central Highlands	64.5	97.2	96.4	95.7

Source: National Department of Statistics, 2000.

has reached villages, only Kinh can afford to pay monthly and registration fees. This situation raises doubts about the effectiveness of such investment and its real impact on ethnic minorities.

Table 7 shows the values of a range of socio-economic development parameters in mountainous areas. It should be noted that the northeast, northwest and central highland areas have lower scores than the national average in all the criteria. They are especially low in the northeast where the GDP per capita is only about one third of the average level.

PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY FROM CASE STUDIES

During the 1990s, there were many research projects on poverty in Viet Nam, providing a clear picture of overall poverty in the country as well as analyzing its causes. However, little has been written on how ethnic minorities characterize and explain their own poverty.

This section presents an analysis of field studies conducted in Kon Tum, Gia Lai and Lao Cai provinces.

Table 7. Socioeconomic Factors

Area	Longevity (year)	Literacy Rate (%)	GDP Per Capita (D '000)	GDP Per Capita (PPP,US\$)	Human Development Index (HDI)	HDI Ranking within Viet Nam
Nationwide	70.9	90.3	5,221	1,860	0.696	
Northeast	68.2	89.3	2,641	941	0.641	6
Northwest	65.9	73.3	1,951	695	0.564	8
Central Highlands	63.5	83.0	3,093	1,102	0.604	7
Socioeconomic factors in 19 mountainous provinces						
Quang Ninh	71.1	92.8	4,626	1,648	0.703	11
Phu Tho	71.0	95.0	2,694	960	0.675	23
Lam Dong	70.8	91.1	2,872	1,023	0.662	31
Thai Nguyen	69.4	95.4	2,359	840	0.660	32
Dak Lak	65.6	92.2	3,504	1,248	0.647	41
Hoa Binh	67.3	92.0	2,180	777	0.637	46
Binh Phuoc	69.7	88.2	2,416	861	0.632	47
Bac Giang	67.4	93.5	2,204	785	0.632	48
Lang Son	65.2	89.4	2,846	1,014	0.628	50
Tuyen Quang	66.8	87.2	2,245	800	0.621	51
Yen Bai	67.2	84.8	2,205	785	0.612	53
Bac Kan	66.6	85.5	1,618	576	0.594	54
Cao Bang	62.4	76.6	2,503	892	0.576	55
Lao Cai	66.0	69.3	2,107	751	0.559	56
Son La	66.1	69.5	1,823	649	0.549	57
Gia Lai	61.8	69.3	2,575	917	0.546	58
Kon Tum	57.2	73.2	2,372	845	0.534	59
Ha Giang	58.8	68.1	1,521	542	0.503	60
Lai Chau	63.7	51.3	1,847	658	0.486	61

Source: The Publishing House of the National Department of Statistics, 2001.

Results of discussions with government officials on their perception of poverty are presented. The section continues with a focus on how ethnic minorities in the surveyed villages perceive and identify poverty and its causes.

Perceptions of Government Officials on Poverty

In general, officials in the surveyed areas consider the main causes of poverty to be the following.

- Low level of awareness among local ethnic minorities. This characteristic is drawn from the fact that many ethnic minorities are illiterate, and they seem to be “slower” than the Kinh in absorbing new technologies.
- The slow pace of change in diversification of agricultural output.
- Poor infrastructure.
- Lack of roads, therefore limited access to and exchange with the outside world.
- Lack of capital.
- Lack of knowledge of modern agricultural production.

Perceptions of Ethnic Minority Peoples on Poverty

During the field visits, the consultants conducted focus-group meetings and household visits to the poorest and the better-off families and individuals. The consultants avoided using set standards to measure poverty levels and imposing concepts on the informants. The indigenous communities expressed their perceptions on poverty in 14 topics, grouped by the consultants into the following five dimensions.

Food Security

Food Insecurity

Insecurity in food supply is the primary concern of the poor ethnic minorities. Foods of ethnic minorities include rice and resources such as tubers, leaves, vegetables, and other forest and aquatic products. Food production deficits average between 3 and 6 months for most villages. Low cash incomes are not cited as a difficulty. Instead of laboring for other people in order to earn money, ethnic minority people still prefer working in their own ricefields to ensure the harvest for the next season: “You never know how much money is needed to buy rice to feed the family.”

Many people also seek off-farm laboring work, currently at D10,000–15,000 per day, equivalent to enough food for a household of 5 people for one day, including 6 kg of rice. However, most of this income is absorbed by the expenditure for household goods and supplementary foods. The need for new products, not used for livelihood previously, contributes to further expenditure. For example, a particular type of plant was burned to make salt. Now, due to forest degradation, these resources are not as plentiful. People buy oil, sea salt, and other additives for cooking.

Wildlife Encroachment and Natural Disasters

Poor people in the communes tend to have ricefields near the forest, which increases the risk of encroachment by animals. In Dak Xu commune, some of these households have lost most of their crops because of wild pigs. Hunting and trapping are prohibited. Despite this rule, however, wild pigs and fowls are often hunted to protect the crops and for food. The massive loss of forest area during the development process has had various consequences including soil erosion, drought, and flood, and a dramatic decrease in soil fertility. These problems are all clearly observed by villagers and were pointed out as a cause of poverty.

Basic Conditions for Production and Livelihood

Lack of or Infertile Land

The present survey reconfirms earlier studies showing that ethnic minorities perceive lack of land as one of the causes of poverty.

In Ngoc Hoi, there are 4,000 ha of agricultural land, of which 3,000 ha are managed as three rubber plantations. In Dak Lung commune, the process of securing land for these farms was simple, according to commune leaders. The farm representatives put forward a plan for rubber plantations to the commune people's committee. That committee then allocated land accordingly without consultation with commune members. The latter were then forced to move further into the forest to look for new patches of land for cultivation.

