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ROLES OF VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS IN POVERTY REDUCTION IN SOME TYPICAL ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES OF VIETNAM

Case studies in Dien Bien, Quang Tri, Dak Lak, and Tra Vinh provinces



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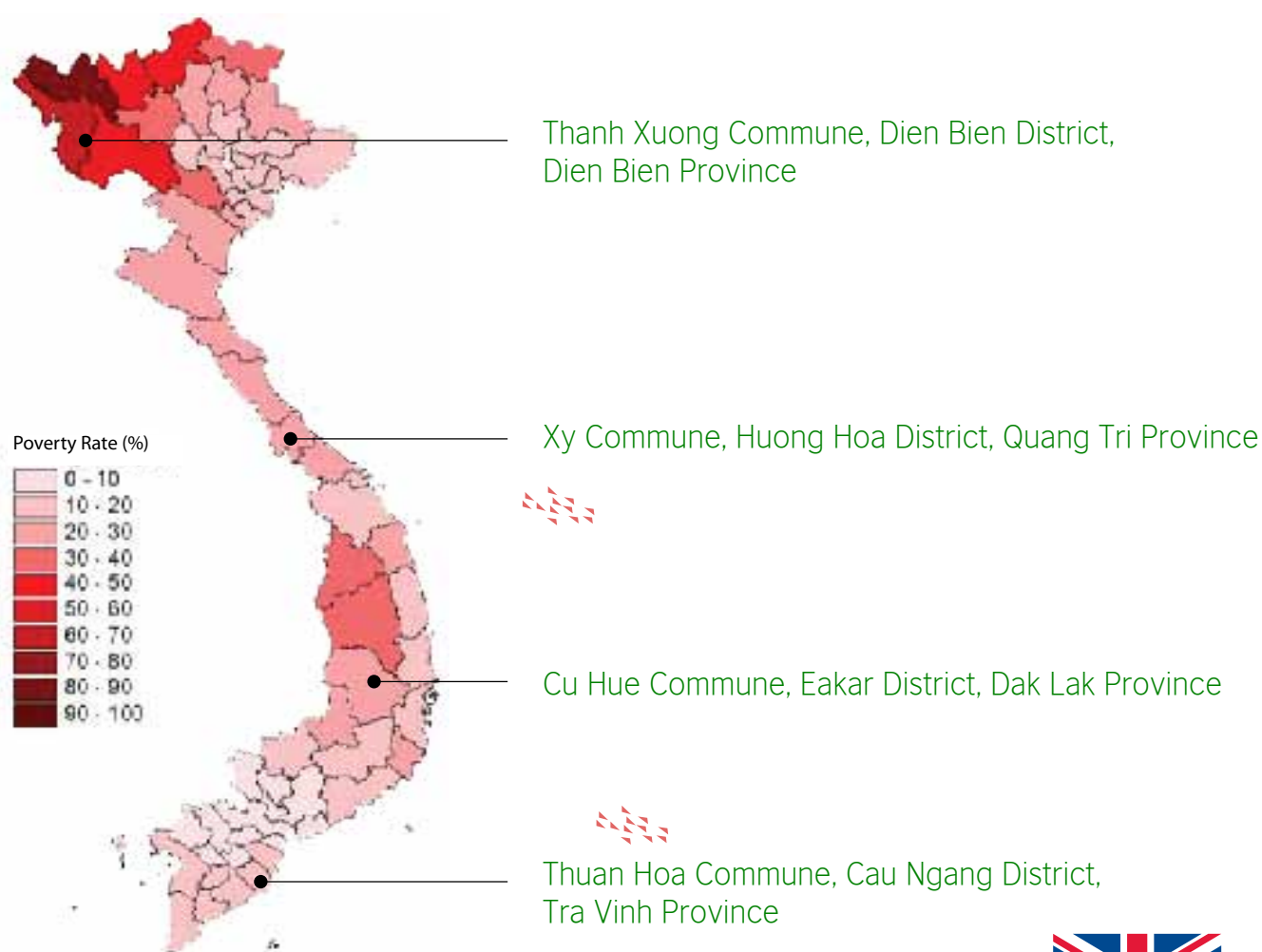


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PREFACE¹

Together with the efforts in State governance reform at the macro level, local governance reform plays an important role in poverty reduction. Village institutions, both official and unofficial, are the basis for local governance.

Strong village institutions enhance community assets and increase the effectiveness of external support. Forming and strengthening village institutions contributes to local governance reform and to the development of rural civil society. These are the urgent needs in ethnic minority areas.

Based on the analysis of the positive roles village institutions play in improving livelihoods and reducing poverty in some typical ethnic minority communities, Oxfam and ActionAid International Vietnam, who have sound experience supporting the poorest and the most vulnerable groups in Vietnam, have conducted this research in order to provide some recommendations for policy dialogues on sustainable poverty reduction and development in ethnic minority areas of Vietnam.

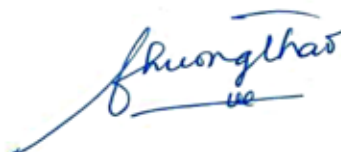
We hope you will find the report useful and interesting.

For Oxfam

A blue ink signature, likely of Andy Baker, consisting of a series of fluid, connected loops and curves.

Andy Baker
Country Director

For ActionAid International Vietnam

A blue ink signature, likely of Hoang Phuong Thao, written in a cursive style with the name clearly legible.

Hoang Phuong Thao
Country Director

¹ This research received inputs and contributions from various organizations and individuals. Ideas, views, conclusions, and recommendations presented in this research are not necessarily the views of ActionAid, Oxfam or any organizations and individuals whose documents have been cited.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is a collective effort that could not have been completed without the contributions of various people.

We would like to thank the leaders and staff of ActionAid International Vietnam (AAV) and Oxfam for their valuable inputs throughout the stages of research design, field work, and report writing. Some officers of AAV and Oxfam directly participated in the field work and shared their invaluable knowledge and experience in designing the methodology and in completing this project.

We are also grateful to the People's Committees and relevant departments at provincial and district levels for their support at the research sites. We are sincerely thankful for the support of commune and village officers who joined and supported us in the field work. We acknowledge the active participation and smooth coordination of AAV's and Oxfam's local partners, who are Coordinators and members of the Supporting Programm for Development in Eakar district (Dak Lak) and Cau Ngang district (Tra Vinh), and officers of CCD Center (Dien Bien).

Last but not least, our heartfelt thanks are given to the women and men, and young people in the local villages who took the time to tell us about their lives and their expectations for the future in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The research could not have been completed without their active participation.

Your comments are highly appreciated². Thank you very much.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAV	ActionAid International Vietnam
ABCD	Asset-Based Community Development
CDF	Community Development Fund
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
EM	Ethnic minority
GSO	General Statistics Office
MOLISA	Ministry of Labours, Invalid and Social Affairs
NMPRP	Northern Mountains Poverty Reduction Project (funded by the World Bank)
NTP-PR	National targeting programme on poverty reduction
PMU	Project Management Unit
Programme 135	Programme for supporting socio-economic development in especially difficult communes (according to Decision No. 135/1998/QĐ-TTg dated 31 July 1998 of Prime Minister)
Programme 30a	Programme for supporting rapid and sustainable poverty reduction in 61 poor districts (according to Resolution No. 30a/2008/NQ-CP dated 27 December 2008 by the Government), which have now become 62 due to administrative border separation.
PS-ARD	Public Service Provision Improvement in Agriculture & Rural Development (funded by SDC)
Resolution 80	Resolution No. 80/NQ-CP dated 19 May 2011 of the Government, orientating sustainable poverty reduction for the period from 2011 to 2020
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VHLSS	Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey
WB	World Bank
WU	Women Union

SUMMARY

This research adopted a “positive deviance” approach to studying the active roles of village institutions in reducing poverty and improving people’s lives in some typical ethnic minority communities.

Traditional and unofficial institutions coexist with modern and official institutions at the study sites. Although, traditional and unofficial institutions have experienced substantial change they still play an important role in ethnic minority communities in Vietnam.

Strong village institutions have the following roles: pioneering and disseminating information; encouraging linkages and cooperation; promoting voice and accountability; promoting participation and empowerment; conserving and developing ethnic culture and characteristics; and promoting community-based social security. Village institutions help develop community assets and increase the effectiveness of external support, therefore improving people’s lives and reducing poverty.

The findings of this research suggest the following policy recommendations:

1. Local governance reform should focus on forming and strengthening village institutions in ethnic minority communities in order to encourage sustainable poverty reduction and socio-economic development. The development of village institutions needs to be in harmony with institutional reforms from communal level upwards in order to raise people’s voice and the accountability of the local authorities and public service agencies.
2. Systematically review official and unofficial and traditional institutions at the village level in ethnic minority communities, and reduce ineffective official institutions. Flexibly combine laws and customs when developing village rules and regulations. Pay attention to the policy of merging the village head’s functions in social, cultural self-managing and economic organization and coordination. Replace the form of “fixed election” of a reputable person (as regulated in the Decision No. 18/2011/QD-TTg) by rewarding reputable people annually elected by the communities.
3. Create a harmonized legal basis (in the Land Law, Civil Code, and related legal documents) in order to promote the role of village institutions in management and use of natural resources, according to traditions of ethnic minority groups. This will in turn contribute to maintaining the living space, cultural characteristics, and healthy spiritual practices of ethnic minority groups. Implementation of projects/programmes (including the programme of new rural development) in every village needs proper planning, with an appropriate route map and specific solutions to ensure a minimum land area for production activities, land for public benefits, forest land allocation to communities, water resources and common areas for animal husbandry.
4. Wide application of the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach in

the poverty reduction and development programmes for ethnic minority villages. This will enable people to work together and support each other and link local activities with external support. Creating a harmonized reform policy to promote economic-linked institutions that benefit poor ethnic minority people. For example, new cooperatives, linkages between farmers and enterprises based on commodities and social enterprises.

5. Institutionalization and wide replication of the in-depth package investment model to village and commune levels (Commune/Community Development Fund (CDF) model) in poverty reduction and development programmes in ethnic minority areas. This goes together with continuous and strong support for capacity building in participatory socio-economic planning, financial management and community-based monitoring.
6. Increasing resources and reforming investment structures in agriculture extension activities in ethnic minority communities. Attention should be paid to development and strengthening of capable local extension workers. Wide application of agriculture extension through farmers' field schools (FFS), and the "from farmer to farmer" method. Sufficient budget should be allocated for at least two to three years after the closure of "agriculture extension" and "livelihood" models in ethnic minority communities. This will help sustain and replicate good practice and effective indigenous knowledge communicated by pioneers to the poor through village institutions.
7. Development of policies to encourage and replicate existing community-based social security models at ethnic minority villages, with specific attention paid to the role of unofficial institutions for risk prevention and self-secured purposes (for example, village funds, community funds, extended family linkages, community groups, economic, cultural and spiritual groups.). Conducting research and development of policies to support ethnic minority people from difficult mountainous areas who earn their living far from home (for example, migrants to urban and industrial areas), with a focus on the active role of social networks among ethnic minority people.

A group of women are gathered outdoors, engaged in a traditional activity. They are using large, dark wooden pestles to pound contents within large, light-colored stone mortars. The women are dressed in traditional clothing, including white blouses and colorful patterned skirts. The background is filled with lush green foliage, suggesting a rural or forest setting. The scene is captured in a warm, golden light, possibly during late afternoon or early morning. An orange semi-transparent banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text 'Part 1' and 'INTRODUCTION'.

Part 1

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Poverty reduction in ethnic minority communitiesⁱ in Vietnam has been remarkably successful in recent times. However, many difficulties and challenges remain. The poverty rate among ethnic minority groups is still high and is falling slowly. Poverty in Vietnam is getting more concentrated in areas where ethnic minority people live. Specifically, ethnic minority groups account for less than 15% of the total population and 47% of the total number of poor people in 2010 (based on the new poverty standard of the WB/GSO). Sixty-six percent of ethnic minority people were classified as living in poverty in 2010, compared to only 13% of Kinh people (WB 2012). Therefore, the Government has urged management agencies to research and propose more effective and sustainable poverty reduction policies for ethnic minority people.

Together with efforts to improve state governance at the macro level, local governance reform plays an important role in poverty reduction. Village institutions form the basis for local governance. The Government of Vietnam has stipulated policies to restore the role of villages, and consolidate rules on village organization and activitiesⁱⁱ. Even though villages are not considered an administrative level, local people can practice some of their direct democratic rights. In addition, there are policies to build the capacity of village officers; form and strengthen mass organizations; implement grassroots democracy; conserve and develop traditional culture; formulate village rules and regulations; promote the role of village notables, reputable people, village heads, and communities through various movements including “all people unite to build a cultural life”, and “new rural development”.

Village institutions in rural areas have been extensively researched in Vietnamⁱⁱⁱ. Some recent research focused on people’s experience of local governance^{iv}. However, the active role of village institutions in implementing policies, projects, programmes, and poverty reduction initiatives in ethnic minority areas is still not fully understood. This is an urgent need of the management agencies, especially the Committee for Ethnic Minorities, for the development of policies on rapid and sustainable poverty reduction in the areas of ethnic minorities.

