

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF VIETNAMESE SEDENTARIZATION PROGRAM AND ITS PRACTICE IN HUONG NGUYEN COMMUNE

This chapter focuses on analyzing the background of the Vietnamese Sedentarization program and overview of the process of implementation of the program in Thue Thien Hue Province. It also presents the practice of the program in Giong village of Huong Nguyen commune. At the same time, it illustrates the process of marginalization and the feelings of the Cotu people after they are displaced to new locations following the program of Sedentarization.

4.1 Vietnamese Sedentarization Program

4.1.1 Background of the Program on Sedentarization in Vietnam

In Vietnam, the Sedentarization program is referred to as fixed cultivation and settlement, implying that among minorities both cultivation and settlement are not fixed (Salemink, 2000). This is a significant program of the Vietnamese government that has been designed and implemented more specifically for ethnic minorities in the upland areas (based on the Resolution 38/CP, 1968).

With shifting cultivation practices seen as “backward,” “nomadic,” and blamed for deforestation and environmental degradation, the Sedentarization was one of the government’s attempts in order to assist ethnic minorities stabilize their cultivation and settlement patterns and receive benefit from social services while protecting forests at the same time.

The objectives of Sedentarization are both economic and social. In this program, the state is involved in creating conditions for ethnic minorities living in the upland areas such as building house and other infrastructure services (roads, electricity, and schools) for new settlements; allocating cultivated land; introducing new technology and cultivation methods; and supplying capital and high yield varieties and so on to upland farmers. Therefore, Rambo (1995) asserts that:

Sedentarization has been considered to be one of the most important steps in poverty reduction and hunger elimination in the upland regions. At the same time, the program sought to address twin goals of protecting watershed forests allegedly at risk of being destroyed by the highlanders while improving national defense by relocating ethnic minorities from isolated and sensitive border areas to regions under government control.

(Rambo, 1995).

The Sedentarization program targeted about 200 highland districts in 24 provinces of Vietnam as having swiddeners who need resettling (McElwee, 1999). The program works through Districts People's Committee and adopts a project approach to settlement; master plans are prepared for each district by teams from the provincial and district agriculture and forestry departments. Once an area is selected as a resettlement site, the Sedentarization is quasi-voluntary, with a new village in a designated area provided by the state as incentive for moving. In these new villages, the newcomers' houses are often constructed to look like lowland Vietnamese settlement, with individual tin and brick houses replacing traditional longhouses or communal dwellings and stilt homes, and the layout of villages usually consisting of individual plots of land rather than any collective or community-held land (McElwee, 1999). Depending on the socioeconomic and political situation of each historical period of Vietnam, the Sedentarization program has had differently targets and criterions as well as the implementation process. Generally, the implementation process of the program was divided into three periods (Dang, 1996).

(i) The Period from 1968 - 1970

The program was mainly deployed in the northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam. It concentrated on the ethnic minorities living in the remote areas of Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Tuyen Quang, and Son La. In this period, the implementation process of the program was to establish propaganda for the shifting cultivators and develop pilot programs in some villages or communities of the ethnic groups living because of cultivating poppy or shifting cultivation in the high mountainous areas and the border between China and Vietnam, such as: the Dao and the Hmong. The Sedentarization program aimed to stabilize life as well as morale of the shifting cultivators, limit the poppy cultivation and unite among ethnic groups living in the same area in order to ensure independence and territorial integrity to the nation.

(ii) The Period from 1971 - 1990

The Sedentarization program was expanded to cover most mountainous provinces, districts and communes of the country. Together with creating propaganda for the shifting cultivators, establishing material facilities for stable production of shifting cultivators was carried out such as: reclaiming terraced fields and permanent upland fields, building paddy fields, constructing irrigation system, planting industrial trees, afforestation as well as developing breeding. At the same time, the Sedentarization program also invested in infrastructure and social welfare services, for example, building schools, Commission Offices, local medical station, running water system, and reconstructing villages for local people.

Before 1979 (before the border war in the Northern Vietnam), the Sedentarization program was rashly and broadly implemented in over the country, but it did not produce the desired effects.

From 1979 to 1990, the task of fixed cultivation and settlement was co-ordinated with the national security and stabilization of material and mental life for the people who were living in the border areas. In this period, the Sedentarization program concentrated specifically on the core communities in the border areas.

(iii) The Period from 1991 - the present

The task of fixed cultivation and settlement in this period has been implemented following the projects in 34 provinces, 186 districts including 136,000 households with a total of 445 projects. The total of investable capital reach about 120,000 million of VND. Each commune has become a unit of a fixed cultivation and settlement project and each project has finished in 3 - 5 years.

Aside from reorganizing production activities, upgrading and constructing infrastructures and public services, it aimed to stabilize the life of local people, protecting and managing forest has been considered as one of the main targets of the fixed cultivation and settlement project. After more than 30 years fulfilling program, about 3.1 million people of different ethnic minorities in nearly 2,000 villages have been asked to settle into sedentary lives. But only 660,000 of them have done so. The program has shown weak results: nearly 2.5 million people still live in nomadic hill tribes. Some households fixed new settlement were even returning to their old

commune to practice traditional swidden in old swidden fields while maintaining a primary residence in the resettled state-built village (McElwee, 1999).

For example, in Lao Cai Province, about 20 percent of the Sedentarization program recipients has settled into fixed residences and fixed cultivation, 43 percent were in fixed residences but continued to swidden, and remaining percentage had no fixed residence or cultivation (McElwee, 1999). In Kon Tum Province, there are still more than 39,000 people living in fixed settlements who practice shifting cultivation, and another 8,500 in shifting settlements practicing shifting cultivation. Fixed settlers are still poor or suffer from hunger. A number of these people have returned to shifting cultivation (ADB, 2002; Salemink, 2000).