In Kong Plong district, only one fourth of the communes have land for paddy rice cultivation. The rest continue to practice upland rice farming in infertile areas of young regeneration forest because of increasing demand and the ban on shifting cultivation by the Government. This led to an unprecedented reduction in upland rice production.

If you go to visit a household and cannot meet them for two weeks or a month, you can be sure they are poor people. Only poor people cannot afford to work near the village, because there is no fertile land left. They often stay in the forest for weeks with their children.

The communal ownership and use of agricultural land and forests meant that households and family clans were entitled to exploit and use them with strict observance of customary laws. There was no purchase of land or other assets. The Dak Xu commune moved in 1987 to a site beside a road as part of the resettlement program. Not only has their lifestyle changed but also their view on land has become one measured by cash. Land disputes between the indigenous people and immigrants in the surveyed communes have become a heated issue.

Land-grabbing incidents and land disputes happen so often in our village. We were not aware

of the value of land before. Now we have to compete with outsiders who are a lot faster than us.

A recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, in six provinces in the Central Highlands and the southeast where immigration is significant, showed that less than 4% of the land occupied by migrant families was allocated to them by the Government, 47% was privately purchased, and 46% was secured by forest clearing.

Before ethnic minorities can secure enough land for their households, all the more fertile areas of land have been taken by either outsiders or people who have access to cash. This cash-oriented economy has over the past decade replaced the subsistence economy, causing a number of difficulties for the indigenous groups. It has changed their lifestyle and values while preparations have not yet been made for them to enter a new social structure and absorb new values that are more market oriented.

They now even charge for domestic animals such as cats or dogs that they used to give away for good luck.

Since the early 1990s, when the market economy accelerated in the lowland areas, migrants have arrived from the deltas in the Central Highlands. They have rented or bought land from indigenous people. At the same time, they have also secured land by hiring indigenous people or northern upland migrants to clear forestland. This cash flow has changed the land-clearing pattern of the indigenous communities. Instead of clearing only enough land for cultivation, they now clear land to make money. Other minority groups, who come almost empty-handed, also create heavy pressure on land by clearing for cultivation. The overall results have been as follows.

- Income from land selling or renting has motivated the indigenous communities to clear more land and move further inside the forest.
- The open market has exposed both the indigenous people and migrants to perennial and fruit crops. However, success in growing these crops depends a great deal on familiarity with complicated techniques and market fluctuations. The Kinh, who

have better access to information and have money, tend to be more successful than the ethnic minorities, who often find it difficult to adapt to the change. Therefore, the latter tend to sell or rent land and move away to continue growing their traditional crops.

- Some more adventurous indigenous households decide to keep up with the change. However, when adverse circumstances (e.g., drop in price or natural disasters) occur, they tend to sell land and move away instead of continuing to grow other crops.

However, the lack of land and inability to expand into forest areas have stopped land trading in many villages. In the surveyed sites, ownership of land has become, more than ever, crucial for the survival of ethnic minorities.

Once you sell land, it means hunger for your family. There is nowhere to go to clear land anymore.

Most poor people interviewed either have no idea about land use-rights certificates (red cards) or have not yet been granted one. Allocating land-use rights requires measuring, mapping, and determination of "origins," and other steps, which are extremely time consuming. In addition, red cards are granted for agricultural land only. In Chu Pha district, only 21% of the total agricultural land has been mapped and red cards granted. The cost for measuring was D100,000 per hectare until this fee was abolished in 2001. According to district officers, ethnic minority people do not appreciate the significance and security provided by the red cards. The concept of customary rights over land is still strongly held. Disputes frequently occur when land allocation rights are sought over an area that is claimed by others under customary systems.

Apart from ignorance of new developments such as the cash value of land, poor ethnic minority people are often not educated and become marginalized from village meetings, which are the only source of information on the government's new laws and directives. Even if they attend such meetings, they are not able to understand fully matters that are most essential to them.

No Inheritance

This facet of poverty refers to a number of aspects including land, assets, and cultivation experience. The most important aspect is that wealthy people in villages are those who inherited large areas of land from their grandparents or parents. Poor families are those who either came late to an area with many children or failed to secure a good tract of land. Their children cannot now expand the family's holding and have to divide among themselves the present land area.

No Permanent Houses

Poor people in the surveyed areas live in small temporary shelters made from leaves, bamboo, and mud. These shelters are unstable and are often located near families' upland ricefields, which are far away from villages. The distance between their residential location and farmland does not allow such families to adapt quickly to a new lifestyle and concepts.

She always lives in her ricefield because she does not have a house in the village. She cannot attend commune activities and events...She does not know the value of land now and, therefore, she does not feel the necessity to obtain a red card.

Economic Activities

Lack of Farming Experience

Many studies have stressed that lack of experience in farming and financial management is an important cause of poverty for ethnic minorities.

In Chu Pah, the ethnic minorities have been exposed to paddy rice cultivation since the French colonial period. However, their ricefields are mostly located near streams to take advantage of the natural water flow for irrigation. They have only one harvest of rice each year. An increase to two harvests annually in this community would require the use of techniques that are not adequately provided by extension workers at any level. Yields of paddy rice in the fields of ethnic minorities are only one third of those in Kinh ricefields.

Before 1985, villagers in Dak Lung worked in a collective farm subsidized by the Government through provision of seedlings, fertilizer, and technical

assistance. Ethnic minority households were requested to contribute labor and received shares of the rice harvested. After the breakdown of this collective system in the 1990s, ethnic minorities were left with insufficient knowledge to start generating sufficient food and incomes. At present, land is allocated to individual households. The change from a subsistence to a partly subsidized and finally to an open market economy has confused a large proportion of the ethnic minorities.