During the period from 2007-2013, Oxfam and AAV implemented a “Participatory poverty monitoring”^v project in a network of communes throughout the country. The project highlighted the importance of in-depth studies of poverty reduction strategies in ethnic minority areas (Oxfam and AAV, 2012a). Hence, Oxfam and AAV conducted a research on “Poverty reduction models in the areas of some typical ethnic minority people of Vietnam” in 2012. This research confirmed that social factors and diversified household livelihood strategies have contributed to poverty reduction. It also stated that promotion of the active role of village institutions plays an important role in reducing poverty in ethnic minority communities (Oxfam and AAV 2013).

This research **Roles of village institutions in poverty reduction at some typical ethnic minority communities of Vietnam** was completed by the end of 2012 in order to further analyse people’s experiences about the active roles of village institutions that helped for policy dialogue on sustainable poverty reduction in the areas of ethnic minority people.

1.2. Concept of “Village Institutions”

Village institutions can be understood as **social institutions** at the local level in Vietnam^{vi}. This research defines **social institutions** as:

“...part of patterned culture. The patterns of culture that are socially accepted and encouraged will tend to become expected behavioral norms - the roles. Therefore, social institutions are series of behavior patterns that have been widely accepted (the roles) in order to satisfy a basic need of society groups”^{vii}

Social institutions have two main functions: regulating (organizing) society and controlling (monitoring) society. Social institutions are factors for combining and settling the whole culture, including the society’s expectations (Pham Tat Dong and Le Ngoc Hung, 2002).

Village institutions can be classified in a number of ways.

Classification based on the official nature:

- **Official institutions** are the behavioral norms based on the state’s official regulations (the applicable legal documents), and are linked to the activities of village heads, party cells, the fatherland front, and mass organizations, e.g. Farmers’ association, Women Union, Youth Union, Veteran Union, community investment monitoring committee, etc.
- **Unofficial institutions** are the behavioral norms that are not officially regulated, but widely accepted in the communities, linked with the role of village notables, reputable people, magicians, family, etc. and other standards that are linked with values, opinions, patterns (including gender pattern) at the village communities.
- In addition, there are also **semi-official institutions**, based on the combination of official and unofficial regulations of communities, e.g. village rules.

Temporal classifications include:

- **Modern institutions** (recently formulated). Official institutions tend to be modern. Some unofficial institutions are also classified as modern, e.g. the linkage between people and shops or agents.
- **Traditional institutions** (with long existence), e.g. role of village notables, family, or the traditional matriarchy/patriarchy. Most traditional institutions are unofficial.

Classification based on economic and social functions include:

- **Economic institutions** are behavioral norms linked with economic ties, e.g. the custom of labour exchange; groups of common interest; community self-managed groups; cooperatives; relationships with shops, agents, enterprises; community organizations for the purpose of natural resources management and use, etc.
- **Cultural, educational, family, spiritual/faith institutions, etc.**

1.3. Objective and Methodology

The **objective** of this research is to “study the role over the last five years of village institutions in reducing poverty in some typical ethnic minority communities and provide analysis and recommendations for policy dialogues on maximizing active roles of village institutions in sustainable poverty reduction for the ethnic minorities in Vietnam”.

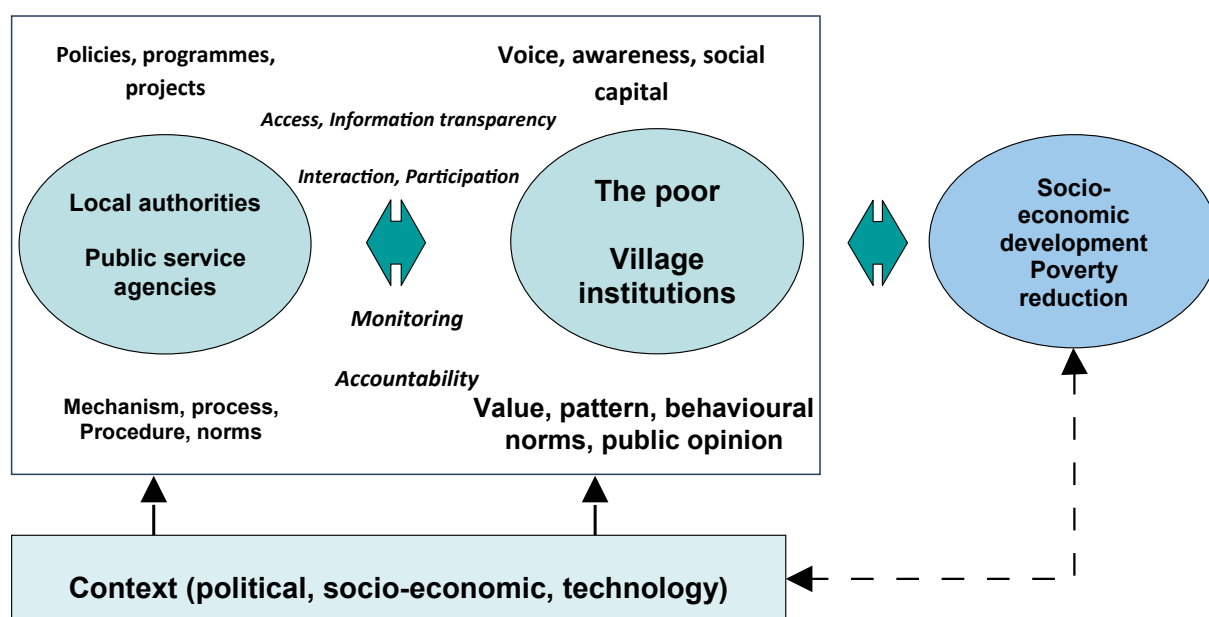
The research questions include:

1. Which major institutions exist and operate in the village? What are the characteristics of the institutions and how do the institutions interact with people in the village? And what are the trends over time?
2. How have village institutions contributed to poverty reduction at the study sites?
3. What good practices and lessons can be learnt from village institutions that positively contribute to poverty reduction at the study sites?
4. What recommendations can be made to policy dialogues and project/programme design in order to maximize the contribution of village institutions to sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority areas?

Approach. This research used the “positive deviance” approach in analysing the role of village institutions. Instead of asking “*why village institutions do not maximize their role in poverty reduction?*” This research sought to understand: “*why some village institutions in specific areas maximize their role in poverty reduction?*” The research therefore focuses on **studying good practices and success determinants** in order to provide recommendations for effective design and implementation of poverty reduction policies and programmes. The “positive deviance” approach helps to increase the confidence and social interaction of the study groups (Andrew Wells-Dang, 2012).

Figure 1 illustrates the **analytical framework** of village institutions’ roles based on the interaction between different agents in the village.

Figure 1. Analytical framework of village institutions' roles



Local authorities and public service agencies (“service providers”) are implementers of poverty reduction policies, programmes, and projects, based on mechanisms, processes, procedures, and specific norms. Local authorities and public service agencies always have a two-way interaction with people and village institutions in the process of policies, programmes and project implementation.

Local people, including the poor and disadvantaged groups (“users” or “clients”) are beneficiaries of the impacts of policies, programmes, and projects. Village institutions play a harmonizing and controlling role that may help penetrate, promote, and increase the effectiveness of poverty reduction policies, programmes, and projects.

The **study sites** selected included six typical villages with a high number of ethnic minority people in four communes in the northern (Dien Bien), central (Quang Tri, Dak Lak), and southern regions (Tra Vinh) (Table 1). These are also among the monitoring communes of the “Participatory poverty monitoring” project carried out by Oxfam and AAV.

Fieldwork was conducted from November 2012 to January 2013, with three days spent in each study commune, including one day for activities at the commune level and two days for activities at the village level.

The **Participation method** during the fieldwork was based on three major principles: (i) Respect diversification and differences; (ii) Pay attention to the opinions of people/ participants; and (iii) Bear in mind that local people are active and creative. The role of village institutions in poverty reduction is compared among the study sites, based on **case studies** developed from group discussion and in-depth interviews with the local people and the related stakeholders, as well as from observation and objective opinions of the research team.

The **main sources** that inform the research are:

- Group discussions with commune and village officers, local men and women, based on visual tools (listing and ranking, timelines, organization analysis, etc.)
- In-depth interviews with some representatives of commune and village institutions (village notables, magicians, cooperatives, etc.). In-depth interviews were also carried out with better-off and poor households in various villages in order to understand the role of institutions in their life.
- Observation and taking photos at the local communities of ethnic minority people who were relevant to the research theme.
- Secondary information: socio-economic development reports, the basic statistics of the study communes and villages, related researches about ethnic minority people.

In total, the research team conducted **22** group discussions at commune and village levels involving **134** participants; **76** in-depth interviews with 57 men and 19 women, most of them were from ethnic minorities.

Limitations are mostly related to the scope and time of the research. As the village institutions studied are very diverse it was impossible to study every aspect of interest to sufficient depth in the time available. As a result, where possible this report has used information from case studies developed as part of the “Participatory poverty monitoring” project as well as other relevant secondary sources^{viii}. It is necessary to carry out more evidence-based research and studies in order to further clarify and confirm the findings of this research.

Table 1. Main characteristics of the study sites

Province	Dien Bien	Quang Tri		Dak Lak	Tra Vinh	
District	Dien Bien	Huong Hoa		Eakar	Cau Ngang	
Commune	Thanh Xuong	Xy		Cu Hue	Thuan Hoa	
Village	Pa Dong	Troan O	Xy La	M'Hang	Soc Chua	Thuy Hoa
Topography	Low mountain	Low mountain	Low mountain	High land	Delta	Delta
Total number of household	76	50	34	167	396	273
Main ethnicity	Thai (80%) Kinh (20%)	Van Kieu (96%)	Van Kieu (97%)	E De (94%)	Khmer (67%) Kinh and Chinese (33%)	Khmer (80%) Kinh (20%)
Distance to the commune center (km)	3	0.5	1	0.5	2.5	1
Distance to the nearest car road (km)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Distance to the nearest Commune Health Station (km)	1	0	1.5	0.5	2.5	1
Distance to the nearest primary school (km)	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.5
Distance to the nearest secondary school (km)	3	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5
Distance to the nearest high school (km)	6	7.5	6	2	3	2
Distance to the nearest market (km)	4	24	22.5	2	2.5	1
Average area of agriculture production land per capita (m ²)	370	9600	N/A	870	2280	712
Village main income source	Paddy rice Renting out labour locally	Industrial tapioca Upfield rice	Industrial tapioca Upfield rice	Paddy rice Hybrid maize Coffee Renting out labour locally	Paddy rice Crop cultivation Renting out labour locally and far from home	Shrimp farming Paddy rice Renting out labour locally and far from home
Percentage of poor households	7.8	46.0	67.6	7.1	22.7	27.4

A photograph of a group of young children standing in a hallway or corridor. The children are of various ages, mostly between 2 and 5 years old. They are standing in a line, leaning against a light-colored wall on the right. Some children are looking towards the camera, while others are looking away. The hallway has a dirt floor and green doors at the end. The lighting is warm and natural, suggesting daytime. An orange semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing the text.

Part 2

STATUS OF VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS

2. STATUS OF VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS

2.1. Socio-economic and cultural context of the ethnic minority communities

All six study villages have experienced significant change in recent decades. In four villages many people have resettled after leaving their original homes. Many people moved to M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak) in 1960 and again in 1975. Thai ethnic people living at Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) moved from the village of Noong Nhai at the center of Dien Bien hollow in 1979-1980 under the "new economy" movement. The Van Kieu people in two villages of Troan O and Xy La, Xy commune (Quang Tri) moved from the Xe Pon River after 1995. The two Khmer villages in Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) have not experienced resettlement. However, Thuy Hoa village was separated from the old village in 1996, while the population in Soc Chua village has increased significantly. Both village populations have a high percentage of Kinh people.

There are also major changes in the traditions of ownership and use of residence land, farming land, forest land, holy forest and cemeteries among the ethnic minority communities. According to Mai Thanh Son (2008), land management and labour policies in the second half of the 20th century have reduced total available living space, and forced ethnic minority people out of their natural environment. Regimes of community ownership and collective use of land are no longer in place. Villages no longer own land as the majority of forest areas, including the holy forests, has been allocated to households.

Because of migration and mixing with other groups, the cultural and spiritual life of ethnic minority people has experienced significant change. Many villages, which were once ethnically homogenous, now have diverse populations. The coexistence of people from different ethnic groups can stimulate cultural interaction. However, there are also risks of economic, cultural and social conflict and discrimination.

Traditional religions and beliefs of many ethnic minority groups are now considered superstitious, and occur less frequently in community activities. Some have been replaced by new religions and belief systems. For instance, the community of E De people in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak) has ceased many traditional practices, especially the worship of God and Water, as a result of State propaganda and increased local interest in Christianity.

Linh Nga Nie KDam (2007) also stated that by the end of the 90s of 20th century, the free migration from the north to Central Highlands, together with the occurrence of Protestant religion and cultural interaction among people from different regions, has made big changes in the spiritual life of the original local people.

Ethnic minority communities have been affected by the market-oriented economy and new cultures. Traditional villages were self-sufficient and relatively closed to outsiders. Improved infrastructure means no ethnic minority communities remain entirely self-sufficient, and most participate in one or more value chains and have improved access to information and markets.