Some people assert that the main reasons for the unsatisfactory results of the Sedentarization program are low annual investment in the settlement program, and the tenacity of slash-and burn traditions among ethnic minority peoples. In fact, the failure of the program in somewhere are likely due not just to the tenacity of traditions, but to a number of other reasons. It can be due to imposition of the state on local people.

The program is designed specifically for the local ethnic minorities but it does not fully address their needs. For instance, moving local people to new locations that lack land for their cultivation, land given is usually poor quality, for example, in Lao Cai province bordering China, 70% of the population are ethnic minorities, and 70% of the land is officially classified by the state as consisting of bare hills. In addition, the program does not focus on traditional cultural aspects of ethnic minority life, for example, building brick houses replacing traditional house –“stilted houses”- of ethnic minorities because that would be “more hygienic;” and attempting to introduce new techniques, new species in upland areas to local people without considering their indigenous technical knowledge, and so on (McElwee, 1999; ADB, 2002).

The Sedentarization program has both positive and negative impacts on ethnic minorities. It has dramatically changed the social structure and the traditional cultures of ethnic minority communes. After fulfilling the program of fixed cultivation and Sedentarization, the ethnic minorities have been access to social services such as; health and education, information and other welfare. Many positive cultural changes have taken place and some customs that were proven to be harmful to human health have

been eliminated. However, the program has broken down or weakened the traditional social and cultural structure including system of values, religious beliefs, customary law, languages, and local knowledge; also affected are village intellectuals, the traditional family form, and village organization (ADB, 2002).

After fixed settlement, the ethnic minorities also faced some difficulties. The production of wet rice cultivation is not sufficient to feed the local population while additional cultivation and the collection of timber and non-timber product is not permitted. Cattle breeding have become difficult. Traditionally, the ethnic minorities allow livestock roam in the village, under the traditional houses, on the fallows and in the nearby woods. This has changed with the arrival of in-migrants who do not allow cattle belonging to the others on their fields. Moreover, swiddening is not only strongly discouraged by the authorities, but traditional land rights are not recognized by the authorities. Their land has been lost gradually by new settlers and by the government program. On the other hand, their traditional culture as well as customary law is also gradually changing. For example, “the longhouses are replaced by the Vietnamese - style houses, the cultural activities of community in longhouses are no longer, and the traditional rituals disappear” (Salemink, 2000). With the Cotu people, after displaced to new locations following Sedentarization they have faced many problems (see more in the following section).

4.1.2 The Sedentarization Program in Thua Thien Hue Province

The upland area of Thua Thien Hue province consists of 44 communes located in six Districts: Huong Tra, Huong Thuy, Phong Dien, Phu Loc, A Luoi and Nam Dong. Among which, 29 communes are subjects to the Sedentarization program including 18 out of 20 communes in A Luoi, 7 out of 11 communes in Nam Dong and 4 communes in other districts. Its natural land area is about 3,100 km² occupying 61% of total natural areas of the province. This is a human ecology area with specific characteristics. This includes a watershed protection area with the abundance of wild animals and plants that has not been appropriately developed. It is also a border area of Laos and Vietnam which plays an important role in terms of the national and regional security. In addition, this is a mainly resident area of 35,000 peoples belong five ethnic minority groups, including Cotu, Ta Oi, Pa Hy, Pa Co and Bru-Van Kieu

whose traditional practice is slash and burn cultivation or shifting cultivation (Report of Fixed Cultivation and Settlement Department, 2002).

Therefore, in order to ensure environmental protection and regional security, as well as the stable life of the local people, especially, the ethnic minorities who are shifting cultivators, nomads, or settlers but they practiced shifting cultivation, Thua Thien Hue province started to organize the deployment of the Sedentarization program in 1976 according to the state policy in terms of the fixed cultivation and settlement. This is one of the programs that play the most important role in socio-economic development, the environmental protection and the regional security of Thua Thien Hue and Vietnam.

Based on specific socioeconomic situations of each historical period of the country as well as of the province, the Sedentarization program in Thua Thien Hue has been implemented following two periods.

(i) Before 1990

Thua Thien Hue Provincial standing committee of the Party issued a resolution No. 07 in May 1976 and another one No. 10 in April 1988, related to the implementation of the Sedentarization program in the communities of ethnic minorities in Thua Thien Hue province. In this period, the program was carried out with the guideline “*Nha nuoc va nhan dan cung lam*” (The state and people work together). With the specific situation of the country and of Thua Thien Hue province during that time, the fixed cultivation and settlement program focused on establish propaganda for the ethnic groups, and persuading as well as carefully guiding them in the implementation process aim to step by step change the unstable traditional life’s way into the stable life’s way for them. Moreover, the program also invested in establishing some necessary infrastructures for their community. It could be said that the campaign of fixed cultivation and settlement in the period of before 1990 was conducted with the meaning of a profound and comprehensive revolution over economic, social and political fields that associated with protecting the environment and the national security.

According to the report of Thua Thien Hue Department of Fixed Cultivation and Settlement in 2002, the Sedentarization program was launched in 1976 to 1989,

Thua Thien Hue Province campaigned 28,000 people of 29 communes and of four villages in Thua Thien Hue mountainous areas to take part in the task of fixed cultivation and settlement. As a result, about 14 communes with 17,000 peoples were stabilized and fixed in a new location; many local infrastructures were built to serve production activity and cultural life for the settled people; about 4,000 hectares of farming land was reclaimed and expanded to meet food security needs, many households transferred from the self-sufficient economy based on shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering to the market economy based on intensive and rotational cultivation, diversification of crops and livestock, and so on. The result of this process has contributed to the limitation of deforestation for shifting cultivation, and the improvement of material and mental life of local people living in the settled areas.