Poor Management of Assets and Expenditures

Managing large sums of money requires a range of skills and an understanding of and a capacity to engage in trading systems. Most women in Dak Xu are not capable of paying back a loan from credit programs. According to them, after the provision of credits ends, they become poorer.

We do not know what to do with the loan money. We do not know how to plan and moderate our income-generating activities and expenditure. And how can we pay back the loan with such interest?

Fluctuations of Prices

Coffee has been the most popular and lucrative cash crop in the Central Highlands. The severe drop in its price during 2000–2001 has caused some serious dilemmas, especially for ethnic minorities. Most of the cash available in coffee-growing households was invested in fertilizer and irrigation for this demanding crop. Now, in many villages, people are removing their coffee trees to start growing new crops. However, the majority continue to wait for the price to increase again. Ethnic minorities in almost every village complained about this sudden change and blamed the Government for not keeping its promise to buy their produce. Some members of these communities have become totally confused as what to grow to generate cash income after they remove their coffee trees.

Health and Education

Poor Health

Most of the households identified by the communities as the poorest households are either headed by a woman or by persons with a disability or poor health. Lack of working capacity due to disability or poor health is always cited as the first sign of poverty:

I am poor because my health is so bad that I cannot engage in any activity at home. But I am still better off than my neighbor who also lives alone. She has better physical health but is mentally ill. She even cannot recognize edible foods.

In all surveyed communes, there is at least one health post with 3–4 staff. However, the health posts are either too far away or not adequately equipped and without medicines necessary to deal with even conventional diseases.

Ethnic minorities have almost ceased using traditional herbal medicines due to the depletion of these herbs and restricted access to them in the forests, most of which are now managed as either state farms or state forest enterprises.

Western medicines have replaced most traditional healing systems. However, the frequency of health service use is still low in the communes. In many but not all communes, the Government subsidizes medicine for common diseases. Most poor people cannot afford to pay for medicine that is not freely available at health posts. Medicine for headaches costs the equivalent of two days labor. Furthermore, only sick persons themselves can buy or be given medicine. Most poor people live alone, are disabled, weak, or live far (1–14 km) from health posts.

In Po Y commune, a fairly big and well functioning clinic was built in recent years, funded by the European Commission. The number of persons using this clinic remains minimal. The patients are mostly people with available cash and border police officers.

High Cost of Education

There are only a few primary schools in the villages surveyed. Most of them were built by villagers and have only one or two rooms. In Doch 1 village, there are 85 students attending classes from grade 1 to grade 5. There are no boarding schools at the commune level. Sending children to the only boarding school in the district is beyond the financial capacity of villagers. The district selects two students from each village and pays for their attendance at this secondary school.

Family Networks and Cultural Change

Family Breakdown

Incidence of family breakdown by divorce, widowhood, or domestic violence, is used by the poor to express their perceptions on poverty. Poor people are clearly aware of their vulnerability regarding this social value.

My husband left me when I was struck with illness and became paralyzed. For a long time, I could not work to support my son and myself. I do not have any relatives in this village; my husband is Kinh. My son has now grown up. He is the only source of income for my household.

Most indigenous groups living in the surveyed areas are matriarchal. Different generations used to share the same "long house." The oldest woman in a long house is the owner of the house and usually has full knowledge and experience of household management, agriculture, and other business. Nowadays, this tradition is disintegrating and is being replaced by the nuclear family. Nuclear families live in separate houses and have their own area of land. Girls marry early and leave home without properly learning cultivation techniques and advice from their parents.

It is difficult to start everything now. Luckily, my mother and I still live near each other. I can learn slowly from her things that I do not know.

Laziness and Alcohol Addiction

Some women interviewed said their husbands engage in a number of activities and distractions that did not exist previously in their villages. The husbands have become lazy and drink alcohol more often with their friends. The tradition of sharing rice wine around the open fireplace in Nha Rong has been abused and turned into alcoholism. Women pointed to this phenomenon as a cause of poverty.

No Relatives

Surprisingly, lack of support from relatives was stressed as cause of poverty. Although villagers give food to the poorest and most hungry people at times, support from relatives tends to be on a more regular and firm basis. In many surveyed communes, landless individuals can rely on their circle of relatives who own land; they contribute labor to the landowners and receive a share of the harvest.

Ms...was left with four small children after her husband's death. She does not possess any land. She sometimes works for other people to earn cash, but the main source of food for the five members of her family is from working in her cousin's ricefield.

Social and Cultural Changes

The indigenous people used to live in such remote areas that communication with the outside world was almost nonexistent. The village is the basic social unit. In the Central Highlands, it is also the highest social organization. Villagers do not know any other social structure beyond it. Their lives have been regulated by customary laws. *Gia lang*—the most respected person—or the *gia lang* council manages all issues related to administration. In the past, the villagers went to *gia lang* to seek advice on issues related to nature, climate, and forest before making decisions on farming and livelihood.

Drastic changes in the environment, technology, farming operations and lifestyles, and the penetration of the State have limited the role of *gia lang*. Village society has been affected by a new official institution: the village chief, who is elected by the villagers and approved by the commune leaders. This person manages administrative issues. As well, there are new organizations and beyond the village there are higher administrative levels. However, from the present survey, ethnic minority people still highly appreciate their traditional institutions for management of village issues. All informants expressed the need to have customary laws and a *gia lang* in their village.