Agricultural practices have responded to market mechanisms. According to Linh Nga Nie KDam (2007), new crops and technologies that improve yields and productivity have

significantly affected community material and spiritual lives in Central Highland areas. Changes can be seen in meals, clothes, housing and belongings of ethnic minority people. For example, many E De women no longer wear ankle-long dresses as they are inconvenient for growing wet rice or coffee. Customs and rituals linked to traditional crop cycles are also being lost.

Many young people are more influenced by Kinh culture, and have abandoned traditional customs and habits.

--- "Doan (Kinh) people are in a much better position as they have education. We wish our children can be like Doan people. We want to be like Doan people, we do not find it inconvenient to dress in their clothes. We don't like our traditional clothes as they are inconvenient."

(Groups of average and better-off households of E De people in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

Along with improved living standards many ethnic minority people have increased expectations. State investment and people's efforts have improved the material and spiritual lives of ethnic minority people at the study sites. Few households suffer food shortages, primary school enrollment has increased, more people have access to health care facilities, housing conditions have improved and more households can buy valued assets (Oxfam and AAV, 2012a). Ethnic minority people are concerned not only with generating sufficient income to afford basic necessities (e.g. sufficient foods, clothes, houses and basic assets), but also other cultural, social (education, healthcare, information, gender equity, custom and festival practices) and market (money flow, non-agriculture jobs) aspects (Oxfam and AAV, 2013).

Improvements in education and increased exposure to outside influences have increased access to information for ethnic minority people. When ranking the poverty levels of households people in the study villages ranked audio-visual assets highly. According to the Van Kieu people in Xy commune (Quang Tri), households with television and telephone are not poor. For ethnic minority people experiencing better-off living and production conditions - the E De people in Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak), Khmer people in Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) and the Thai people in Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) - possession of high quality televisions and mobile phones indicated a wealthy life.

---"Information is so important now. Prices of coffee, maize, or information about diseases can be accessed better with TV and mobile phones. Households with flat screen TVs and mobile phones with cameras are rich".

(Poor group of E De people in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

Recent difficulties (natural calamities, diseases, price increases) have affected poverty reduction efforts of ethnic minority people at the study sites. The ability to manage risk is still low. Community and family support are insufficient. Many ethnic people value the ability to pay (mostly Kinh) shops for goods in installments.

--- “We borrow from shops when we lack money or because of sickness or shrimp crop failure. We do not have other options. Better-off households can manage, while poor ones lose everything after one or two crop failures”.

(The core group of Khmer people in Thuy Hoa village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

Ethnic minority people participate more in local issues. Communities have benefited from different supporting policies, programmes and projects funded by the state and other donors. For many local people and officials, “participation” - e.g. contributing to and monitoring infrastructure construction in villages - has become a demand and a criterion for assessing improvements in community awareness.

--- “The State gave us a road. Our task is to contribute and monitor construction. Activeness income and taking the lead means we are aware. Silence is not good.”

(Average income and better-off group in Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

2.2. Current status of village institutions in ethnic minority communities

There have been changes to traditional institutions. Traditional institutions have proven effective in regulating economic activities and village affairs. However, applicable laws and regulations mean many traditional institutions have become unofficial. Many traditional institutions have disappeared or became lost importance (Table 2).

Table 2. Traditional institutions at the study sites

Sites	Strong institutions	Less important/flexibly changed institutions	Disappeared institutions
Xy – Quang Tri	Labour exchange Power of village notables Family/extended family Neighbour relationship	Role of magician or religious practitioners Agreeable marital relationship Rules on ownership and exploitation of natural resources Tradition of equal division	Role of village midwife
Cu Hue – Dak Lac	Labour exchange Family/extended family	Power of village notables Matriarchy and staying in the wife’s family after marriage	Rules on ownership and exploitation of natural resources Role of magician or religious practitioners “Wiring” custom
Thuan Hoa – Tra Vinh	Linkage with Buddhist temples San Khum association Role of reputable people in the communities	Family/extended family Role of “Me Phum” ^{ix}	Role of “me soc” ^x
Thanh Xuong – Dien Bien	Family/extended family	Role of magician or religious practitioners Power of village notables Staying in the wife’s family after marriage	

In many villages the power of village notables, once spiritual leaders and land lords, is reduced. According to Linh Nga Nie KDam (2007) village notables in the Central Highland areas have lost their influence over local production activities. Where people have converted to other (Catholic and Protestant) religions the important task of village notables in communicating with Spirits is lost.

Even in villages where traditional institutions are still strong, such as the Van Kieu community in Xy commune (Quang Tri), village notables now only play a role in activities such as marriage, family, birth delivery, death, community relationships, and occasionally the ownership of natural resources. Village notables now have little knowledge of issues of concern to villagers.

---“He knows many things in the past, but little of the current life. He advised me to get an education, but he did not know what I learnt. Production activities have changed. Tapioca was not produced as a commercial commodity in his time”.

(H.V.K, a young Van Kieu in Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Traditional institutions are less influential. Village notables and family heads now only provide advice, and have less authority than before. The decision to follow traditional rules and regulations is very much dependent on individuals.

---“In the past, men of P’roan O family could get married with women of Ro Man family, while P’roan O women were not allowed to marry Ro Man men, otherwise they would be sneered at. They had to give pigs and buffaloes as a fine, and they also had to leave the community until nobody could see them. Now we only remind them, but we don’t fine them. Some listen to us, but not all”.

(H.V.L, a Van Kieu village notable in Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Educated people, veterans, and retired people who have returned home bridge traditional and modern institutions. Educated people and those with wider experience are respected in ethnic minority communities. They disseminate indigenous knowledge, and at the same time help their children follow laws and regulations and interact with society. Linh Nga Nie KDam (2007) refers to them as “new village notables”, who play an important role mobilizing people at grassroots level, and contributing to maintaining social order and security in the Central Highland areas.

---“Everybody in Soc Chua village respected my father as he is one of the people with the highest education level here. There were not many people like him. He knew several foreign languages and worked in the city. People listened to him very much. All of his children got to work outside as teachers or doctors. Our family behaved well and this made people listen to us. People consulted my father about which university their children should apply for, or which profession their children should be. They even asked my father to host their children’s marriage, as he knows traditional rituals and understands the current laws”.

(K.V, a teacher of Khmer ethnicity at Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

The reputation of retired officers and their devotion to community activities are based on their capacity and willingness, not acceptance or allowance by the State. In the last two years, following the implementation of Decision No. 18/2011/QĐ-TTg, every ethnic minority

village has elected one reputable person. However, official “elections” do not ensure reputable people are more effective, especially when many reputable people have not been “elected”.

---“Only one reputable person is elected, but there are many of them in the village. I was asked why that person has been elected but not my father”.

(Y.N, an E De person in M’hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

---“I think people should be aware of reputable people, visit them and give them gifts. It’s not necessary to elect them. People in my village did not understand and have elected Mr. H., who was village head before. In fact, there are many reputable people in my village”.

(L.V.T, a Thai person, head of Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune, Dien Bien)

At the moment, there are too many official institutions at the grassroots level. Commonly, there are about 15 – 20 official institutions in a study village, with about one to three people operating in each institution. Many institutions and representatives do not in fact work. As not all the positions receive an allowance from the State, one person is often in charge of different tasks, e.g. a village head may work with 5-6 titles (Box 1).

Box 1. There are too many official village institutions

In Thuy Hoa village (Thuan hoa commune, Tra Vinh), there are about 17 official institutions with more than 30 operational people

Official institutions	Number of representatives
Village People’s Committee	2 (head and deputy head)
Party cell	3 (secretary, deputy secretary, clerk)
Public security	2
Front working committee	
People’s inspection committee	2
Vel ^{xi} representatives	6 (2 persons per Vel: head and deputy head of Vel)
Farmers’ Association	2 (head and deputy head)
Women Union	2 (head and deputy head)
Youth Union	1
Veteran Association	1
Village health staff	1
Veterinary collaborator	1
Population collaborator	
Study encouragement association	
Red Cross association	1
Steering committee for environmental hygiene	3 (head and 2 members)
Mediation group	3 (head and 2 members)
Total number of institutions: 17	Total number of representatives: 32

One person may bear several titles: e.g. the head of the People's Committee also works as Party Cell secretary, the head of the study encouragement association, the head of the environmental hygiene steering committee, and at the same time is a member of mediation group. Some institutions do not have many activities. For example the People's Inspection Committee, Veteran Association, Red Cross Association, or village representative (especially village deputy head), etc. When interviewed, many people could not remember which "officers" were available and what their roles were.

---"There are many officers in my village. Not all have their names posted in the Hall. There is a head and deputy head of this village, but we don't know what they are doing. Becoming "officers" is to gain benefits. Poor households are often considered when there is a need for a post."

(N.T.N.P., a Khmer person in Thuy Hoa village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

In the life of ethnic minority people, and in the operation of village activities, **there are traditional/unofficial and official institutions**. Traditional institutions still influence people's awareness and behavior. In the community of E De people in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak), matrimonial and family relationships are still under the influence of the traditional matriarchy regime. After marriage a man often lives with his wife's family. When his wife dies he has to return to his home with only those assets that his parents gave him before he joined the wife's family^{xii}, or a share of the assets he and his wife accumulated after marriage. This rule is not an official State law, but remains effective in the communities of E De people.

---"I would have to return to my home with my bare hands, or take less than 10 million dong in the best case if my wife passed away. If my children feel sorry for me, they will ask me to stay, but this often does not happen and most people have to go back to their parents' home. If I do not get on well with my son-in-law, I will have to go. If I stay, people will gossip. I have worked hard and let my children go to school, but I will lose everything after my wife passes away. I am not happy with this, but I have to follow the custom."

(Average and better-off groups of E De people, M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

Official institutions are bulky and often ineffective, while traditional institutions are no longer as binding as in the past. As a result many people tend to make use of both sets of institutions simultaneously. For some this is problematic. For example, the Van Kieu people in Xy commune (Quang Tri) make use of healthcare facilities available in the local hospital, but also engage in traditional practices that can be costly. Mr H.T.L, head of the Front working committee in Troan O village is a typical example. His wife fell ill and was treated at the district hospital. The hospital allowed her to stay at home, use medicines from the commune health station and visit the hospital every month. However, Mr. H.T.L's family believed traditional methods would be more effective, and organized three ceremonies (with goats, chickens, pigs and cows) costing 30 million dong. Unfortunately, proceeds from the family's tapioca business did not cover the costs and the family was forced to sell their only motorbike and the daughter had to drop out of school.

---"(Doctors in the) hospitals said that it would take time to treat but I am afraid of God, of pain, of death, and therefore I worshipped. My relatives also said if I did not worship, my wife would die. Now I have lost everything, I have no chickens, no pigs, nothing."

(H.T.L, a Van Kieu person in Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

According to Mai Thanh Son (2008), the tension between official and unofficial institutions is a cause of instability in such communities. It also hinders village economic processes (this can be seen through the lack of consensus for many issues like protection of plant, animals, natural resources, or infrastructure invested by th.). Some individuals have taken the advantage of this gap for their own benefits.



Part 3

ROLES OF VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS IN POVERTY REDUCTION

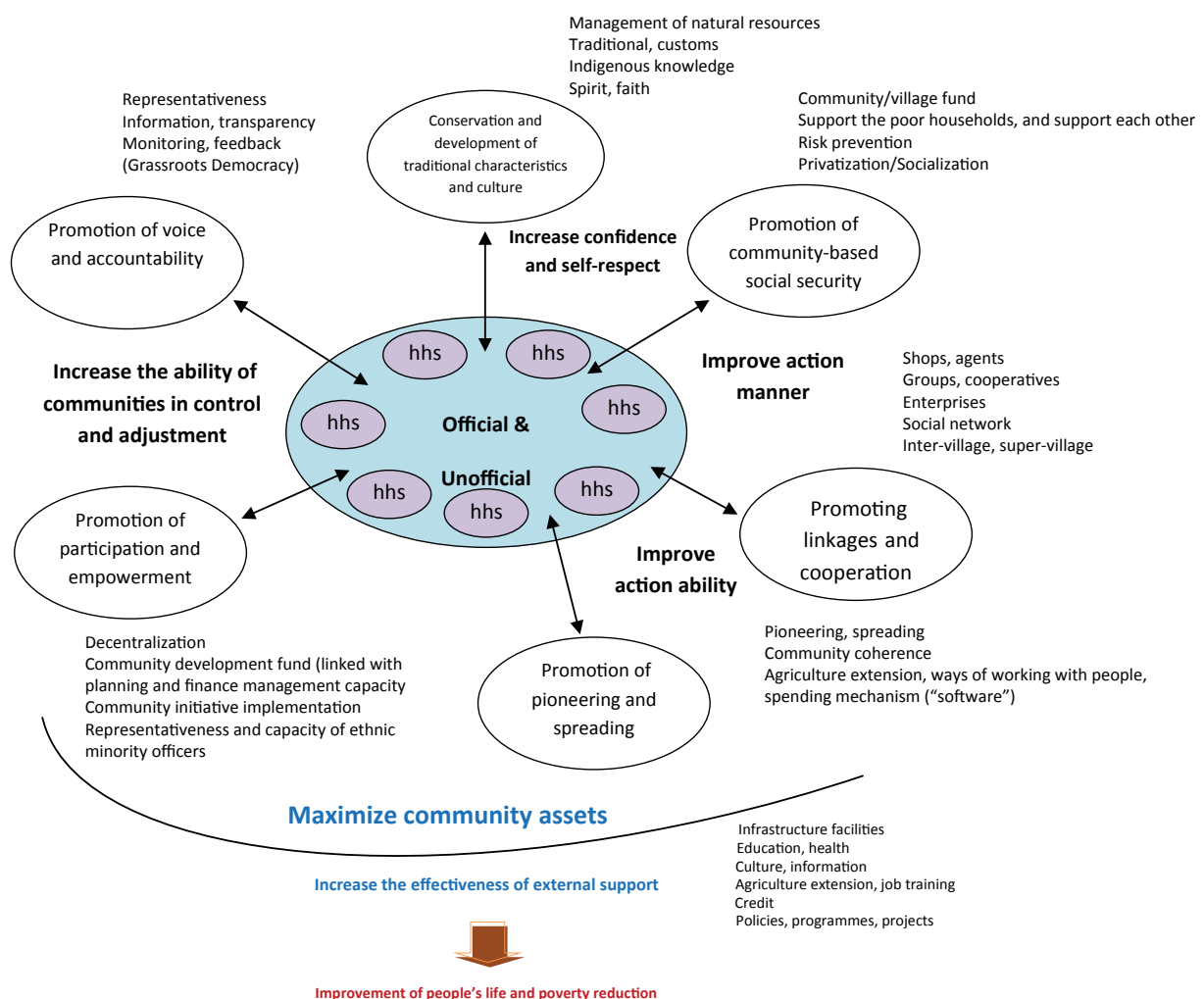


3. ROLES OF VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS IN POVERTY REDUCTION

Strong traditional and modern institutions play the following roles in ethnic minority communities: promoting pioneering the dissemination of ideas; promoting linkages and cooperation; promoting voice and accountability; ***promoting participation and empowerment; conserving and developing traditional characteristics and culture; promoting community-based social security.***