However, the program of fixed cultivation and settlement in the period met with some limitations. Due to the implementation process of the program concentrated mainly on propaganda, and the low support of government (about 40,000 VND/ per household) did not meet production requirements, many households thus returned to shifting cultivation.

(ii) The Period from 1991 to present (2004)

In April 1990, after the conference of summarizing the Sedentarization program, the Party and the State promulgated Resolution No. 22 TW and Decision No. 77 HDBT related to the task of fixed cultivation and settlement aim to promote the implementation process and overcome the limitations of the pervious period of the program. The program of fixed cultivation and settlement has been deployed following projects and connected closely with the 372 program related to the forestry protection and management.

Implementing the state and party policy in terms of the Sedentarization program in the new period, since 1991, Thua Thien Hue Provincial people's committee has directed the Fixed Cultivation and Sedentarization Department establish the fixed cultivation and settlement projects for some mountainous commune of the province. In the two years from 1991 - 1992, the fixed cultivation and settlement program of the province invested in constructing the local infrastructures such as: school, medical station and road system for 21 communes and

three villages of A Luoi and Nam Dong districts with total invested capital about 814 million VND.

Since 1993, the Sedentarization program has been strongly deployed following the project in each commune or each village, and expanded on a large scale to the provincial level. Its implementation process has been connected not only with the program 327, but also with other programs such as; the program on supporting poverty alleviation for ethnic minorities, the program of replacing poppy cultivation to planting agricultural crops and other cash crops, and programs to building the center of commune group.

According to the report of Fixed Cultivation and Settlement Department in the end of 2000, there are 29 communes that need to have fixed cultivation and settlement in Thua Thien Hue, basically completing with total of 28,079 persons and 4,752 households. The initial results of the program in this period are more satisfactory than the period of 1990 before. Almost all the ethnic groups that need to be fixed cultivation and settlement feel more secure about their life in the new location. They have gradually changed from the self-suffice economy based on practicing slash and burn cultivation to the multi- dimension oriented economy that include activities of afforestation, forestry protection and management, agricultural cultivation, agroforestry, livestock breeding and so on. They have access to social welfare services such as; school, local hospital, clean water system, and electricity.

Generally, the implementation of the Sedentarization program in Thua Thien Hue is a continuous process succeeded by two periods (the period of 1976 - 1990 and 1991 up to now) and deployed following four various forms. The first is to combine the implementing fixed cultivation and settlement with the establishing co-operatives on the spot of each commune or community. In this way, each co-operative has been considered as a basic unit to reorganize production activities and to be easier for specific managing in each production team of the commune or community.

The second is the fixed cultivation and settlement associated with setting up New Economic Zones. This is the integration between the Kinh people and the ethnic minorities peoples in a certain fixed location aimed to establish new administrative units, as well as set up a new economic area. The target of this program is to bring into play national solidarity between the Kinh people and other ethnic minority groups

in the upland area of Thua Thien Hue, and at the same time to create favorable conditions for the ethnic minorities to access to livelihood activities as well as the life's way of the Kinh people.

The implementation and organization of the fixed cultivation and settlement directly related to forestry enterprises is in its third form. In this form, households are seen as a self-controlling unit; the director of the forestry enterprise is a project manager who has responsibility for land and forestry allocation for each household in order to stabilize production activities, and guides the public works' construction of the community.

The final phase is implementation and organization of fixed cultivation and settlement associated with the border defense. This form is implemented in the border communes, frontier posts. The frontier post has become a project management unit that coordinates with staff of the community in allocating land and forest, planting industrial crops, creating home gardens, developing breeding and afforestation and guiding the local infrastructure construction.

Therefore, based on the specific situations of each commune or community the fixed cultivation and settlement has been deployed following an appropriate form. Among four forms mentioned above, the third and forth forms are applied in Thua Thien Hue in the current period. In these forms, each household is a self-control economic unit managed by the forestry enterprise, the frontier post, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development or Forest Management Enterprise that base on each village to guide constructing the public works and supporting labors. The Sedentarization program practiced in Giong village of Huong Nguyen commune is a specific example of the third forms of the program's implementation process.

4.2 The Program Practice in Giong Village

4.2.1 Implementing Process of the Displacement Following the Program in Giong Village

Giong is the largest village of Huong Nguyen commune and is classified as having special difficulties in Thua Thien Hue province by the state. The main ethnic minority group of Huong Nguyen is Cotu. Formerly, they were concentrated into small villages/ hamlets scattered along the river and stream banks in the upper stream

of the Huong River (see section 3.2.). The life of the local people is very unstable. Production level of weak mainly brings self-sufficing character and completely relies on natural condition. Means of communication and transportation among villages in the commune and adjacent areas are disadvantageous for them. Illiteracy, lack of information and epidemic diseases often damage the life of the local people in this area, which makes their lives being poor by natural become poorer.

Therefore, Provincial People's Committee, and District People Committee of Aluoi collaborated with Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and department of Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement of the province built Fixed Cultivation and Settlement project for the local people of Huong Nguyen commune in 1995. The plan of the project's implementation is five years (from 1996 - 2000). The project was managed directly by A Luoi Forestry Enterprise and Department of fixed cultivation and settlement of A Luoi District, and each household was considered as a self-control economic unit that takes part in the project. The target of project is to move the local people to settle along the highway No.49 and nearby Ta Luong stream, 100km away from their previous dwelling place with have favorable conditions for improving infrastructure and the other social services.