The poor people spoke about their inability to fully participate in festivals and rituals, and about the breakdown of their traditional beliefs. For example, according to indigenous religious beliefs, trees have souls like human beings. In the past, wood was used for household construction purposes such as building houses, firewood, cattle barns, boats, and coffins. Before cutting down a big tree, they held a ceremony to mourn the soul of the tree. Wood from that tree must be used for the purposes stated during the ceremony. Nowadays, wood is harvested on an industrial scale and traded for cash by outsiders. The forests close to their homes have rapidly disappeared. Access to wood and other forest resources is very limited.

The *nha rong* (communal house) was the cultural and often physical center of a village, a place to gather every night to talk, drink, dance, and exchange

experiences regarding livelihood practices. In all surveyed villages, people are now moving to new areas, mainly beside roads. The circular settlements do not exist any longer; the *nha rong*, therefore, has disappeared with all its rituals. In some communes, it has simply been transformed into a building called the cultural hall of different architectural design and made with a tin roof. In Dak Lung commune, the *nha rong* was replaced by a small brick house with tables and chairs instead of a wooden floor and a central open fireplace. Villagers gather here for meetings that are different from their traditional gatherings. The new *nha rong* is not acknowledged or accepted by the community as a part of their cultural life. In other communes, villagers gather in the village head's house for meetings. According to ethnic minorities, the *nha rong* is not just a festive site. It is the place where poor people can learn from those better-off. There is no longer a mechanism for sharing and exchanging knowledge and experiences.

The design and placement of resettlement villages do not allow the communities to find resources easily for building a proper *nha rong*. The frame of a *nha rong* is made from big logs. According to the *gia lang* in Dak Lung Commune, it now takes four days to reach the area in the forest where big trees can be found. However, this area now belongs to a state enterprise and, therefore, there is no access for local people. Even if they were allowed to log in this area, it would be difficult to carry the big logs back to the village.

6

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK EXPERIENCE

This section reviews the manner in which ADB has addressed indigenous peoples/ethnic minorities¹² in its project and program interventions in Viet Nam. As will be seen, considerable attention has been given to ethnic minority concerns both in overall country program strategies and in the preparation of projects in the Central Highlands. ADB strategy and program interventions appear to recognize that these minority peoples are disproportionately poor and have special needs with regard to the development process.

The review is primarily concerned with the ADB country strategy and program for 2002–2004. Particular attention is given to the Central Region Livelihood Improvement Project, which was under preparation at the time of the study, and for which a significant number of activities are targeted specifically at indigenous peoples/ethnic minorities.

ADB resumed activities in Viet Nam in 1993. By the end of 2000 it had provided 32 loans, amounting to just over US\$2 billion, and 107 technical assistance grants. Under ADB's interim strategy for 1993–1995, the emphasis was on infrastructure rehabilitation in transport, water, and power, and also reform of agriculture policy. Later, ADB operations were extended to human resource development through health and education, rural development and microcredit, forestry, crop diversification, and financial sector development.

ADB COUNTRY STRATEGY AND PROGRAM, 2002–2004

The present ADB country strategy and program (CSP) for Viet Nam, as elsewhere, aims to make poverty reduction its overarching goal. Thus, the overall objective of the CSP is to help achieve poverty reduction

targets by combining employment-generating economic growth with interventions aimed at reducing social and regional imbalances. This has clear implications for ethnic minorities. First there is to be poverty targeting, identifying both the poorest geographical regions and the poorest sectors within these regions. Inevitably, this means in the Vietnamese context that ethnic minorities will be identified as among the principal target groups.

The CSP identifies a number of thematic, sectoral, and geographic priorities, to ensure that growth reaches the poor. These are, respectively, sustainable growth, inclusive social development, good governance, and a geographic focus on the central region.

As regards inclusive social development, ADB will “adopt an integrated, mainstreamed approach, building the poverty, gender, and ethnic dimensions into relevant areas of assistance, to increase inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the development process.” The CSP considers that issues of social inclusion are adequately addressed in the government's goals and strategies. Reference is made to the preliminary Viet Nam Development Targets,¹³ in particular the goal to eradicate poverty and preserve the culture and diversity of ethnic minorities. The three targets are (i) to preserve and develop literacy in the local language, (ii) to ensure that individual and collective land-use rights for all land-use types have been allocated to the majority of the ethnic mountainous people, and (iii) to increase the proportion of government personnel of ethnic origin such that it is closer to the proportion that ethnic groups make in the national population.

While the Government “has recognized the need to preserve the culture and diversity of ethnic minorities,” the CSP considers that “the Government should carefully review the impact of past policies and programs for the development of ethnic minorities and remote areas. More generally, the Government needs to undertake a thorough and systematic ex-post evaluation of targeted programs to increase their efficiency and sustainable

impact.” In this respect the CSP refers to “limited evidence that disadvantaged ethnic minorities are benefiting from Government programs.”

Ethnic minorities are listed among the population groups that are particularly vulnerable to social and economic marginalization because they have limited access to assets and opportunities. Partly because of the remote regions they inhabit, ethnic minorities also tend to suffer greater exclusion from services and economic opportunities. Low-income ethnic minority women are seen as a particularly disadvantaged group. To increase inclusion of ethnic minorities, one approach in the context of promoting economic growth will be to ensure that ADB operations focus on promoting access of ethnic minorities to credit, extension services, and training. Another approach to benefit ethnic minorities in particular is the proposed geographic focus on the central region where more than a quarter of Viet Nam's ethnic minority populations live (see below).

The CSP points to the need for an appropriate level of data disaggregation by ethnicity as well as by gender, in order to pay special attention to how inclusion of ethnic minorities may be achieved, and also to establish benefit monitoring and evaluation systems.