Using the “power”^{xiii} analytical framework it can be shown that village institutions help increase the ability of ethnic minority communities to control and adjust community activities, maximize community assets and increase the effectiveness of external support (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Roles of village institutions in poverty reduction



3.1. Promotion of pioneering and spreading

Pioneering

Pioneers play an important role in poverty reduction and improving the living standards in the ethnic minority communities. They are often flexible, ambitious and devoted to the community. There are two types of pioneer: (i) economic pioneers, for example through the introduction of new seeds and technology; and (ii) pioneers who mobilize other people (Oxfam and AAV, 2013).

Strong community institutions may help pioneers learn skills and techniques, pilot new ideas and manage key risk. Pioneers often take advantage of traditional production techniques and the support of nuclear and extended families. People in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak) considered Mr. Y.L.K, an E De man an expert in coffee production because of the knowledge he had gained from working with Kinh people. His family did not receive any external support for coffee farming. His success came from the appropriate allocation of family labour. Consensus among family members also helped him overcome difficulties. For example, during the 2000s when the coffee price dropped, he and his brothers agreed to sell a part of their land in order to maintain the coffee crop.

The timely, practical, and continuous support of the agriculture extension system, institutes, and projects has influenced pioneers. Pioneers have made good use of external support, particularly the provision of new techniques, seeds, capital and machinery. Mr. Y.H.K, for example, an E De man in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak) collaborated with the village agriculture extension and has pioneered techniques to improve his cattle herd and produce micro-biology fertilizer. The Eakar extension station (Dak Lak) also provides village extension collaborators with a 10-month allowance in advance to encourage them to implement new models.

Interaction between village institutions (including both official institutions and unofficial institutions) and pioneers is two-way. Village institutions promote pioneering, and once successful pioneers support and operate village institutions that promote poverty reduction. In some localities, economic pioneers have become social pioneers (Box 2).

Box 2. From economic pioneer to social pioneer

Mr. T.C (1943) is a Khmer farmer from Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh). With support from his extended family, he introduced new seeds and a new cultivation model. Institutes, programmes and projects selected Mr. T.C to introduce experimental models, for example, rice row seeding, early peanut crops, out-of-season watermelons and maize seeds. He has received many awards from the People's Committee of Tra Vinh province and different agencies for his work and contribution to agriculture extension.

Most people in the village can now apply the technological advances pioneered by Mr. T.C. In 2012 Mr. T.C established and became Chairman of the Commune Club for Eliminating Social Evils. The club works with local authorities and public security to educate and convert people engaging in social evils.

Since its establishment, the club has worked with the local temple, San Khum association and village meetings to disseminate information. Mr. T.C also visited Khmer adolescents in their homes to provide advice. His work and club activities have reduced levels of crime and social disorder. In 2012 there were no major violations in the village that required the intervention of local authorities.

Disseminating New Practices

Faith and spiritual practices, extended families, marriage, inter-ethnic relationships help new and effective practices spread through communities.

Pioneers influence others through official and unofficial institutions. The influence of pioneers depends on their position and status. Family heads, village notables, reputable people, or those in charge of mass organizations have the most influence. For instance, Mr. Y.H.K, an E De man in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak) is the head of his Krong family, one of two largest families in the villages. As head of the Farmers' Association and a village extension collaborator he has significant influence in the village.

---"I am from the Krong family. Mr. Y.H.K is my family head. He works hard and is very good at production. His children also behave well. Many people learnt from him to make micro-biology fertilizer. He showed me that micro-biology fertilizer is cost-saving, easy to make and environment friendly".

(Average and better-off groups of E De people in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

Close family relationships are also important. Parents give children land and assets and share their experiences. Parents support newly married couples. Relatives and cousins also shared useful experiences, and even financial resources and land for business development. Among the Khmer people in Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) households of the same blood-line live together in a "square" (an enclosed space with a bamboo fence, a common gate and yard, similar to the traditional "phum" model). In the community of E De people at M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak), it is quite popular for three generations of the same to live together.

---"After I got married, I did not stay in the long house. My parents built a house for me on the same land. My father gave me four sao of land for growing aubergines, three sao for growing maize, and a cow. He helped me with many things. He sent my brother to help me harvest maize. He did not take money from me for cow cross breeding. He even prepared and sent a loan application for me".

(H.G, an E De woman from M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

For the communities of Van Kieu people in Xy commune (Quang Tri), families maintain close inter-generational relationships. People of the same family often visit and take care of each other, especially in the event of sickness or death.

Healthy faith and spiritual activities are important ways to foster community cohesion and close relationships. People who share common beliefs often support each other with labour exchange, rice, money, or by sharing experiences. For the Khmer people in Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) where Buddhism plays an important role in the community, the relationship among neighbours and Buddhists is close. Neighbours are relatives in the

same “wuen”. According to local reputable people, “wuen” is a “temple word”, referring to the division of residential areas (equivalent to San Khum). People living in the same “wuen” often support each other (see Community-based Social Security). Peace worship ceremonies (organized twice per month) are also opportunities for people to share living and production experiences.

For the communities of E De people in M’Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak), protestant households also support each other at weekly religious meetings. Although village members may follow different religions there is little conflict.

--- *“For Y.H.K, parents are Protestant, but children do not follow that religion. For Y.K.N, children are Catholic, but parents are not. They all still stay together and have no problem. Parents and children do not have conflicts because of religion”*

(Y.B.N, E De member in M’Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

Economic institutions promote new practices in ethnic minority communities. It is quite common for ethnic minority groups in mountainous areas to practice labour exchange, often at seeding and harvest time. As labour exchange groups work for different households, they learn new practices. For instance, the Van Kieu people in Xy La village, Xy commune (Quang Tri) have learnt from labour exchange to buy engine grass eliminating spray in order to save labour in their farm work.

---*“The H.V.E. is good at farm work. They bought a good spray. When I joined in labour exchange groups, I often heard people compliment that spray. As I could not afford the same machine, I have bought a cheaper one at a cost of some hundred thousand dong. My machine is not as fast as theirs, but as effective as 3-4 people.”*

(The Van Kieu poor group in Xy La village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Ethnic linkages are effective communication channels, particularly between districts and provinces. A report of Oxfam and AAV (2013) discussed the Ma people in Dak Glong (Dak Nong) who learnt about coffee and tea plantation from other groups of Ma people in Di Linh and Bao Loc districts (Lam Dong). Also, some Ma people from Lam Dong have bought land in Dak Glong and taught the local Ma people about tea plantation.

Inter-ethnic relationships are also important. For instance, the Thai people in Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) have learnt about crop and rice growing from Kinh people (from Thai Binh). The Kho Mu and Thai people in Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) have lived together for a hundred years, and have shared many cultural values and experiences. For example, Kho Mu people learnt to grow paddy rice from Thai people, while Thai people learnt to use rattan products made by Kho Mu people.

The extension method of “from farmer to farmer” may increase the effectiveness of new practices. Ethnic minority people often share information by word-of-mouth and direct observation rather than the written word (Box 3).

Box 3. A pioneer in improving cows in the community of E De people

Mr. Y.H.K is a successful farmer in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak). He also works as a village extension collaborator and is head of the Farmers' Association. He is the head of Krong family, one of two large families in the village.

Mr. Y.H.K's household was selected by the Eakar District Agriculture Division and Project MU in 2009 for the model to improve local cows. He was provided with a bull of foreign breed, an allowance and grass seeds and technical assistance from district extension workers. According to the model Mr. Y.H.K will not charge village members for cow breeding, although he can charge people from outside at an agreed price, and after three years he will own the bull.

After three years of implementing the model, Mr. Y.H.K has helped people in his commune breed many cows. On average, every year he has helped impregnate about 200 cows. People reported that the new generation of hybrid cows had many advantages: they were nice looking, strong, suitable to local conditions and fast growing.

---"I committed to build a proper enclosure and ensure sufficient grass. I could only get the bull when I had planted the grass. I received my allowance in advance to buy materials for building the enclosure. I have to take care of the bull and breeding for the first three years, after that I can own the bull. During the first year, as agreed, I did not charge people from my village for breeding. However, it depended on their willingness. They paid some ten thousand or 100 thousand dong in 2012. For people from outside, I charged 120,000 dong every time. After three years, this charge will increase to 150,000 dong because it is hard work and it costs 300,000 dong in other places".

(Y.H.K, extension collaborator from M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

The extension method of "from farmer to farmer" is highly different from "demonstration model" that is popular in the current extension system. The "demonstration model" does not pay attention to the identification and support of dissemination channels. Decree 02/2010/ND-CP regulated that model replication is an important aspect of agriculture extension work. However, due to inappropriate budget mechanism, it mostly only focused on the stage of model implementation (including a field workshop upon model completion). Budget is often lacked for the "post-model" stage (supporting for sustaining and replicating new practices for at least 2-3 years). This has led to a fact that many "demonstration model" were successful but could not be replicated in the communities of the ethnic minority people.

3.2. Promoting linkages and cooperation

Roles of cooperatives and groups

Some new cooperatives work effectively and have brought benefits to their members.

Among the study sites, Thanh Xuong cooperative (Dien Bien) worked quite effectively. This cooperative manages the internal irrigation system, works with the extension system to devise a crop calendar, helps prevent disease, and also supports farmers by purchasing

fertilizers on their behalf and receiving payment at a later date. This helps the poor avoid high interest rates charged by agents and better manage their rice fields.

---"At the beginning of the season we register with the group head and pay by the end of the harvest. By doing this we don't have to buy from agents. If we buy on credit from agents, we will have to pay 50-70,000 dong extra after 3-4 months for a sack of NPK fertilizer. When borrowing fertilizers from the cooperative, we only have to pay the same interest rate as charged by the bank. Now I have sufficient fertilizer for my rice field".

(L.T.T, Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune, Dien Bien)

When compared to other ineffective cooperatives or institutions, Thanh Xuong cooperative had the following advantages: (i) effective supply of basic agriculture services to their members; (ii) strong organization, active MU worked with the subordinates (heads of production groups) who are also village heads; (iii) transparency created consensus among the members. Key information on loans, wages, late payment charges etc. is always clearly communicated.

Semi-official groups (established by mass organizations, programmes or projects) can help improve living standards and reduce poverty. The Women's Union in Xy commune (Quang Tri) called for a credit - saving group in early 2012. Such groups were established in all the commune villages, and some raised funds of nearly 10 million dong by the end of 2012. Van Kieu women actively participated in these credit-saving groups and have learnt to count money, saved small amounts and exchanged life and production experiences. The credit-saving group established in 2008 in Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) under the support of CIDA is also serving a useful role (Box 4).

Box 4. Credit-saving fund received active participation from the local people

The project "Improvement of living standards", funded by CIDA, has supported the establishment of credit-saving groups in Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) since 2008. There were 21 initial groups in the commune, with 20 members in each group. Half of group members were women and 30% from poor or difficult households. Group members contribute a fixed amount of 20,000 dong per month and can borrow 500,000 – 1,000,000 dong with an interest rate of 10,000 per loan. Group members have the discretion to lend higher sums to households in difficulty or that require loans for productive investments, provided that they do not exceed 50% of the total fund. Initial loans are for three months, and second loans six months. Interest earned is paid into the fund and used to cover expenses, or visit members in case of sickness.

Even though loans are small, many households benefit.

---"People here need capital; otherwise they could not carry out production. Even though loan size was small, but it was easy to borrow. With low interest rate, we can sell maize and fruits to pay back".

(S.N, a Khmer person from Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

Although the project ended in 2010, the groups remain. Women continue to contribute to the fund. There were 23 credit-saving groups in Thuan Hoa commune by October 2012 (two new groups formed in 2012), with 420 members (of whom 336 members were Khmer people). The total fund of these groups was 351,900,000 dong, enabling 105 loans for small trading and husbandry activities.