According to the narratives of the elder people and the local authority, the state agencies in Thua Thien Hue province and A Luoi District organized a meeting to inform local authority of Huong Nguyen commune about the content, target as well as implementing strategy of the fixed cultivation and settlement project, and to discuss with the authority specific deploying plan and method of the project in the end of 1995. The local authority then held meetings in the commune to announce the state policy involving the fixed cultivation and settlement for all the local people; simultaneously, to provide propaganda and persuade them respond to the appeal on January 1996. However, all of the local people, especially the elders, reacted against the appeal, they claimed that they could not give up their traditional village where they had to manage to overcome the difficulties and hardships caused by the wars to maintain their stable life.

Confronted by the protest of villagers, the local authority continued to summon group meetings in the each village of the commune to call upon the local people to take part in the fixed cultivation and settlement project. At the same time,

they came to each household to encourage them to move to the new location. With the local authority's efforts, each household representative came to the new location to know the specific situation and to choose the appropriate land to build their house and home gardens, as well as to cultivate farming. Until March 1996, the local people started to move to new location to stabilize their life and production activities as the state's development policies applying to ethnic minority people, the shifting cultivators.

Giong is one of six villages of Huong Nguyen commune; it was the first finish resettlement in the new location. Until April 30 1996, all households of the Giong were displaced to the new location. Each household was provided twenty pieces of sheet iron to construct a roof for their house and enough rice for their family to eat for six months from the beginning of displacement. Moreover, each household was allocated about 1,000 - 2,000 square meters' residential land and home gardens, and they were also supplied with fertilizer, pesticides, high-yield crops' varieties and livestock, and trained in new breeding and cultivation techniques in order to step by step stabilize production activities.

Swidden and wet rice cultivation have become the main livelihood activities of the Cotu peoples. Activities like animal raising, gardening, afforestation, and forest protection are practiced, while at the same time, the traditional activities like shifting cultivation, hunting, trapping, gathering natural products, extracting non-timber forest products are also maintained in the Cotu community after resettlement. However, these activities have not yet satisfied their daily consumer demands because income and resources gained from such activities remains fairly low. The reasons causing low income in livelihood activities can be due to a lack of experience and knowledge in applying new technology and methods in terms of agricultural cultivation and livestock breeding, limited access to good cultivation land and capital, changing ecological and political environment, and prohibiting the local peoples' practice of traditional activities by state authorities.

Together with such difficulties of livelihood activities, the Cotu people have also been controlled by the state in terms of economic, social and political aspects. This makes the local people become powerless and dependent on the external interventions, and cultural characters of their ethnicity as well as their identity.

Therefore, it can be said that the Sedentarization program also caused marginalization for Giong villagers. This issue is illustrated in the following sections.

4.2.2 Marginalization of the Cotu People in Giong Village After Resettlement in the New Location

As discussed in the chapter III, formerly the Cotu people in Giong village had experienced immigrations to many places due to the changes in situation and condition, but they normally lived in small villages scattered along the river and stream banks in the upper stream of the Huong River. Their livelihood activities relied completely on forest resources. Therefore, the Sedentarization program, which was launched for the Cotu people of Huong Nguyen generally and Giong village particularly in 1995, aimed to improve the life of the villagers who were considered as “backward,” “nomadic,” and “deforestation” by displacing the villagers from the traditional village to new location near the road that create favorable conditions for travel and for setting up the local infrastructure and the other social services.

In fact, in the new location the Cotu people have to suffer from the difficulties in their livelihood activities. Their traditional practices like slash and burn cultivation, hunting, and logging have been prohibited. Their current livelihood activities have been governed by the state. The state not only controls the ownership of land of the villagers, but also directed their livelihood activities through supporting capital and new technology, finding the consumer market for the village. This means that the villagers are increasingly dependent on the intervention of the state. Their roles of decision-making in terms of their life have been gradually overshadowed. Therefore, it can be said that the Sedentarization program also brings about marginalization for the villagers.

The marginalized situation of the Cotu villagers in the new location is displayed under different aspects, such as; declining right of access to natural resources, depending more on the intervention of the state, increasing poverty situation, ignoring indigenous knowledge and changing the traditional social structure of the Giong village.

4.2.2.1 Declining Rights of Access to Natural Resources

In the past, when the Cotu people lived in remote areas, the forest was considered open access and everyone was freely appropriated its resource for practicing cultivation in the areas they chose and for supplying food source.

Some important dimension in the traditional cultivation activities was selecting plots and setting up ownership of the plots to cultivation. Normally, the Cotu people went into forest in order to find good land for setting up the swidden plots, and they used “*Chi rông*” in order to determine their ownership of the plots they chose. If a plot had “*Chi rông*” that means the plot belong to a certain people and the other people were not allowed to cultivate on the same plot. The owner would cultivate in the plot for three years and moved to other plots in order to let the former plot be regenerated. After about five to seven years, he could return to his former plot and cultivate again. If he found other plots that were better than the former plot, he could cultivate in the new plots and left the former plot regenerate. He could let other families to cultivate in their former plot if those families asked for it.

As described in the chapter III, however, some plots of the traditional village were not allowed to be appropriated due to private purposes. Those plots are communally owned and met the community activities, such as; the sacred forest, the spirit forest and so on. Therefore, it could be said that forestland in the traditional village was managed at two levels: village and family. The village controlled the general area and the graveyard forests. Meanwhile, the family owned as many plots as possible, but they were allowed to own only those plots that belonged to their village and that were not used by anyone. This was the prevailing principle in the village.