A key element in the CSP strategy is its geographically targeted approach, focusing approximately one third of operations in the central region. Special emphasis within the central region is to be placed on the considerably poorer north central coast and south central coast areas, and on the Central Highlands. ADB will support interventions aimed at raising the incomes of the rural poor through livelihood improvements based on local resource endowments, combined with strengthening the regional physical and social infrastructure. Community-based livelihood projects are to address the causes of poverty at the micro level, addressing the links between natural resource depletion and poverty. Operations in the Central Highlands are to emphasize forestry and watershed management as tools for poverty reduction, also including agroforestry and the planting of fruit trees and fuel wood crops, and food and livelihood security for forest-dependent communities.

The situation of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands is addressed under the heading *risks and safeguards*. Whereas nearly 2.3 million people from 30 ethnic groups live in the central region, the relatively small number of some of these groups and the diversity in their

sociocultural background make it difficult to devise common solutions to their particular development challenges. Given the high levels of unorganized immigration into the Central Highlands, exacerbating social and environmental pressures, the CSP observes that issues of sustainable immigration and of cultural sensitivity to ethnic populations will require special attention in the design of projects affecting the central region. ADB will engage in dialogue with NGOs and other development partners with experience in these areas, to verify project and program design and to minimize adverse impact.

CENTRAL REGION LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Of the various ADB interventions either under way or in preparation, and which have at least some impact on ethnic minorities, this project is the most useful to examine for the lessons that can be learned. The project has generated considerable information concerning ethnic minorities and their socioeconomic situation as a result of fieldwork during the preparatory phase. In accordance with ADB procedures, an indigenous peoples development plan was prepared, drawing on data collected during consultations with target communities. These included focus-group meetings and discussions with local officials in several communes. A socioeconomic survey was undertaken in four representative communes, covering 120 households and 638 individuals. Participatory rural and poverty appraisals were carried out in the same communes.

The overall objective of the project is to help the Government ensure that the poor in upland communes of four provinces (Kon Tum, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, and Thua Thien Hue) achieve sustainable livelihoods with an improving quality of life. Target beneficiaries are some 348,000 people living in 65,000 households in 139 communes, spread through 10 districts of the 4 provinces. Approximately 70% of the primary target beneficiaries will be indigenous peoples. Efforts will focus on improving farming systems and diversifying incomes to enable indigenous peoples to participate more fully in the market economy.

The objectives are to be achieved through (i) improving and sustaining household food security; (ii) generating household incomes through improved farm

productivity, infrastructure development, and off-farm income-generating opportunities; (iii) developing community capacity to utilize and manage scarce resources through an expanded social development plan; and (iv) strengthening the capacity of support services to respond to grassroots initiatives to ensure the delivery of improved services in upland communities. An important feature of the project is its focus on the development of innovative resource management strategies linked to social development objectives.

Underpinning the project has been its community development component, aiming to strengthen the technical and organizational capacity of rural upland communities to plan and manage their own development activities, and to assist target communities to form community organizations and strengthen the community planning process. Thus, the design of the project has taken into consideration the importance of confidence building among beneficiaries, particularly the indigenous populations and among them, especially women.

The extent of indigenous/ethnic minority poverty within the project area was identified in an initial social assessment. It was found that 87% of indigenous peoples' households were well below the overall poverty line. Moreover, indigenous peoples within the project area were facing an influx of better-educated and richer Kinh. The project area was selected on the basis of key poverty indicators including those monitored by both CEMMA and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs. Intended beneficiaries are predominantly subsistence and upland farming families, of which 60% are ethnic minorities. They were found to depend mainly on subsistence agriculture, partly relying also on shifting cultivation.

The indigenous peoples development plan document observes that the project provides a framework for the participation of all indigenous peoples' groups in the detailed planning and implementation of the project, and that the mechanisms for their participation have been developed through extensive consultations. There will be comprehensive consultations with the involved communities as a precursor to the formulation of socioeconomic development plans for each commune.

The indigenous peoples development plan itself comprises a set of achievements within the project framework for all indigenous groups. These achievements are represented by the following targets.

- The rehabilitation of the road and market network will improve travel and market conditions.
- Transportation costs will be reduced and this will lead to lowering the costs of consumer goods and farm and business inputs while at the same time raising the prices of farm produce and other outputs.
- Access to health and educational facilities will be substantially improved.
- The improved road and market network will improve the investment environment and through the project's microfinance component, target beneficiaries will be able to expand existing enterprises and undertake new ventures.
- The community development component will provide for a natural resource management plan and assist in land dispute resolution. In addition, all indigenous groups will be represented on the committees that select and manage the subprojects in the social development plan.
- The project's training program will train and then use local NGOs and other community groups to provide a beneficiary training program aimed at expanding income-generating opportunities.

At the same time, the development plan recognizes that these targets are also the subjects of specific concerns raised by various officials and NGOs, such as the possibility that improved roads will allow more immigrants and illegal loggers into the area, and that microfinance operations, being alien to local culture, could destabilize the traditional way of life. Thus, these and other concerns will be carefully monitored. The project has provisions for amending or adding to the various component targets and activities.

Monitoring will be primarily the responsibility of a project advisory office. Implementing agencies will have a monitoring and evaluation officer and will provide this office with details of indigenous group involvement and of any negative impact on them from the project. Progress will be measured from baseline indicators resulting from a benchmark socioeconomic survey prior to project start-up.

Monitoring and management committees will be formed to assist the communities to identify, implement, and manage small-scale infrastructure projects, with all local indigenous groups represented in their membership.

Local indigenous groups are to be given priority for job opportunities arising from road rehabilitation. Use is to be made of natural resource management plans and geographic information system maps of communes to resolve land disputes and to help indigenous groups gain recognition for traditional patterns of land use.

However, while commitment to community participation is expressed in the project document, it would appear that considerable groundwork is needed in order to render such participation truly effective. In Kon Tum, for example, the assessments carried out during the present study pointed to possible deficiencies in project preparation and also to considerable challenges in building up a real relationship of trust with the target communities.