Unofficial groups with voluntary economic purpose provide important support to the poor. The poor Khmer in Thuy Hoa village, Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) have formed groups of 5-10 members to provide labour for sand and stone carrying. In addition, there are also groups for goods loading and unloading, and construction work. Members also come from a nearby village. Group members are highly committed and try to ensure all members can participate, despite of the workload.

---“There is only a small work for church construction, but we all participated. We worked from 7-9am, and each of us earned about 30,000 dong. It is not much, but we have got use to that. We may earn little today, and more tomorrow”.

(T.S, a Khmer person from Thuy Hoa village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

The role of enterprises

Some enterprises help ethnic minority people access markets. During 2007-2012 a number of institutions linked farmers with enterprises. These included the Shan tea model in Ban Lien (Lao Cai), the sugarcane model in Phuoc Dai (Ninh Thuan), and industrial tapioca model in Xy (Quang Tri). The tea enterprise in Ban Lien exported tea to Europe at higher prices using Fair Trade in 2010. The sugarcane company helped farmers extend contracted farming areas from 54ha in 2009 to 100ha in 2010 (Oxfam and AAV, 2012a). Oxfam and AAV (2013) also indicate that it is important to establish **sustainable institutions that bring mutual benefits to farmers and enterprises.**

The role of agents, shops, and periodical markets

The relationship between people and agents and shops is an unofficial economic institution in all the study sites. A high proportion of households transact (purchasing and selling goods and borrowing money) with agents and shops. For instance, 100% of E De households in M’Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak) borrowed from shops and agents to invest in coffee and maize plantations. A majority of Van Kieu households in Xy commune (Quang Tri) borrowed rice and money directly from shops. *“Seven out of every ten people borrow from shops”* (Group of commune officers, Xy commune, Quang Tri). Even though poor households have a limited opportunity to borrow from shops and agents, better of relatives can do so on their behalf. This enable many poor households to have rice in periods of shortage.

“Borrow first and return later” is a popular way of transaction between shops, agents and local people. Shops and agents benefit from price differences and interest rates (that can reach 3-4% per month). For local people, shops and agents are “unofficial banks”. In areas like Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak), or Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh), farmers need capital to invest. Therefore, shops and agents are important to them.

---“Only one or two out of ten people have money to buy fertilizers. The rest ask shops and agents to supply fertilizers when required. They also borrow 500,000 or 1 million

dong from shops and agents for daily expenses. Upon rice harvesting, they sell to those shops and agents and accept a lower price. Without shops and agents, there will be no fertilizers, we should be thankful to them”

(Average and better-off Khmer groups in Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

Recently more shops have opened. Increased competition between shops also benefits the poor, forcing shops to be more flexible or bring down prices. In some areas, shops allowed farmers to delay their repayments without additional charges.

---“I borrow 2-3 sacks of rice from shops every year and return upon selling my tapioca. However, sometime money from tapioca selling is only enough for my wife’s sickness treatment and I have to ask the shops if I can delay repayment. The shops do not charge me for the delay as they feel sorry for me. When I have money, I pay them back”.

(H.T.L, a Van Kieu man from Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Shops and agents are also source of technical and market information for farmers. Agriculture input agents with support from their headquarters organise workshops to introduce new models and disseminate information about their products. These shops often provide counselling to farmers when their plants are diseased. Oxfam and AAV (2012a) showed that “asking shops and agents” was considered one of the main sources of information for local farmers.

For areas far from markets and with inconvenient traffic conditions, **vendors** are important to ethnic minority people. Vendors that visit every day help farmers earn cash for their daily consumption expenses. In addition, vendors also bring meat, fish, vegetables and other consumption items like clothes and lighters. Sometimes, vendors also bring fertilizers and other goods as ordered by the local people.

Periodical markets affect poverty reduction in northern mountainous areas. People can sell agricultural products, and buy tools, foods, and other basic consumption commodities. Ethnic minority people can also learn about prices and market dynamics. Periodical markets also generate jobs for many people, including the Kinh and the ethnic minority groups who engage in mobile trading activities. Periodical markets are also places for cultural exchange that improve the spiritual life of ethnic minority people.

Since a periodical market was opened in mid-2008 in Ban Lien commune (Lao Cai), people of Tay and Mong ethnicities do not have to travel the 30km to the district market. Many products that used to be only consumed by local households (for example, vegetables and chickens) are now sold in the market. Periodical markets also help people reduce borrowing from shops and agents (Oxfam and AAV, 2011).

The Role of Social Networks

Social networks create solidarity among people of the same family, the same village, or the same ethnicity. People working away from the village help others find work and manage risks when they work far from home. A report on urban poverty by Oxfam and AAV (2012b) demonstrated that young ethnic minority groups depend on their seniors when they first arrive in Hanoi. They often stay with or hire accommodation together with people from their home village. They often go to work together in order to be familiar to the road system. After some time, when they have got used to the city, they can manage the traffic and living conditions.

Inter-village or super-village relationships enabled communities to support each other share spiritual values or manage risks. In Xy commune (Quang Tri), every three villages of Van Kieu people practice holly forest worship together as agreed by village notable heads. When a household faces difficulties households from other villages visit and provide support.

---“My father is from Troan O village, but he got married to my mother in Xi Tonua village. This has been the case for many generations, and therefore people in that village (Xi Tonua) are also our relatives. When somebody dies there, my father and one of his sons brings rice and alcohol for ritual practices. We talk to each other when working on the farms. When there is a need for labour exchange, we inform each other”.

(Average and better-off Van Kieu groups from Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Inter-village and super-village relationships also generate income opportunities for people. For example, for the inter-village relationship for San Lung alcohol production in Ban Xeo village, Bat Xat district (Lao Cai), San Lung village brewed alcohol, while other villages supplied inputs (unhusked rice) (Box 5).

Box 5. Inter-village linkage for San Lung alcohol production (Bat Xat, Lao Cai)

Located in high mountains and 5km far from the commune center, San Lung village, Ban Xeo commune, Bat Xat district is home of Red Dao ethnic minority people. This village specializes in alcohol production. Since 2003, Sa Pa Petrol Tourism Joint Stock company cooperated with the locality for the development and promotion of the San Lung alcohol brand through San Lung alcohol cooperative.

With the establishment of the alcohol cooperative, there was a higher demand of unhusked rice as a production input. The cooperative members had to buy rice from various villages. Therefore, various commune villages (especially those from the valley area) concentrated on growing Nhi Uu 838 rice variety to supply the cooperative. Upon harvesting, rice households only kept a small quantity for consumption and husbandry, while they mostly sold to San Lung village. Unhusked rice, therefore, has become a speciality and generated income for people in Ban Xeo commune.

Source: Department of Labour, Invalid, and Social Affairs of Lao Cai province and Oxfam (2013)

3.3. Promoting Voice and Accountability

Openness and Transparency

Strong official institutions help improve openness and transparency. The Grassroots Democracy Ordinance, has improved information transparency at the study sites. Information disseminated includes socio-economic development plans, local investment projects, and policies to manage risks, crop calendars, labour exports and vaccinations. Village meetings, the loud speaker system, mass organization meetings, household visits, notices in public places are the most effective ways to disseminate information. Information is also disseminated using TV, magazines and newspapers. **Village heads play the most important role in ensuring information transparency at village level.**

To increase the effectiveness of information dissemination in ethnic minority communities the MU and local mass organizations have applied different initiatives:

- Integrate with village meetings to disseminate agriculture extension messages, veterinary, healthcare, environmental hygiene information (Thanh Xuong -Dien Bien, Thuan Hoa - Tra Vinh).
- Enforce attendance at village meetings by introducing time sheets and cash fines for those who are absent from village meetings (Thanh Xuong - Dien Bien).
- Criticize households who missed previous meetings (Thanh Xuong - Dien Bien).
- Send invitations to village meetings to household heads (Cu Hue - Dak Lak)
- Ensure village meetings are only organized for important activities (Thuan Hoa - Tra Vinh).
- Post information on a board in the village hall according to the principles “People know, People discuss, People do, and People supervise” as regulated in the Grassroot Democracy Ordinance (Thuan Hoa, Tra Vinh).
- Publish policies in simple and short documents that are then sent to village officers for dissemination (Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak).

Unofficial institutions, such as word-of-mouth, are also important dissemination channels. However, where official channels are effective, informal channels assume less importance.

Combined official and unofficial channels are also effective channels. For example local authorities, mass organizations and Buddhist temples in Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) cooperate to disseminate information to the local Khmer on the first and fifteenth day of the month of Khmer calendar when many people visit temples (Box 6).

Box 6. Information dissemination through Buddhist temples in Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh)

It is difficult to organize village meetings in Thuan Hoa commune because villages are large, there are no village halls. Most people in the commune follow Theravada Buddhism. They visit temples twice per month. Temples are not only places for religious activities, but also serve as a community cultural center. Monks^{xiv} are important to the local people in terms of faith and many other aspects of life.

For many years, the local authorities and mass organizations in Thuan Hoa commune have cooperated with Senior Monks to disseminate information to local people. Documents on laws and policies are available on the temple book shelves. Mass organizations also use these events for information dissemination.

---“On temple days, senior monks advise people to follow policies, not to drive fast and carelessly, not to make noise or have more than two children. Mass organizations also come to provide information to people. My study encouragement association also took this opportunity to advocate people. We have advocated at the village meetings, but people listen more at temples”.

(B.P, a Khmer man from Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune)

Tra Vinh province has a policy to provide budget support in order to maximize information dissemination through Buddhist temples.

Monitoring and Feedback

Official institutions are effective channels for people to provide feedback about policies and initiatives. Village heads often provide people's feedback higher authorities. The People's Inspection Committee and Community Investment Monitoring Committee are more effective when they receive more favourable conditions for their activities. A typical example is a CIDA funded project to build a road through Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) in 2008. The quality of the road was attributed to the efforts of members of the Community Monitoring Committee, who were trained to monitor the road's construction.

Official institutions resolve civil conflicts when unofficial institutions cannot. People in Xy commune (Quang Tri) have often gone to People's Councils when their land has been taken by other communes. Households in M'Hang village, Cu Hue (Dak Lak) have also resorted to Commune authorities.

---"Stone enterprises pumped water and flooded our rice fields. I immediately reported it to the village head who then went to the Commune authorities. With their interference, the problem has been solved. I follow state regulations, but I am not afraid of the stone enterprise (owner) as he is an ordinary person like me"

(Y.M, an E De person from M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

---"When I met with the District People's Council, I told them about the land problem I had with A Tuc. The Council reported it to higher authorities. Inspection officers have been here. Even though I have not heard about the final decision, the concerns of Xy commune people have received attention"

(P.T, a Van Kieu man from Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Unofficial institutions monitor and provide feedback on initiatives or programmes and projects involving people's contributions. Ethnic minority people often elect their own monitoring committees, whose members were reputable and experienced people in the village. Committee members can monitor small-scale projects carried out by community initiatives. Projects monitored by the community unofficial institutions are often better quality and report fewer losses (Box 7).

Box 7. People monitored road construction project at Lau village, Thach Giam commune (Tuong Duong district)

Lau is a village of Thai ethnic minority people. In 2012, a 927 meter road was built with a total investment of nearly 850 million dong, of which 30% was from the new rural development programme, 10% from the Oxfam's Community Development Fund, 10% from local enterprises and sponsors, and 50% from local people's cash payment and labour.

In order to ensure project quality, two monitoring committees were established. The Commune monitoring committee comprised of the Steering Committee of the new rural development programme, and heads of the commune mass organizations. People of Lau village also formed their own monitoring committee with two reputable members with construction experience. These members stayed at the project site for the period of construction. Project progress and problems were reported in village meetings. Problems were resolved immediately.

---"As people contributed to this project, they wanted to monitor it. The road has been built with good quality and nobody has complained. This project has received compliments from the district"

(V.X.Q, Chairman of Thach Giam commune)

Source: MU of the OHK programme in Tuong Duong district and Thach Giam commune officers

3.4. Promotion of Participation and Empowerment

Findings from this research show that both official and unofficial institutions can promote participation and empowerment in ethnic minority communities. This role is especially effective when this is a combination between these two types of institutions.

The role of official institutions

In a traditional society, the village management structure was formed through representative democracy^{xv}. Village heads must be reputable, capable organizers, with a sound knowledge of customs and traditions. They often do not receive material benefits, but people's respect as well as some powers in village management and operation. At the moment, every ethnic minority village has elected a village head through direct democracy^{xvi}. "The right to elect village head" is the most direct democratic right of the people in their communities.

Integration of social, cultural self-management and economic organization and operational functions has led to the success of the village heads in promoting participation and empowerment. When implementing policies, programmes and project activities, village heads organize and coordinate people's participation in their communities. Village heads also act as a bridge between the official and unofficial institutions (for example, communication with the commune authorities, consulting village notables and reputable people) when mobilizing and persuading people to take part in various community activities. Supporting activities among community members are also influenced by village heads, for example household ceremonies or house building.

In Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien), village heads not only have the most important administrative role, but they also have important socio-economic and cultural roles. Village heads also promote people's participation in village activities (Box 8).