After displaced to the new location, all forest and forestland is controlled by the state; the state has only allowed the Cotu people to reclaim for cultivation on the small fixed land areas and determined their land ownership on the areas. Almost all practices related to the land areas of the villagers have been adopted by the local authorities. The traditional practices of the villagers such as shifting cultivation, hunting and logging have been considered as illegal activities. The villagers have to transfer from shifting cultivation in a large scale into fixed cultivation on a limited scale, reforestation and forest protection under the direction of the local authorities

following the target of the Sedentarization program. This proved that the local people not only became increasingly powerless in terms of decision-making in their livelihood activities, but also lose gradually the right of access to natural resource.

Some villagers complained that formerly they could considerable land for swidden cultivation, at least three or five plots (about 1 - 1.5 hectares) for cultivation in a year, and they could cultivate and collect other forest products whenever and wherever in their community scale. But, at present, their land cultivation area is small, one family owns 1,000 - 2,000 m² home garden and house, 1,000 - 1,500 m² paddy field and 1,500 - 2,000 m² swidden land but this land is planed for reforestation and planting rubber.

According to their opinions, the cultivation land in the new location is not good and limited, productivity of products created from cultivation activities is low and not enough for family consumption, but they can not legally come back the forest to slash and burn cultivation, hunting or trapping because of the state's prohibition. Moreover, the gathering forest products are more difficult because the forest is very far away from their dwelling place.

4.2.2.2 Dependency of the Local People on the Outside Intervention

With the strategy of the Sedentarization program to improve the life of the ethnic groups and to protect forest resources, the state has intervened in their economic, cultural, and social life. The state has laid out a policy integrating the ethnic groups into the economic and social life of the larger society by displacing them from remote areas to settle near the dwelling place of the Kinh people, gradually replacing the traditional cultivation practice with new cultivation ones, and universalizing knowledge and new technology for cultivation practice. These interventions have brought about significant change for the local people's life, such as change of livelihood, the way of life, culture and education, etc. However, one of serious changes of those interventions is the dependency of the villagers on the state. This is seen clearly by the displaced villagers like the Cotu people of Giong village.

Aside from arranged dwelling places and allocated utilized land by the state authorities (as mentioned in section 4.2.1), the local people also rely on other

interventions relating to their livelihood activities from government agencies. Through some government programs such as Fixed Agriculture and Sedentarization, Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction programs, the state authorities help the local people in building hill-garden, home-garden, fishpond, wet rice cultivation, etc.

The authorities of Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) or Provincial Center of Agriculture Extension have held training courses to transfer new planting and raising techniques to the villagers. They also have provided wet rice varieties; some fruit-tree seedlings, such as mango, sapodillas, custard-apple, pineapple, orange, lemon, and mandarin; fertilizers and insecticides; as well as other veterinary services.

Besides, some credit programs are being implemented in the Giong village such as programs such as Fixed Agriculture and Sedentarization, Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction programs, and upland projects funded by Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry, which mainly provide capital for developing commercial garden and cattle-raising and poultry. The programs include funds from the Fixed Agriculture and Sedentarisation Program, Fund for alleviation of poverty and eradication of hunger program, Fund for employment generation, Agricultural Credit, Direct loans of the Agricultural Development Bank and The Bank for the Poor. These credit sources are available through the social organizations of the commune, such as the Farmers' Association, the Veteran's Association, and the Women's Union.

With this support and intervention, together with the limited rights of access to forest resources as mentioned above, the Giong villagers have lost gradually their initiative in practicing livelihood activities. For example, in present years, the state authorities have encouraged the Giong villagers planting rubber trees following the project of alleviation of poverty and eradication of hunger for ethnic group living upland area. Almost all households in the village have used their swidden land and deployed some other allowed land areas to plant the tree thank to the capital lending of the state bank. Following an agreement between the state and the villagers, the state has lent money to the villagers, supported technology in terms of planting, caring and harvesting the rubber tree, and purchase the product from the activity. Conversely, the villagers have to give their land ownership certification as security for the loan and sell the product harvested for the state to pay the loan. Problems that need to be

addressed here are how the rubber tree plantation's program influence the long term livelihood of the villagers and whether economic effect gained from rubber plantation can ensure sustainability of livelihood of the village meanwhile they have used total swidden land to plant that tree and depended on the support of the state like providing capital, technology and consuming their product. The villagers always worry about the debt they borrowed from the state bank because they don't know how the effect of the planting rubber tree. They also worry about the lack of land to cultivate farming when all swidden land is used to plant the rubber tree.

Another issue influencing the long-term livelihood of the villagers is consumer market of the product created from planting fruit tree. Some households have invested capital and trained technology for planting fruit trees in their home gardens, but they can not gain profit from production activity because they no access to the consumer market. Almost all products created from fruit trees' plantation cannot be sold or sold with a limited amount. The case of Mr. Pham Ngoc Sau household is one of the households that has suffered from consuming fruits. On one occasion that I visited his household, he asserted that:

Following the encouragement of the authorities of DARD and of Provincial Center of Agriculture Extension, my family invested in planting 5,000 m² fruit trees including mango, sapodillas, pineapple, persimmon, orange and banana. In two years recently, my family could harvest much fruits from those plants, but unluckily, I have not known where and who I could sell them because almost all households in the village have planted those trees. Members in my family could not consume them in the short time. Therefore, sometimes, I don't want to harvest them. It is very wasteful but I don't know how to deal with that issue...

(Pham Ngoc Sau, 60 year olds).