First, although extensive fieldwork was carried out during the preparation phase and almost all officials in the surveyed areas were aware of the project's existence, consultations were apparently not held with indigenous communities in the proposed project sites. Unless consultations are held with villages at the local level, it is inevitably difficult to detect their real needs and aspirations.

Second, it is not fully clear how the training activities envisaged in the project will gain the full trust

and confidence of indigenous communities and give them a real sense of "ownership" of the project. Development work involving a high degree of responsibility has tended to be allocated to outsiders. Indigenous community members have been engaged only in the most basic or manual tasks, such as transporting rocks and other building materials to project sites. A symptom of the lack of confidence and trust is that indigenous communities have generally been reluctant to become deeply involved in infrastructure building projects. Indigenous peoples tend to perceive them as extraneous projects. They see their participation simply as one of providing manual labor to enable them to buy rice.

Government officials tend also to disparage indigenous peoples, seeing them as too "primitive" to grasp the technical dimensions of project activities, and also as too difficult to educate. This mentality can make it difficult to implement ADB's own philosophy, as set out in the project documents, of involving indigenous peoples in all aspects of projects and programs. Little attention is paid to the potentially positive contribution of indigenous knowledge systems, many of them built up over centuries of experience and adapted to difficult environments.

This livelihood project may be a test of Vietnamese capacity to implement bottom-up and participatory approaches to rural and community development. Lessons can be learned for other new and upcoming projects, for example, those related to education, rural credit, and forest management and livelihood.

7

STRATEGIC ISSUES FOR A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

A key objective of this study has been to prepare an action plan for addressing the poverty concerns of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam. Elements of such an action plan were prepared for the national workshop held in Hanoi on 18–19 September 2001. During this workshop, many proposals were put forward for activities that could be undertaken either by the Government of Viet Nam or by the international community and, specifically, ADB. More than 40 different proposals were put forward, some of these overlapping in substance.

In the course of the present study and its national workshop, it became clear that an action plan has to embrace a very diverse range of concerns. First, despite the substantial ethnological assessments that have been carried out in recent decades, there is need for further work to determine which population groups should be covered by the term “ethnic minorities.” Second, there is a need for a more coherent policy framework for ethnic minority development and for mechanisms to ensure that such a policy is translated into effective action at the provincial and commune levels. Third, there is a need for improved consultative mechanisms, to ensure that development and poverty reduction programs respond to the real needs of ethnic minority communities. Fourth, there is a need for policies and programs in different sectors (health and education, land and forestry, infrastructure development, and social services, among others). Fifth, it is important that the poverty reduction programs and projects of an organization like ADB have a coherent vision and objectives, involving ethnic minority representatives and responding to their felt needs. In this light, participants at the national workshop directed a number of their recommendations specifically to ADB.

This final chapter aims to summarize the principal recommendations for such an action plan, placing them in their appropriate context.

CLASSIFICATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS

The List of Ethnic Groups in Viet Nam, issued in 1978, has in many ways proved a useful and important tool for work on ethnic minorities. As seen in earlier chapters, it has permitted some analysis of poverty trends for different ethnic minority groups and has prepared the ground for some targeting of development and poverty reduction programs.

However, recent studies and experience have shown that the 1978 list is insufficient. A more precise identification of ethnic composition should now be accorded high priority. Attention should also be given to self-identification, in particular by the numerically small groups whose distinct identity is not recognized in the existing classification. A revised List of Ethnic Groups should be prepared and officially recognized as soon as possible. In the meantime, the relevant agencies should agree on a new interim list, based on existing ethnological findings.

A detailed map of the different ethnic groups, their geographical location and their main socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, can then be prepared in the Vietnamese language. This will be of considerable value for policymakers, and also for the national and international agencies that are now trying to adapt their development and poverty reduction programs to the needs and aspirations of diverse ethnic groups.

Moreover, once a more accurate list and map of the ethnic minorities have been prepared, it may be possible to deal more effectively with some of the policy dilemmas raised earlier in this report. For example, a revised and more comprehensive list can prepare the ground for further participatory poverty appraisals among ethnic minorities with different levels of integration within the market economy. Baseline studies

can determine the health and education status of the different groups, their patterns of income generation, their land tenure and agrarian characteristics, and other essential features of their livelihoods. It may also prove possible to determine, through longitudinal studies over a period of time, whether or not small groups have benefited from current policies to integrate them within mainstream society and the market economy, and what are their attitudes and aspirations in this regard.

A precondition for culturally sensitive approaches of this kind will be an accurate and updated list of all ethnic minorities.

INFORMATION AND RESEARCH

During the 1990s, several studies were conducted toward a better understanding of ethnic minorities and mountainous areas. To complement these, multidisciplinary and more theoretical studies in economics and related social science disciplines would be of value. These can provide a scientific background for the development of new principles and policies on ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

There is a need to improve the quality of collection, analysis, and dissemination of information related to the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. In socioeconomic studies, for example, there has been limited use of indicators pertaining to conditions in these areas. Compulsory inclusion of such indicators from ethnic minority areas in official statistical publications at all levels would redress this deficiency.

There is a further need to extend research and documentation activities beyond the major urban centers. Vietnamese intellectuals are heavily concentrated in such cities as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. Support should be provided for the development of research and training centers at the provincial level and for the attraction of human resources to them. Both the Government and its international development partners can play an important role by extending their aid and training programs to individuals and organizations at the provincial and local levels.

OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK

At the present project's regional workshop, held at ADB headquarters in Manila, the Vice-Chairman of CEMMA described the various policies and programs that the Government has been implementing to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty among ethnic minorities. There are five principal policies related to, respectively, capital investment, land allocation, human resource development, market access, and a general policy regarding economic sectors. The basic aim of these policies, implemented over the past decade, has been to bridge the gap in socioeconomic development between the inhabitants of mountainous and lowland areas, and between ethnic minority and majority peoples in Viet Nam.

Although certain programs have been targeted specifically at ethnic minorities, the Government has not as yet issued a comprehensive policy on the subject of ethnic minorities and their development. Moreover, while important bodies such as CEMMA exist at the central level, and departments on ethnic minorities and mountainous areas at the provincial level, the mandate of these bodies exceeds that of ethnic minorities alone. Indeed, the relationship and the difference between the criteria for "mountainous areas" and "ethnic groups" need to be clarified.

Developing an overall policy is bound to be a complex matter. It cannot be the task of a small group of policy institutions and individuals at the central level. Rather, it needs to be considered as a long-term process with open policy discussions, involving stakeholders at different levels. Attention should also be paid to the potentially useful role of national and international development organizations in facilitating the policy dialogue.

Policy formulation also needs to be a blend of theoretical work—in order to agree on some basic principles for addressing the needs and claims of ethnic minorities—and practical work, drawing on the lessons of field experience. At the theoretical level, it can be useful to review such international instruments and guidelines as ADB's Policy on Indigenous Peoples, the

World Bank's policy instruments on the subject, and the international instruments of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. It would be useful to examine, in collaboration with ethnic minority representatives, the extent to which principles of indigenous rights can be adapted to the context of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam.

Policy also needs to be built on national realities, with particular attention to the needs and aspirations of ethnic minorities with regard to their social, economic, and cultural development. Debates apparently continue on the extent to which different ethnic minority groups seek to be integrated within mainstream Kinh culture and society. Some groups have experienced a high degree of de facto integration, others much less so. Further studies are needed to examine the extent to which approaches to ethnic minority development are governed by Kinh cultural attitudes. Studies should focus both on the attitudes of the Kinh officials who work on development and poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities, and on the attitudes of ethnic minorities toward the majority Kinh culture.

Studies of this kind will be of considerable importance for determining the overall policy framework.

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

Identification of the perceived needs of ethnic minorities will always present a major challenge. The ample consultations with ethnic minority communities carried out during the present study have pointed to the following prominent concerns.

Culture and Social Structure

In devising poverty reduction programs, it is important to understand the organizational and social structure of ethnic minority communities, and the institutions that tend to enjoy most legitimacy among their members. Until now, policies and programs have tended to target communes or individual households as the basic units for development. However, ethnic minorities tend to be organized around the traditional village. In consequence it is the village, and the village

authorities, that should be targeted for development interventions in ethnic minority areas.

Further studies are needed to examine how best to reconcile the interests of traditional village institutions, such as village assemblies, with those of state-sponsored village organizations.

It is also important to identify the role played by the more educated ethnic minority individuals, both within their own communities and in broader society, and to increase their participation in policies and programs. An elite group of ethnic minority intellectuals certainly exists, some of them holding prominent positions in national economic and political life. These persons may retain close links with their communities of origin and identify themselves very much as ethnic minorities.

Education and Language

Education and training of ethnic minorities have received considerable attention. A key aspect of policy has been the promotion of boarding schools at provincial and district levels, and "semi-boarding" schools at the commune level. This network of fully or partially subsidized boarding schools needs to be strengthened. Enrolment procedures could also be improved in order to select more capable students, for example, by examination instead of direct nomination.

Attention also needs to be given to locating schools to provide easy access by ethnic minority children. Local resources could also be tapped more effectively to improve the conditions of schools. State investment could then focus more on upgrading the quality of teaching facilities.

Literacy programs in ethnic minority areas should be further strengthened, with a particular focus on those over the age of 25 who comprise most of the labor force. These programs need also to be adapted to the social and economic circumstances of ethnic minorities.

Continued efforts should be made to preserve and promote the use of ethnic minority languages. It is advisable that ethnic minority students be taught initially in their local language at school. Officials should be encouraged to learn and use local languages in their administrative and project work. Local languages can also be promoted as the means of communication in agricultural extension and social welfare services.

Administrative reforms could improve the quality and delivery of educational and linguistic services for ethnic minorities. The current educational system is managed at the national level, with some attention being given to the educational needs of ethnic minorities. It would be useful to establish a separate agency with specific responsibility for education in ethnic minority areas. This could operate at both central and local levels, and coordinate research on key issues. Among other things, it could address the issue of adapting the educational curriculum to ethnic minority cultures.

Health Services

Health care programs for ethnic minorities need to be both more extensive and more effective. Health education, for example, should focus on the essential needs and knowledge appropriate for mountainous regions, be designed with visual aids, and be culturally sensitive.

Village health services are of key importance in ethnic minority and mountainous areas. Greater attention should be focused on the training of village health workers, preferably through the creation of a national program for the provision of these services. This should ensure that health services are extended to the more remote geographical areas and are culturally sensitive.

Policies should also maintain and promote the use of traditional medicines and treatment.

Land and Forestry Policies

The issues of access to and the best means of operating agriculture and forestry lands on the grounds of both economic efficiency and environmental sustainability, have become highly sensitive in Viet Nam over the past decade. This appears to be particularly the case in the Central Highlands, in view of the high levels of Kinh settlement and the spread of commercial crops.

There is a need to explore and promote the means by which ethnic minorities can enjoy secure access to their traditional lands and forests, where possible based on their customary laws. Existing land and forestry policies in ethnic minority areas need to be examined carefully in order to reconcile the interests and claims

of state-owned enterprises, villages, family clans, individual households, and settlers. Baseline surveys will be necessary to review existing patterns of land use and allocation, changes over time, and the impact of recent land law and policies on land tenure.