Box 8. Administrative and socio-economic roles of the village head in Pa Dong village (Thanh Xuong commune, Dien Bien)

Mr. L.V.T has been a village head in Pa Dong for one year. He is also the head of the Production Group, the Farmers' Association, the Study Encouragement Association, the Loan Group, and the Forest Protection and Natural Calamities Prevention Group. His main tasks are:

- To organize village activities in line with announcements from the commune, or community initiatives.
- To take the lead in the poor household survey, supervise and mobilize people as required to implement village programmes and projects.
- To guide soil preparation, seeding, irrigation, disease prevention; tax collection; making the list of fertilizer buyers, collection of payments for fertilizer.
- To work with the bank on loan issues, organize meetings of credit groups, and collect interest.
- To supervise children's study, work with the school to encourage children not to drop or quit classes.
- To take part in patrols and forest protection activities, especially in the dry season.

He receives a total allowance of about one million dong per month, including village head allowance (630,000 dong/month), allowance from cooperative for management of production group and commission for fertilizer purchase (3,400,000 dong per two crops), allowance from the Bank for Social Policies for management of a loan group (based on a cost norm of 0.09% of the collected interest, equivalent to about 120,000 dong/month).

Despite his heavy workload, Mr. L.V.T feels proud as he is supported by the village and he has certain rights and benefits.

---"People here listen to the village head, because he is rational. He told us to send our five year old children to kindergarten, and we followed his advice despite of our economic status. He also told us to take part in irrigation work, and we followed him as we were cooperative members".

(The poor household group in Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune, Dien Bien)

Village heads also act as a bridge between schools and families at the study sites. As Head of the Study Encouragement Association, village heads are also responsible for reviewing and monitoring children within the age of compulsory schooling. There is a close relationship between schools and village heads. They are often invited to important events at schools. Schools also send children's study results to village heads who can encourage the best students, and help others. When children drop out, teachers and village heads can persuade them to return to school.

---“In case of school drop-outs, our school works directly with children. If necessary, we ask the Youth Union and village head for help”.

(Secretary of Youth Union in Xy commune, Quang Tri)

---“The village head is also head of the Parents’ Association. Therefore, the school often invites the village head to major activities. If the village head cannot join, then the deputy head will go. If a student drops out of school, I visit them at home together with teachers. I know why that student dropped out, and I can persuade them to return”

(C.T, Raglai ethnicity, deputy head of Ma Hoa village, Phuoc Dai commune, Ninh Thuan)

Mass organizations, whose activities are linked to people’s needs, can attract many members. This can be seen at some communes like Thanh Xuong (Dien Bien), Thuan Hoa (Tra Vinh), or Xy (Quang Tri), where a lot of women have joined the Women’s Union and credit-saving groups. Their participation enables them to get capital for household jobs and husbandry, as well as to communicate with other women.

The role of unofficial institutions

Unofficial institutions best maximize their role in promoting people’s participation and empowerment when combined with official institutions for implementing community initiatives. There have been many community initiatives involving people’s contributions. People have actively participated at all stages, contributing knowledge, experience, cash, labour and materials. At each stage, cooperation among village notables, reputable people, and village heads has been effective. For example, the kindergarten in Khu Chu Tung 1 village (Ban Lien, Lao Cai) was an initiative of the village head and notables who then persuaded and mobilized people, and led and supervised the implementation process (Box 9).

Box 9. Mobilizing people for a kindergarten building in Khu Chu Tung 1 village (Ban Lien, Lao Cai)

Khu Chu Tung 1 is a village of Mong people, located on a high mountain. It is about 5km from the village center to the main road. The adjoining road is steep and in bad condition. Responding to demand for education for young children, the village notables and the village head proposed mobilizing people to build a kindergarten in 2008. The village head supervised the process.

---“Village officers calculated the necessary quantity of roof sheets, nails, beams and then collected them from households. The village head made a timesheet. If a household did not participate in building, that household would have to participate in repairing the building when required”.

(Male of group of Mong people, Khu Chu Tung 1 village, Ban Lien, Lao Cai).

When the kindergarten was degraded, the village head and notables continued to persuade and mobilize people to repair it in 2011. Every household, including those without children of kindergarten age, have contributed labour (wood cutting, carrying, sawing, wall making, etc.).

Source: Field notes taken at the sites of Project “Participatory Poverty Monitoring”, Oxfam and AAV (2007 - 2012)

Projects in which people participate tend to be more effective than other infrastructure projects (Table 3).

Table 3. Differences in participation and quality of the two infrastructure projects in Cham Puong village (Luong Minh commune, Nghe An)

	Road and bridge of Resettlement Project	Bridge of community initiative
Design, planning	Carried out by contractor, no participation from commune and village	Initiative proposed by the village notables Village meeting was organized to discuss about planning and a construction committee was elected
Cash, labour and material contribution	Fully funded by project	Fully contributed by village members with cash, rice, and their labours
Monitoring and acceptance	Commune People's Committee, Village MU and people did not participate	The village has assigned reputable members to lead and supervise the implementation process
Maintenance and operation	None	People frequently checked the bridge quality, and repaired it as guided by the village head and notables
Project quality	The road became degraded, and the bridge broke after two months of use When the bridge was broken people did not inform the commune as they perceived that "it was the business of the contractor with the commune"	The length and width of beams and boards remains as the original design The bridge is still used and is in good shape

Source: Field notes taken at the sites of Project "Participatory Poverty Monitoring", Oxfam and AAV (2007 - 2012)

Some unofficial institutions have helped improve access to local public services. The Khmer temple in Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) taught Khmer language to children, and provided scholarships to poor pupils. Khmer language is a compulsory subject for all pupils from Grade 2 onwards at the primary school in Thuan Hoa commune, with two classes per week. During the summer vacation, Khmer language is also taught twice per week at the temple. According to the teachers of the primary school in Thuan Hoa commune, there are many advantages when the temple taught Khmer language: (i) temple teaching is for those who are interested, many children really liked to learn as it was not compulsory like in school; (ii) Monks are of Khmer ethnicity; they have learnt Khmer language in an official manner and therefore have had a better knowledge of it; (iii) there are many books in Khmer language at the temple; temple is the place for retaining and disseminating the Khmer traditional culture, therefore children can get close to their tradition. As a result, many children participated in the Khmer language classes at the temple during summer vacation, including those children of Kinh and Chinese groups.

---"Many children participated in the Khmer language classes at Cossom temple during the summer vacation. They said learning here is more interesting than in the school as they could also learn about Khmer culture. Teachers in the school also know, but not as well as the monks".

(T.T.S.R, a Khmer person, teacher of the primary school in Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

The temple also participated in the commune movement to encourage study. At the end of a school year, there are ten gifts provided to the best student (one set of notebooks). Some students with very high study results even got money awards. Even though the money awards are only symbolic (some ten thousand dong/student), it has encouraged students to study better.

There is a commune health station and a network of village health workers at all the study sites. More ethnic minority people visit commune health stations for health checks and treatment, especially for prevention services (e.g. pregnancy examination, or children's vaccinations). However, people in some villages still use their traditional herbal medicines for common sicknesses (colds, headaches and minor injuries). Traditional village healers are still important as they keep specific remedies.

The role of village institutions in promoting participation and empowerment can be maximized by decentralizing investment decisions.

Community/Commune Development Funds (CDF) are institutions to enable ethnic minority communities to own a decentralized budget to implement small projects (infrastructure building or livelihood supports). The Budget Law and related documents for decentralization of community package investment (this mechanism has just been placed in the national targeting programme on poverty reduction as a pilot model) makes no reference to this. However, some donor-funded programmes and projects have successfully implemented this type of investment package in over one hundred ethnic minority communes. For example, g. the Poverty Reduction project in the northern mountainous areas, funded by the World Bank and Public Service Provision Improvement in Agriculture & Rural Development Programme (PSARD), funded by SDC.

Studies and assessments of CDF showed that these funds have strengthened people's participation and empowerment in the ethnic minority communities, creating opportunities for them to actively discuss and implement small scale infrastructure projects and livelihood models. One of the best results of CDF is mobilization of contribution, close monitoring, benefit sharing, and promotion of real grassroot democracy in the community. The major lesson learnt from the successful CDF for poverty reduction is only when it linked with a participatory socio-economic planning, and improvement of the capacity in financial management and community monitoring (Helvetas 2010).

3.5. Conservation and Development of Traditional Characteristics and Culture

Conserving traditional culture is important to ethnic minority people. Protection of holy forests, reminding young generations to maintain marriage customs, wearing traditional clothes in traditional festivals and practicing traditional rituals are expectations of many ethnic minority people. People's lives and livelihoods are improved if they can protect water resources, forests, and animal feeding areas. This is an aspect of "multi-dimension poverty reduction" towards improving life quality in the new context as perceived by the local officers and people (Oxfam and AAV, 2012a & 2013).

Community management of natural resources

Forest land and resources also have a spiritual function linked to ethnic characteristics. Community forests are also places where the poor can collect fire wood, bamboo shoots for their own consumption and selling, or bamboo and rattan for building houses.

Forest and forest lands are important common assets in traditional villages. Village notables and religious practitioners play a role in managing holy forests.

Communities are currently not allowed to own land and natural resources as they belong to the state. The state provides use rights for land and forests to organizations and households. **However, in the minds of ethnic minority people, forest land is still in community ownership. Therefore, village institutions in some ethnic minority communities still play a certain role** (Box 10).

Box 10. Keeping a common land in Goc Lu village, Xuan Hoa commune (Bao Yen, Lao Cai) for animal farming

Goc Lu is a village in which 95% of the population is Dao ethnicity. A part of village forest land has been allocated to households, while the rest belongs to a state forest enterprise. However, village reputable people have mobilized people to send a proposal to the enterprise to keep 15ha of land for husbandry farming, as they argue that “this land has been common land for many generations”.

People only took buffaloes home in the winter time, while they let them stay all year around at the common farming area. Some elderly people even built a tent and stayed there to look after their animals and grow crops. With this common farming area, the village members could develop their husbandry activities to increase their incomes. The village was selected by the national targeting programme on poverty reduction for replication of the project “Replication of poverty reduction models” with buffalo model in 2007. The replication was successful, partly thanks to the village common area for animal farming. Mr. D.V.D, a farmer said:

---“Without the common farming area, a household can only feed 1 buffalo. If a household wants 2 buffaloes, there will be food shortage and the buffaloes may eat tea and other plants. We can only raise a school of buffaloes (that provided by the State) with a large land, and then earn a big sum of money from selling them. This land was a common land since our grandparent generations. A forest officer came 10 years ago to measure the land for forest plantation, but our village has asked to keep it for our husbandry activities as we are doing now”.

Source: Department of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs of Lao Cai province and Oxfam (2012)

Some ethnic minority villages have mobilized communities for effective forest protection.

For example, the community of Mong people in Khu Chu Tung 1 village (Ban Lien commune, Lao Cai) protects about 30ha of bamboo forests. Members have both rights and obligations to the forests. They are allowed by the village to collect bamboo shoots in at certain times. Households can take home mature trees with the approval of the village MU. The members who collect bamboo shoots or cut trees without approval will be considered thieves and have to pay fines. Everybody is responsible for protecting the forests, and report violations to the village MU (Box 11).

Box 11. Community forest protection in Khu Chu Tung 1 village (Ban Lien, Lao Cai)

The 30ha bamboo forest of Khu Chu Tung 1 village has existed for many years. Every year, a group of four members is elected by the village for forest monitoring and protection. Membership of this group is rotated annually in order to strengthen community forest protection awareness.

The forest protection group has a strict working regulation. Every household contributes 5kg of rice per year (10kg since 2011) to support the group. Every week, group members divide into two and patrol in two directions of the forest. They report problems to the village MU. According to the village rule, a fine of 5,000 dong is applied for every bamboo shoot collected; 50,000 dong is applied for one person collecting a tree. However, when it is necessary (e.g. funeral, building house, etc.), households only need to inform the village head and then they can collect bamboo, rattan, and bamboo shoots in unlimited quantities, provided that they are not then sold.

Source: Field notes taken at the sites of Project "Participatory Poverty Monitoring", Oxfam and AAV (2007 - 2012)

Following Programme 30a, some communes have allocated forest land to village or households groups in order to maximize the community's role in forest protection. The cases of Phuoc Dai and Phuoc Thanh commune (Bac Ai district, Ninh Thuan) demonstrate that forest allocation to the local communities as regulated by Programme 30a has improved forest protection rather than allocation to individual households, and maximized the role of the village MU in forest protection and at the same time, improve people's income.

Indigenous knowledge

Ethnic minority people have accumulated indigenous knowledge applied to production and community management.

Organizations and individuals in some localities aim to conserve and develop indigenous knowledge. Ms. L.T.P from Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) has been making traditional Thai dresses (*xua com*) for five years and she is well-known in the district. She occasionally has help from women in the village when she has a large order. Another example is the success of flax cooperative at the community of Mong people in Hop Tien village, Lung Tam commune (Ha Giang). At the moment, the cooperative has made diversified products that are highly appreciated by clients. This helped create an average income of one million dong per month for 120 members (Oxfam and AAV, 2013).

Village notables and dignitaries, family heads, reputable people, and religious practitioners help conserve indigenous knowledge on community management. In areas where traditions and customs are still strong (for example, communities of Van Kieu people in Xy commune (Quang Tri)) village heads receive support from notables for village operation and management. Village heads often ask notables for their advice and experiences in handling community issues.