4.2.2.3 Poverty situation

When discussing poverty, there have been several different conceptions of poverty depending on its cause or its measure as well as context specific. Some social researchers are based on income and consumption measures, others focus on the satisfaction of basic needs such as capital, food, labour, and health, and so on to identify poverty as well as measure it. Especially, in recent years, there has been a shift away from a narrow understanding of poverty (as measured by income or consumption) to seeing poverty as one aspect of wider concepts such as well-being or deprivation.

Generally, poverty is tied to a lack of access to productive resources, physical goods and income, which results in individual and/or group deprivation. Besides, poverty is connected very closely with vulnerability and powerlessness: ethnic minorities in the remote mountain areas, people in the disaster-prone areas, laid-off workers from the state-owned enterprises, single-headed households, victims of the war, and landless workers in the south. This has various manifestations including hunger and malnutrition, ill health, and limited or no access to education, health care, and safe housing and (paid) work environments. It also includes experiences of economic, political and social discrimination.

In the mountain areas, poverty is relatively homogeneous in the community, and is largely related to the overall difficult conditions in which people live. In many areas, they have gone through major changes in their production system, from shifting cultivation to fixed cultivation. This puts them in a vulnerable situation, as their traditional knowledge with regard to cultivation, the spreading of risk and adaptation to the environment is no longer valid. The transformation to fixed cultivation is constrained by poor infrastructure and remoteness from district and provincial centers, services and markets.

In the context of the Giong village, poverty has been acknowledged by the villagers following the criteria of income, basic needs such as capital, food, labour, and health, and stable level of house. According to primary data supplemented by direct observation, the Giong village presently has 37 poor and very poor households occupy about 75.5% among total households of the village (see more in section 5.1.2.4); malnutrition rate among children is rather high, about 27 percent in 2004; the nutritional level of the village is still very low. The meals in most households lack adequate nutrition, especially protein, for children. This problem is caused not only by the lack of food, but also due to the lack of knowledge of the parents. In addition, the primary data show that most the Cotu people of Giong village have stomach problems in the new location. The major cause of the stomach problems asserted by some villagers is the source of water poisoned by dioxin brought from the war.

Some ideas of the villagers contend that in the past they did not worry about the lack of food, lack of meat and fish, and they did not have stomach problem as in the present. On the contrary, at the present they have to suffer from the lack of food for

daily consumption, the lack of land and capital for new production activities, the unfamiliarity with new cultivation techniques, the limitation of rights of access to natural resources, the dependency on the intervention of the state, and from the stomachache, etc. Therefore, they have not yet got out of the poverty situation in the new location.

4.2.2.4 Marginalization of Local Knowledge and Identity

Local knowledge or indigenous knowledge is non-school knowledge. It is accumulated, developed and passed from one generation to another through a long process of activities to meet their daily life. Local knowledge often expresses the harmonic relations between human being and environment and is imbedded in community practices, institution, relationship and rituals. Therefore, each of community or group has a specific local knowledge system depending on their livelihood practices, rituals, and institution as well as social relation, etc.

Regarding the Cotu people, as mentioned elsewhere, their life relied completely on natural resources with tradition of shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering. So they accumulated the specific local knowledge concerning swidden cultivation on the hillside and forest resource utilization through their real experience and their beliefs. However, from the outsiders' point of view, especially state authorities, shifting cultivators and their farming system have been blamed for conducting "destructive activities" in the forests. Moreover, techniques and tools used in their cultivation practice have been considered as "backward." Therefore, implementing Sedentarization program for the Cotu people of Giong village in particular and of Huong Nguyen commune has aimed to stop practicing slash and burn cultivation in order to protect watershed of Bo River. This means that the local knowledge of the Cotu people have been marginalized somewhat in their new location.

For instance, planting new varieties to replace traditional varieties of some crops had caused unsatisfactoriness of the Giong villagers. Some villagers showed that some varieties of traditional corn (*ngo nep*), cassava (*san mi*) and dry rice (*nep than*) with their soft and sweet-smelling characteristic, and good stand capacity against unfavorable conditions of the environment, that they like so much are no

longer available. Those varieties have been replaced by new varieties with high productivities and short planting time. However, the villagers do not like them so much because the varieties do not have the characteristics as the traditional varieties. For example, the “three-month-cassava” variety has given high yield and can harvest in the short time but the villager don’t like to plant it because the store is difficult and it is not soft and has a bitter taste. According to the villagers, the productivities of those traditional varieties have been lower than new varieties because of a lack of proper care, and the new varieties will give low yield if they are not tended carefully.

Aside some traditional varieties that have been gradually lost in oblivion, the fallow time in practicing swidden cultivation is very short or non existent, and shifting cultivation practice are prohibited, while rotational cultivation is replaced by intensive cultivation and polycultivation and so on that have influenced fertility of the soil and productivity of the crops. Especially, at present, swidden land has been gradually used to plant rubber trees, so the swidden cultivation activity of the villagers can disappear gradually in the new location. Therefore, it can be said that the local knowledge of the Giong villagers has been ignored when they have settled in the new location.

Together with the denigration of local knowledge, the identity of the Cotu people has been undermined. When moved to the new location, the Cotu people start to integrate into the ways of life of the Kinh people. They study Kinh’s language (Vietnamese language), wear clothes that look like the Kinh, build their house similar to Kinh’s house, familiarize with new livelihood activities like wet rice cultivation, home garden, and so on. This leads the decline of traditional cultural characteristics of the villagers. For instance, Cotu writing is no longer used in the their community, houses on stilts are replaced by the Vietnamese style houses, traditional dress style exist in a few old women, custom of acknowledging mature age of the youth also no longer practiced.