The Government has announced its aim to allocate sufficient land for cultivation to ethnic minority farmers and to secure land-use rights for the poorest people in the areas facing severest land shortages. It is important that policies and programs on land issues be carefully monitored and evaluated, in particular as they affect ethnic minorities.

State policies on sedentarization need also to be reexamined. As already recommended by the Poverty Task Force, the current focus on sedentarization might be replaced by more intensive research into agricultural options for upland farming systems, and by land titling measures that are more in line with the traditions, practices, and land-use systems of ethnic minorities.

IMPLEMENTING POVERTY REDUCTION PROJECTS FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

It has often been observed in Viet Nam that official projects and programs follow a top-down approach based on supply rather than demand factors, and ignore the real needs of local communities. The need for implementing officials to record "achievements" may prevent them from giving due attention to local and ethnic minority aspirations.

This calls for attention to the decentralization of programs and projects and to management aspects. In theory, a trend toward the decentralization of management has been in place for many years. In practice however, it has not been truly effective. The major programs and projects have remained under central control. There are various ways in which the process of decentralized management and more local participation could be accelerated.

The traditional management structure, embodied in the *gia lang* council, should be considered an official component of the management system. An official regulation should be enacted to this effect. The relationship between project management units at the central and provincial levels could also be improved.

The role of the central units could be a coordinating one, while the major administrative tasks could be carried out by the local units. In any event, more effective and sensitive mechanisms are needed to ensure local feedback, thus improving the process of decentralization and overall sector management.

It is important to strengthen the role of the development and poverty reduction institutions through their existing field presence, which may already have built up strong contacts with local communities and which may have a good understanding of local development aspirations. Particular mention should be made of the Viet Nam Bank for Agriculture and the Viet Nam Bank for the Poor. At present, the activities of these agencies are essentially restricted to granting loans. Their future roles and functions could be enhanced, in consultation with such international finance institutions as ADB and the World Bank.

Personnel issues are also of key importance. Although several policies have been adopted on this subject, there remains a shortage of qualified and adequately compensated staff. Personnel working in ethnic minority areas should be trained in the professional skills required for these local conditions, including knowledge of local languages and cultural characteristics. Training programs should also be provided for ethnic minority personnel as a long-term investment.

ROLE OF THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

ADB has a particularly important role to play in addressing the poverty concerns of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam. It has been pursuing the objective of poverty reduction in an appropriate and integrated manner in the Central Highlands, where its new generation of projects is largely targeted on geographical areas occupied by different ethnic minority groups. The focus of future ADB projects and assistance may eventually be broadened to include other areas with significant populations of ethnic minorities.

Much of ADB's past portfolio in Viet Nam has focused on infrastructure improvement, while recent projects and those under preparation have given relatively more attention to the social sector.

Infrastructure works may not be among the most immediate needs of ethnic minority groups, and the benefits may accrue more to wealthier sectors of society and to communities with a high degree of integration within the market economy. A balance needs to be struck between investment in such infrastructure as roads, electricity, and irrigation; and investment in safe water supply, agricultural extension, basic social services, human resource development, and institutional development including the strengthening of traditional institutions. In some cases, smaller rather than larger projects have been seen to have more positive results, especially in ethnic minority areas. It is important to place more emphasis on policy dialogue, discussing the way in which ethnic minority concerns may be addressed within the ADB country strategy and program as a whole, and on the development of partnerships at all levels.

At the present study's national workshop in Hanoi, participants identified the following nine specific areas in which ADB interventions might henceforth take place and complement a national plan of action for reducing the poverty of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam.

- (1) Technical assistance to support the development of official policy guidelines on ethnic minorities including (i) facilitating policy dialogue, (ii) comparative analysis of the policies of other countries in the region, and (iii) training and capacity building at the national level.
- (2) Assistance for institutional and capacity building at the provincial level.
- (3) Assistance for the development of a policy on access to, or ownership of, land and forestry resources.
- (4) Assistance for a policy on language and education for ethnic minorities.
- (5) Development of a social protection network for ethnic minorities.
- (6) Assistance for an appropriate institutional framework to promote the teaching of ethnic minority languages.

- (7) Support for health education of ethnic minority communities.
 - (8) Capacity building for personnel of the Viet Nam Bank for Agriculture and the Viet Nam Bank
 - (9) Support for the establishment of development agencies and capacity building for their staff at the local level.
- for the Poor, enabling them to extend their development operations.

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ENDNOTES

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- 4 Le Trong Cuc and Rambo (1999).
- 5 Le Van Hao (1970, p. 20).
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- 7 The poorest, most remote or border areas.
- 8 ADB (2000c).
- 9 The poverty gap shows how much on average the incomes of the poor need to be raised to bring them to the poverty line. Thus, it shows the extent or depth of poverty within the sector.
- 10 Baulch et al. (2001).
- 11 Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors on a Proposed Loan to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for the Central Region Livelihood Improvement Project. ADB, Manila, April 2001.
- 12 Although the term *ethnic minorities* has been used elsewhere in this report, reflecting the terminology that is most widely used in Viet Nam itself, ADB project documents (such as for the Central Region Livelihood Improvement Project) often use the term *indigenous peoples*. For this reason, the two terms are used interchangeably in this section of the report.
- 13 Poverty Task Force, *Vietnam Development Report, 2002: Strategies for Achieving Vietnam Development Goals*. Report prepared for the Consultative Group Meeting, Hanoi, 7–8 December 2001.
- 14 This bibliography includes many documents not cited in the text, but which are of use to those working in this field. For some references the information is incomplete; further details were unobtainable.