Retired intellectuals, veterans and reputable people in the communities also helped connect indigenous and advanced knowledge. These are mature people, with sound

indigenous knowledge. They are also some of the few people who have lived outside of the community. Therefore, they can compare lessons and knowledge as appropriate. Upon returning to home, their opinions and advice are important to people's life as well as to local governance.

---*"They joined military and have just returned to the village. They got to know about many things in the past and in the present. People listened to them. They advised not to keep the "wiring" marriage customs as women suffered from that. They also explained about legal regulations. If you have any questions, you can ask them"*

(Y.K.N, an E De person, deputy head of M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

Customs and traditions

Every ethnic group has formed behavioural norms that are accepted by the whole community. Currently many traditions and customs are under threat.

Village heads and notables continue to remind village members to practice their traditions and customs. In order to sustain traditions and customs, ***compromise is mostly applied by the heads of traditional institutions***. Customs also depend on the economic conditions and willingness of village members. Practices in marriage, funeral, and seasonal worship have been simplified, and are open to compromise. Compromise is important to ensure individuals still respect customs and traditions, and do not oppose community rules.

Some unofficial institutions strongly influence the conservation of traditions and customs.

Public opinion plays a role in adjusting individual behaviours. Behaviours considered to be contrary to traditions are often criticized. Women in the community of Thai ethnicity in Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) still wear traditional clothes when receiving guests or at festivals.

---*"I find it is more convenient to wear a T-shirt like Kinh people, but for receiving guests I prefer wearing our Thai clothes (xua com). Everybody thinks our clothes are beautiful, and we are all saving for a beautiful set to wear on the events of new rice or new year"*

(C.T.T, a Thai woman in Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong, Dien Bien)

Van Kieu people in Xy commune (Quang Tri) grow upland rice and are still practicing their traditional rice worship even though rice is losing its economic significance to the local people. Together with family willingness, village notables and family heads are important to sustain traditions.

Traditional faith and spiritual practices

Village institutions at some ethnic minority communities have well conserved traditional faith and spiritual practices. These play an important part in the activities of ethnic minority communities. For the Van Kieu people in Xy commune (Quang Tri), village notables organize God worship ceremonies (*yang*) every year at the holly forest area with contributions from village households. In addition, there are many other spiritual events organized within families and households (for example, new year rituals – *puc su*; rice seedling – *tuc le*, rice blossom – *tra sre*, year end – *coh cuh ma*, household peace worship (with buffalo killing) – *ru ram cha ta ria*, etc.) under the coordination of family heads. The belief in Yang (the God) and the spirits of dead people is still strong. Even though the community of Kho Mu people in Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) does not have their holy forest due to resettlements

and the construction of district center, village notables and the MU still guided people for the holy forest worship practice every 3-4 years.

---“Thick forests are no longer available. We worship near the school because our forests were there in the past. Even though forests are no longer available here, we must worship. All family members, including adults and children, men and women should join this activity”.

(Q.V.N, a Kho Mu person, member of the Front Working Committee, Pu Tuu village, Thanh Xuong commune, Dien Bien)

3.6. Community-based social security

In traditional societies, mutual support among members of ethnic minority communities is frequent and a characteristic of strong community coherence. Many traditional support structures still exist, while some have disappeared and other have been replaced. Table 4 shows the roles of official and unofficial institutions in implementing community-based social security at the study sites (including the communes of the “Monitoring Poverty Impacts”, project carried out by Oxfam and AAV).

Table 4. Community-based social securities at the study sites

Community-based social security at the study sites	Implementing institutions
Support in the form of labour	Family/extended family Neighbours Women’s Union
Sponsoring elderly people, orphans, disabled people	Household Family/extended family
Material support (cash, rice)	Family/extended family Neighbour relationship Village rules Community/village funds San Khum association (Tra Vinh)
Micro-credit	Community/village funds Shops
Spiritual encouragement	Family/extended family Neighbour relationship Village MU Fatherland Front Mass organizations Temples/ San Khum association (Tra Vinh)
Job generation	Family/extended family Family Neighbour relationship
Risk prevention and climate change adaptation	Customs Village notables Village MU

Support in the form of labour is a popular activity in many ethnic minority communities. Relatives and neighbours often help with house construction. If a household lacks labour or has sick members at harvest time, relatives provide support. In some communes the

Women's Union mobilized members to contribute labour to help households in difficulty.

---*"I have two small children, and my wife is slow. My cousins help me a lot. When my wife gave birth, relatives came to help several days for grass weeding (of tapioca crop). They brought their own food, and did not ask me to pay. When somebody gets sick, I will also provide help like that".*

(The poor group of Van Kieu people, Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Sponsoring elderly people, orphans, and disabled people. Close families are themselves an effective safety net. A family with different generations living together can provide material and spiritual support for elderly people, orphans and disabled people. There are very few single elderly people among the Thai people in Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) (except when they have neither children nor relative). Orphans, mentally ill people, disabled and sick people are also provided with help. Many elderly people in the community of E De people in M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune (Dak Lak) received support from relatives.

---*"Thai people here are not the same as others in the lowland. Even with only one child or grandchildren, they don't have to live alone".*

(L.V.H, a reputable person in Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune, Dien Bien)

---*"Our family received an old man whose wife had passed away and her family sent him back home. He is mentally ill and could not work, but he is not alone. We built a house for him, and share food with him. It is a character of our ethnicity that relatives provide help and don't leave anybody alone".*

(The poor E De group, M'Hang village, Cu Hue commune, Dak Lak)

Material support. When there are food shortages ethnic minority people can borrow food from relatives. For other big events, (for example, funerals and weddings)) they can also get support from their relatives. Material support may be large or small, but are always important to households in difficulty.

---*"This tree is the biggest one in the garden. It has been here since I joined the family. Many people wanted to buy it and have even asked to pay some million dong, but I did not agree to sell. I keep this tree for my nephew as he is going to build a house. As we are relatives, we don't mind about money. He is facing many difficulties when starting his own family".*

(H.T.L, a poor Van Kieu household in Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Neighbours also provide material help (rice, cash). In many villages it is an unofficial rule that neighbours should visit and give cash or rice to support households with sick or dead members. In some villages such support is officially regulated. For example, in Pa Dong village, Thanh Xuong commune (Dien Bien) every household, regardless of its economic resources, should contribute 50,000 dong and 1kg of rice to households with a dead member. Village heads will collect donations and give them to the in-need household. Some households may also provide additional support. Some unofficial institutions provide similar forms of support (Box 12).

Box 12. San Khum association in Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh plays an important role providing security for households in difficulty.

San Khum is a traditional group of Buddhists. In Khmer language, “San Khum” means “support association”, or “social association”. There are one or two associations in every village in the commune. Association members refer to each other as “relatives”.

San Khum associations often meet twice per month for the peace worship events that are organized rotationally among the member households. Money is collected from members at each event. A proportion is kept for the association fund and can be used when members are sick. Members of San Khum associations also contribute money to buy tents and dishes that are used in ceremonies, and poor people can also borrow funds.

---“The tent helped the poor households save some hundred thousand dong from renting. It is not a problem for the rich as “they called and got their service provided”.

(T.C, a reputable person in Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa, Tra Vinh)

In case of funerals, members contribute money (about 10-20,000 dong per member) and rice, help prepare the coffin and receive guests. Material and spiritual support from the San Khum association helps reduce the difficulties faced by the poor.

Community funds for social security are small-scale funds contributed by village members. Households can borrow a small amount of money or rice from the fund for their immediate needs, e.g. payment for children education expenses, hospital expenses, food shortage, etc. Some funds charge interest (e.g. the rice fund in Ban Lien commune, Lao Cai), while others do not (e.g. Fund of the production group in Phuoc Dai commune, Ninh Thuan). Few households fail to repay the loans (Box 13).

Box 13. Community Funds provide interest-free loans for social security purposes

Rice and cash funds in Doi 1 village (Ban Lien commune, Lao Cai) – Tay ethnicity

Newly formed households in Doi 1 village contributed 15kg of rice to the fund. This fund helped the poor during periods of food shortages. The fund has so far accumulated more than 1 ton of rice, allowing 30 households to borrow (every household borrowed 40-50kg and has to pay an interest of 2kg for 10kg borrowed per year, except when the loan was for funeral). In addition, there is a fund of 400,000 dong that is used for urgent loans of about 50,000 – 100,000 dong.

It is simple and convenient for people to borrow rice or money from these funds. The funds are managed strictly and transparently.

Fund of the production group in Ma Hoa village (Phuoc Dai commune, Ninh Thuan), Raglai ethnicity

The production group No. 3 comprises of 60 households, with 1ha of common land for growing maize, green beans, and French beans. Income generated is put into a

group fund. After many years, the fund accumulated seven million dong by 2011. This amount is kept by the group deputy head and used for meeting expenses (tea, water), and for providing loans to households in need (sickness treatment, education expenses for children, etc.). At the moment, most of the fund has been provided as loans to households. The highest loan is 500,000 dong, and the smallest one is 50,000 dong. The amounts lent are recorded in a notebook and communicated to people. Since 2011, the group has allowed one member household to rent the common land. According to the group head, this household did not return money timely (due to crop failure) so the group fund did not increase.

Source: Field notes taken at the sites of Project "Participatory Poverty Monitoring", Oxfam and AAV (2007 - 2012)

There are villages with funds to help poor households or those facing risks. Even though funds are not big (several hundred thousand dong or less per household), it is significant poor households or those with sick members. For example, the fund of Pu Tuu village (Thanh Xuong, Dien Bien) gave 200,000 dong every year to the three poorest households at New Year (Tet).

Shops also provide loans of cash or rice to poor households. In the Van Kieu communities in Xy commune (Quang Tri), people can borrow small amounts of cash from the local shops (from ten to several hundred thousand dong) for their immediate needs or borrow rice for household's meals. Most repay the debt once they have sold tapioca. Better-off households with larger salaries can borrow more. Many poor households have asked their relatives who are better-off to borrow rice or money from shops for them. Everyone participating in a group discussion with the poor Khmer people who do not own production land in Thuy Hoa village, Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) reported borrowing from "shops" when in difficulty. Beside purchasing necessities on credit at reasonable prices, households can also ask for urgent loans of 50,000 -100,000 dong.

---"Being a poor household without production land, we need support from shops very much. We did not sell products to the shop, but only purchased things on credit, and then earned money from renting our labour to return the loan. In case of sickness, we borrowed about 50,000 or 100,000 dong. Shops did not charge interest. This was highly appreciated by us. We are thankful to the shops".

(The poor Khmer group in Thuy Hoa village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

Spiritual encouragement. Many people, especially the poor, like to feel that they "belong" to a certain institution. Many, when in difficulties, appreciate the support of relatives, neighbours, mass organizations, or representatives of village MU. Many poor Khmer in Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune (Tra Vinh) said they received help from temple management, representatives of the San Khum association, and relatives during funerals. This has made them feel good that they were not marginalized.

---"When my husband passed away, the Senior Monk came and prayed. Members of San Khum association also helped with funeral practices, and neighbours did not mind helping me. This made me believe that I would always receive support from neighbours and San Khum".

(TB, a poor household in Soc Chua village, Thuan Hoa commune, Tra Vinh)

Job generation. Family members, relatives, and neighbours often help those close to them participate in job networks. To find jobs in urban areas, ethnic minority people often rely on relatives, or friends who have already got jobs there. The first migrants are important for those that come later (see 3.2 – Promotion of linkage and cooperation).

Members of the same family, households, and neighbours often help each other find work near to home. A person from P'roan O family in Troan O village, Xy commune (Quang Tri) helped most young people in his family (including women) participate in wood carrying earn money.

---“He told me to join in the wood carrying job. All the members of my family, whoever is strong enough, have joined this job. Other people in my village also wanted to join. He allowed me to borrow money to cover expenses for my wife and my children. When I get paid, I will return to him”.

(H.V.M, a poor Van Kieu household in Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

Risk prevention and climate change adaptation. Village rules on community forest protection are important ways to manage risk and the impact of climate change. According to the perception of Van Kieu people in Xy commune (Quang Tri), holy forests, ghost forests, and watershed forests are the old ones locating at the riverhead, with many century-old trees as well as precious animals. These are also place of many spirits and gods. Hence, people are not allowed to cut trees, clear forests for making farms, burn fires, hunt animals, leave cows and buffaloes unbridled, sell, or privatize the land. Those who violate the laws will be fined buffaloes, or pigs and chicken. According to Y Thi (2011), traditional rules have contributed to protecting forests and land, especially watershed forests; and to limiting deforestation. Experiences in Xy commune (Quang Tri) showed that rules on forest protection are strictly followed. Community members don't dare to cut trees as they are afraid of gods and spirits. When working on the farms that are near the holy and ghost forests people are careful with fire so that forests will not burn. These rules are passed down from generation to generation.

--- “There has been nobody who dared to cut trees in the ghost forests, even though big trees are there. If you dared to cut trees there, gods will not only fine you, but everybody in your village will have to die. If you don't worship, gods will not give you anything to eat”.

(The Van Kieu poor group in Troan O village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)

--- “Ghost forests are for worship, not for tree cutting. When working on the farm, you should be careful. If you cut trees there, you will get mad. We will tell our children generation about this and they will not destroy forests”.