The process of marginalization of the Cotu people is expressed not only through declining rights of access to natural resources, depending more on the intervention of the state, increasing poverty situation, ignoring indigenous knowledge, losing the identity but also through changing the traditional institution.

4.2.2.5 Change of the Function of the Cotu Traditional Institution

In the past, the Cotu society was ruled and managed by a self-governing apparatus that included a council of the village elders (*P'taha*) consisted of a traditional village head called *Takoh Vêêl*, and the assistants of the *Takoh Vêêl* like: *Abhô Yang/ Xrâm/ Manri ve Yang* (the sorcerer), *Takoh Kabhuh* (the patriarch), *Cavan* (the richer), *Manríh Papráq bhmã* (the arguer), *Takoh takop Wêêl* (the military leader). However, after resettlement in the new location following the Sedentarization program, this apparatus seems to be invalid, instead of the state organizations, such as the People's Council and the People's Committee of the commune, farmers' association, Front's Organization, Communist Youth Union, Veterans' organization, Elder Association and Women's Union, and the role of *Takoh Vêêl* and the other village elders have gradually decreased.

Several old villagers claimed that they are now living in a new situation in which their village is controlled by state authorities. They have to follow state law and policies; traditional rules of their village have not been strictly implemented. According to the authorities' criteria, village leaders must be able to read and write Vietnamese. In addition, village leaders are normally appointed by the commune and District, the village leaders that are selected are mostly young people, so the role of village elders is no longer respected and has become recognized.

When interviewed about the role of the *Takoh Vêêl*, most of the villagers stated: "In the traditional village, *Takoh Vêêl* was considered as a founder of the village and the most powerful person in the village. He played an important role for organizing the Cotu together and managing them, and for solving problems related to resource use and management in the village scale. However, his role has currently not been recognized clearly; he is no longer a person who can deal with or control what happens in his community; and his voice become less powerful in the village" (interview in the village meeting on 12th November).

For those reasons, *Takoh Vêêl* has gradually changed his view about his position. He confined his view to me when I visited his family on December 15th 2004: "We villagers have currently been controlled by the state and party; land and forest now belong to them. So we have to follow what the state and the party requires us to

do.” Similarly, the role of village elders has become invisible in the current Cotu society. Some villagers showed that the village elders had an important position in the traditional village; they had represented the village head to deal with specific work related to managing the village and communicating inside as well as outside of the community, depending on their responsibility assigned (see Chapter III, Section 3.1.3). Their voices were effective in the community meetings. These elders now do not hold an important position in the village, and they are like figureheads because they are invited in official village meetings but their voice has no meaning; authorities decide everything in the village.

In reality, as I observed, although the authorities manage activities in the current village and work as arbitrators for the villagers, village elders remain very influential in deciding activities related to their tradition and customs, even village security. Some villagers claimed that most of present village leaders are not as experienced and prestigious as the traditional village elders, and they do not understand the traditions and customs as well as culture of the Cotu community sufficiently. Therefore, in community management, the local authorities still need the consultation of the council of village elders. In official meetings, they appear to be silent but they react over issues related to the existence of their community’s culture. Furthermore, they have an important role in people’s life including solving conflicts, witnessing weddings, celebrating ceremonies, educating young children about the traditions and customs of the Cotu community.

Therefore, the present social structure of the Cotu community consists of (i) formally, social and official political organizations of the commune and of the village represented by the local authorities, and (ii), informally, a council of the village elders (*P’taha*) represented by *Takoh Vêêl*.

Such social and official political organizations include farmers’ association, Front’s Organization, Communist Youth Union, Veterans’ organization, Elder Association and Women’s Union. All the organizations are under the administrative of The People’s Council and the People’s Committee of the commune. All of these organizations in the village, as well as the community are managed by the Communist Party, which plays an important role in all activities such as production, culture, sport, national defense, and security in the community. Among these organizations, the

farmers' association and women's union play the most active and important role in the village as well as for the community's economic development. They assist the local farmers in gaining access to credit systems and extension activities.

Meanwhile, the council of the village elders (*P'taha*) only plays an important consulting role in terms of practicing tradition, customs and culture of the Cotu community for the current village leaders.

4.2.3 Feeling of the Local People After Displaced to the New Location

The Cotu people are essentially swidden cultivators whose life bases completely on self-sufficiency economy dependant on natural conditions. In the past, they had a nomadic life; they often migrated to different places to practice swidden cultivation, gathering and hunting for their survival when their old dwelling place could not ensure their living condition, such as; lack of cultivation land, poor cultivation land, epidemic diseases, natural disaster, war, and so on. Normally, the Cotu people migrated following the clan or group of households to look for the places where had favorable natural potentiality for practicing their traditional livelihood activities. In new places, they freely set up their house, reclaimed land for swidden cultivation, reorganized the community and social relation, and so on following their traditional lifestyle. Therefore, it can be seen that, the emigration of the Cotu people in the past is a process of unforced displacement.

Contrary to the process of displacement in the past, the process of displacement following the Sedentarization program is a process of forced displacement. The local people are displaced from their old dwelling place to settle in a new location that is assigned by the government. Their livelihood activities have been governed by the state as a substitute for their self-determination in the past, and reconstructing their new houses have been also influenced by the state's intervention. Therefore, their traditional lifestyle has to be gradually changed to adapt to new circumstances and to integrate with new lifestyle - the Kinh lifestyle.