(Core group of Van Kieu ethnicity in Xy La village, Xy commune, Quang Tri)



Part 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

All institutions work together at the study sites. Although many are weaker than they once were traditional and unofficial institutions still play an important role improving people's lives and reducing poverty among ethnic minority communities in Vietnam.

Strong village institutions at the ethnic minority communities play a variety of roles in ethnic minority communities (Table 5).

Table 5. Summary of good practices of village institutions at the study sites

Roles	Dien Bien	Quang Tri	Dak Lak	Tra Vinh
Promotion of pioneering and disseminating information	<i>Extended family Relationship with various ethnicities</i>	<i>Labour exchange Family Agreeable marriage</i>	Extension <i>Labour exchange Family Reputable people in the community Spiritual and religious activities</i>	Extension <i>Extended family Reputable people in the community Spiritual and religious activities</i>
Promotion of linkages and cooperation	Cooperative <i>Credit groups</i>	Enterprises <i>Shops Credit groups Inter-village relationship</i>	Enterprises <i>Shops, agents</i>	Enterprises <i>Shops, agents Credit groups Social network</i>
Promotion of voice and accountability	Village heads Village rules <i>Public opinions</i>	Village heads <i>Public opinions Village notables</i>	Village heads <i>Reputable people in the community</i>	Village heads Community monitoring committee <i>Temples Public opinions</i>
Promotion of participation and empowerment	Village heads Women Union	Women Union Village heads <i>Village notables Village healers</i>	Village heads	Village heads Women Union <i>Temples</i>
Conservation and development of and culture	Village MU <i>Village notables Public opinions</i>	<i>Village notables Customs and traditions Public opinions</i>	<i>Public opinions Reputable people in the community</i>	<i>Temples Reputable people in the community</i>
Promotion of community-based social security	Women Union Village rules <i>Family Families/extended family Neighbour relationship</i>	Village MU Fatherland Front <i>Family Families Neighbour relationship Shops Village notables</i>	Fatherland Front Village MU <i>Extended family Family Neighbour relationship Shops, agents</i>	<i>San Khum association Temples Family Extended family Shops, agents</i>

Note: Official institutions are marked in red/straight. Traditional/unofficial institutions are marked in blue/Italic.

Promotion of pioneering and spreading. Traditional institutions can support local pioneers. Village institutions help pioneers influence other community members. Timely and practical

assistance from agriculture extension systems and programmes, based on the “farmer to farmer” method, can be effective.

Promotion of linkages and cooperation. Effective cooperatives may bring benefits to their members. Semi-official and unofficial groups are an important base for the poor. Some enterprises act as agents that help ethnic minority people access markets. The relationship between local people and shops/agents is a popular unofficial institution. Shops and agents also provide technical and market information to local people.

Promotion of voice and accountability. Both official and unofficial institutions help improve transparency, particularly when the village head plays the most important role. Initiatives that combine official and unofficial institutions are particularly effective. Official institutions help to resolve local civil conflicts. Unofficial institutions help monitor and provide feedback from programmes and projects.

Promotion of participation and empowerment. Combination of the social and cultural self-management function and economic organizing and operating function has led to the success of village heads in people’s participation and empowerment. Mass organizations whose activities are linked with people’s needs have attracted a high number of members. The unofficial institutions maximized their role in promoting participation and empowerment through cooperation with the official institutions for implementing community initiatives. It should be noted that the role of village institutions in promoting participation and empowerment have been maximized through the mechanism of package investment decentralization (Commune/Community Development Fund, CDF) for small-scale projects (livelihoods or infrastructure supports) linked with participatory socio-economic planning and capacity building in financial management.

Conservation and development of ethnicity cultural characteristics. Village heads, notables, and traditional institutions are still important for natural resource management in some ethnic minority communities. Some villages have mobilized people for effective forest protection. Some organizations and individuals have been actively helping to conserve and develop indigenous knowledge and culture. This is an important way to sustain “social capital”, creating opportunities for the poor to participate in community activities. It is also a type of unofficial “safety net” for the poor.

Promotion of community-based social security. Labour exchange is a popular means of support in many ethnic minority communities. Familial institutions help care for elderly people, orphans, and disable people. Common funds available in some villages can support poor households. Some unofficial cooperative forms, such as the San Khum association in the Khmer community, are also effective. Families also help family members participate in job networks. Village rules concerning community forest protection can help manage risks and climate change.

4.2. Recommendations

This research provides the following recommendations for policy dialogues on strengthening sustainable development and poverty reduction in the ethnic minority communities of Vietnam (following the recommendations mentioned in the report on “poverty reduction models” of Oxfam and AAV, 2013):

1. Local governance reform should focus on forming and strengthening village institutions in ethnic minority communities in order to encourage sustainable poverty reduction and socio-economic development. The development of village institutions needs to be in harmony with institutional reforms from communal level upwards in order to raise people's voice and the accountability of the local authorities and public service agencies.
2. Systematically review official and unofficial and traditional institutions at the village level in ethnic minority communities, and reduce ineffective official institutions. Flexibly combine laws and customs when developing village rules and regulations. Pay attention to the policy of merging the village head's functions in social, cultural self-managing and economic organization and coordination. Replace the form of "fixed election" of a reputable person (as regulated in the Decision No. 18/2011/QĐ-TTg) by rewarding reputable people annually elected by the communities.
3. Create a harmonized legal basis (in the Land Law, Civil Code, and related legal documents) in order to promote the role of village institutions in management and use of natural resources, according to traditions of ethnic minority groups. This will in turn contribute to maintaining the living space, cultural characteristics, and healthy spiritual practices of ethnic minority groups. Implementation of projects/programmes (including the programme of new rural development) in every village needs proper planning, with an appropriate route map and specific solutions to ensure a minimum land area for production activities, land for public benefits, forest land allocation to communities, water resources and common areas for animal farming.
4. Wide application of the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach in the poverty reduction and development programmes for ethnic minority villages. This will enable people to work together and support each other and link local activities with external support. Creating a harmonized reform policy to promote economic-linked institutions that benefit poor ethnic minority people. For example, new cooperatives, linkages between farmers and enterprises based on commodities and social enterprises.
5. Institutionalization and wide replication of the in-depth package investment model to village and commune levels (Commune/Community Development Fund (CDF) model) in poverty reduction and development programmes in ethnic minority areas. This goes together with continuous and strong support for capacity building in participatory socio-economic planning, financial management and community-based monitoring.
6. Increasing resources and reforming investment structures in agriculture extension activities in ethnic minority communities. Attention should be paid to development and strengthening of capable local extension workers. Wide application of agriculture extension through farmers' field schools (FFS), and the "from farmer to farmer" method. Sufficient budget should be allocated for at least two to three years after the closure of "agriculture extension" and "livelihood" models in ethnic minority communities. This

will help sustain and replicate good practice and effective indigenous knowledge communicated by pioneers to the poor through village institutions.

7. Development of policies to encourage and replicate existing community-based social security models at ethnic minority villages, with specific attention paid to the role of unofficial institutions for risk prevention and self-secured purposes (for example, village funds, community funds, extended family linkages, community groups, economic, cultural and spiritual groups.). Conducting research and development of policies to support ethnic minority people from difficult mountainous

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NOTES

ⁱThe term “ethnicity” in this research means a group of ethnic people. The term “ethnic minorities” referred to all the ethnicities who are not Kinh people, the majority in Vietnam. The term “ethnic minority community” describes a social group of different ethnic people living in the same environment and possessing common interests. In this research, it can be understood as the ethnic minorities living in the same village.

ⁱⁱOrganization and operation of village as a community self-managed entity was restored since the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s. Village rule was temporarily stipulated (for the mountainous commune) at the Decision No. 164/TCCP-CCVC dated 29 June 1995 by the Minister, Head of the Government’s Organization and Personnel Department. Village rule has been then officialized throughout the country with Decision No. 13/2002/QĐ-BNV dated 6th December 2002 by the Minister of Home Affairs, and recently has been changed into Circular No. 04/2012/TT-BNV dated 31 August 2012 of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

ⁱⁱⁱThe book *“Communes and villages in Vietnam”* by Nguyen Hong Phong (1959) mentioned the most basic issues of rural areas in Vietnam, i.e. land ownership, patriarchy regime, classes and commune and village administration, community coherence in the communes and villages, organization and implementation of community activities.

The two important works of *“Vietnam rural areas in history”*, volumes I and II (1977, 1978) combined articles about communes and villages of various authors from and outside of the Institute of History. The articles mentioned the organization structure and operation of Vietnamese villages under a diachronic and synchronic view.

Tran Tu (Nguyen Duc Te Chi) has announced research about *“Organization structure of traditional villages in the north of Vietnam”* (1984). This has been considered a complete comprehensive work about the organization structure of Vietnamese northern traditional villages. The research confirmed that there are always unofficial institutions existing in the Vietnamese village together with the official ones. The unofficial institutions do not belong to the State’s administrative system, but integrated in the villages and operated based on specific rules of every institution, creating adherence among the members.

The book *“Thai people in the northwest upland region of Vietnam”* (1978) touched many aspects in the life of Thai people in the northwest region, including the concern in village (“ban”) organization that was based on 3 main relationships: between villages (“ban” and “muong” – a combination of various villages); among families; and between families and land areas.

During the 60s of XX century, the doctoral dissertation in ethnology of Anna de Hauteclocque Howe (French) “Matriarchal society of E De people” has presented about the traditional social institution in the villages of E De people with various parameters such as power, customs, clan.

A doctoral dissertation on *“Commune types of Khmer people in the Mekong Delta areas”* by Nguyen Khac Canh (1997) was one of the rare instances of research on local institutions of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta areas. This work mentioned about structure, social relationship among the Phum (a type of people living area), kinship, marital and family,

community activities, functions of Soc (an area of several Phum), socio-economic basis of Soc, operating mechanism of society management structure, community awareness, etc.

^{iv} The research on “Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index” (PAPI): Measuring citizens’ experiences” conducted annually since 2009 by the Center for Community Support Development Studies (CECODES) in cooperation with the Front Magazine of the National Fatherland Front Committee of Vietnam, People volunteer Committee of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, and UNDP. The 2011 PAPI was calculated based on the quantitative survey with 13,642 households from all 63 provinces/cities, following 6 “contents”, i.e.: strengthening people’s participation, ensure information transparency, accountability, corruption control, administrative procedure reform, and public service supply (CECODES 2012).

The report on “Vietnam Development Report 2010 - Modern Institution” provided research findings on governance issues in Vietnam, including local governance based on the Governance module with data from the 2008 VHLSS. This report has analyzed issues about decentralization, land use and planning at local level (WB 2009).

^v Project “Participatory poverty monitoring” carried out by Oxfam and AAV from 2007-2013, funded by The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) from 2009 – 2010 and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) from 2010 - 2013.

^{vi} In this research, the word “village” is used to describe the local social unit in different rural areas of Vietnam that can be named in various ways in the Vietnamese language, including “lang”, “ban”, “thon”, “ap”, “buon”, “bon”, “plei”, “palei”. etc.

^{vii} “Social institutions” can be considered “rules of the game” to adjust behaviours in the communities. The social institutions often adhered to “social groups/organizations” who are implementer or under the impacts of social institutions. For example, when mentioning about “village notables” or “village head”, it referred to the behavioural norms that linked with the role and functions of the village notables and heads for operating/organizing and controlling/monitoring community activities.

^{viii} Information taken from other localities than the study sites in Dien Bien, Quang Tri, Dak Lak, and Tra Vinh is separately noted.

^{ix} In Khmer language, “phum” means “garden”. There are often 4-5 households living in such a “garden” who shared a blood-line of their mothers. “Me phum” is the oldest son-in-law of the upper clan. He is also the one with many production experiences and reputable to family line. “Me phum” is organizing the common activities of every “phum”.

^x A “soc” in the Khmer community is formed by different “phum”. “Soc” is one type of rural commune, being people’s traditional residence place, mostly based on the neighbour relationship. “Soc” is self-formulated and owned a high level of self-governance. “Me soc” is elected from “me phum”. “Me soc” is also a mature man, with production experiences and respected by other people. “Me soc” is responsible for organizing activities in “Soc”.

^{xi} “Vel” is a small population unit under the Khmer villages, equivalent to “group” in the villages of Kinh people. A village of 200-300 households may divide into 4-7 vel depending on the population distribution.

^{xii} According to the Family and Marriage Law, husband and wife have equal rights to own, use, and determine common assets; after a husband or wife has passed away without a will,

the other will be the owner of a half of common assets and can inherit a part of the remained half together with his/her children.

^{xiii} Roles of the village institutions in poverty reduction can be analyzed based on the “power framework” that included 4 main roles as follows:

- “Power “over”: regulate, control and force based on the rules and regulation (official and unofficial)
- “Power “within”: increase confidence, awareness, motivation and activeness to take action
- “Power “to”: increase ability and capacity (knowledge, skills) to act and implement rights of community members
- “Power “with”: link, unite, cooperate for collective action

^{xiv} Monk (“Ong Luc”) means the monk (the person practicing religion) in the Theravada Buddhism temples of Khmer people. The Senior Monk is referred to as “Ong Ca” or “Thay Ca”.

^{xv} Every family line has its head who is the representative of the highest level. According to local customs, village heads often elected from the heads of family lines.

^{xvi} Election of village head is organized as regulated by the current laws. The candidate with most votes from households will become village head after obtaining acceptance by the Commune authorities.



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