As stated previously, although the Sedentarization program has been considered to be one of the most important steps in poverty reduction and hunger elimination for ethnic minority people living in the upland regions, the program

sought to address twin goals of protecting watershed forests as well as natural resources allegedly at risk of being destroyed by the people by excluding them from their traditional village where they were already closely related. Therefore, it is difficult to avoid the impression of the villagers and their experience of displacement, especially with the Cotu people of Giong village who have been displaced about nine years, have to confront the immediate difficulties in new dwelling place. Different groups have different feeling on the displacement process. The experience of displacement is presented through the story of the villagers that I heard when I conducted my fieldwork.

The old villagers normally expressed their viewpoint by making comparison with the pre-program period in terms of living environment, traditional livelihood activities, belief system, as well as relationships in the community. According to the elder villagers, traditional village life had been more harmonious and friendly. Everyone in the village was related to each other as kin. They always helped each other when they had to face the difficulties in daily life such as; starvation, war, and epidemic diseases. The support for each other in terms of traditional cultivation activity and the unification in terms of distribution of foodstuff hunted or gathered from traditional village, as well as the freedom of their beliefs also expressed the closely united relationship of the community that the present is not easy to find. In the new location, although the condition to access social service is easier than their old village, they still regret the years living in traditional village. The example of an old man, Mr. Quynh Dieng, 70 year olds:

Formerly, we had such a happy and united life although the chances of access to social services were unfavorable. We often shared experience and supported each other in practicing daily livelihood activities and in performing traditional rituals. Especially, the old men as us had to have responsibility for imparting traditional production experience, customary law, and traditional rituals of the communities for the young man of the village at the *Guol* (community house) every night. Another matter that we felt very interesting, that was every villagers got a rake off food and danced and drunk together whenever the village organize traditional ceremonies or anyone hunted wild animals. It is to be regretted that those issue seldom recur in the new village...

(Interview with Mr. Quynh Dieng, 70 year olds, on 10th November 2004)

An old woman, Mrs. Can Toong, 80 year olds, who is knowledgeable about traditional custom, culture and belief of the Cotu people, once talked with me about her feelings when I visited her house:

Swidden cultivation could be seen as a main practice of the Cotu women. We feel very excited at the time of planting and harvesting rice because those times looked like the festival days of the village. We often call those dates: “*Ngày hội lên nương*”. The noisy atmosphere of those dates was expressed clearly at the swidden plots on the hillside not at the village. Every member of the household and the relatives and the neighbors of the household participated in practicing together on the same swidden plot. This was a good opportunity so that everyone could share production experience. At here the traditional rituals, the labors’ division in household, and the important role of women in terms of planting and harvesting rice were manifested... (Interview with Mrs. Can Toong, 80 year olds, on 10th November 2004).

Not only the elder villagers expressed grieving over the past, but also some young villagers feel unsatisfied with their current life. A case of Mr. Ho Xuan Viet, 32 year olds, is a typical example of experience displacement:

In the old village, daily livelihood activities was not or little tied down by the intervention of the state. Everyone could trap, hunt wild animal and catch the fish anytime they like; they were also free to find good land to slash and burn cultivation and to gather forest products anywhere except the places that their village did not permit use such as: the sacred forest, the ghost forest, and so on. Everyone could swim in the clean streams and rivers. (Interview with Mr. Ho Xuan Viet, 32 year olds, on 19th November 2004).

With broken words in a short while, he continued to explain:

My urgent matter when entering on settlement here was water. The stream system here is not only fewer but also more dirty than the stream system in old village. During 2 - 3 months from coming here, I felt very depressed because of the small, shallow and dirty streams; I could not swim in the stream like the past. Moreover, I was unused the tap-water supplied by the Sedentarization program...

(Interview with Mr. Ho Xuan Viet, 32 year olds, on 19th November 2004).

Some of the young women still complain about their current daily activities.

They say that they have to work so hard, but there is not enough food to consume in their family. According to them, the swidden cultivation is more difficult due to bad soil, they have to learn new cultivating technology such as ploughing land, using fertilizer and pesticides in cultivation. Moreover, the gathering non-timber products they loose considerable time because the forest is far from their new dwelling place.

However, other young villagers are content with their present life in new location. They assert that, the process of displacement sooner or latter also occur whenever their life has been intervened by much outside factors such as; the prohibition of the state in terms of practicing slash and burn cultivation, the economic and social development of the country, and the environmental and natural resource

degradation that they are blamed due to their traditional livelihood activities, and so on. “We don’t want the outsiders to despise us and our children as: “backward”, “deforestation”, and so on”, they said, “We have access to the social services like electricity, hospital, school and market, our children have to go to school and the health of our children have been cared” (Mr. Pham Ngoc Chinh, 27 year olds, and Mr. Ho Xuan Thi, 34 year olds).

Especially, the youth of the village are pleased with their current life. They believe that they will be no longer disdained by the outsiders like before because they now can learn modern life style of Kinh people such as: speaking Kinh language, dressing Kinh clothes, learning Kinh culture and new cultivation technology. One of my informants claimed:

We feel secure about our life here. We can communicate with the outsiders easily because we are learned language, culture and way of life of the Kinh people. Therefore, we will be no longer a complex about our humble life blamed by the outsiders as “backward”, “destitute.”
(Mr. Ho Van Hao, 20 year olds).

During the fieldwork, I recognize that the different sentiments among different age groups of the Cotu people after displaced to new location are easy to understand. With the old people, their life had a strong attachment to their traditional village from a long time ago; their traditional way of life, culture, customs and belief were allied with their traditional village and always existed in their unconscious. Therefore, external interventions related to replacing their traditional village or their traditional way of life would cause deep psychological wounds. They often express grieving over what is far off. Meanwhile, the young people normally want access to new way of life and to integrate with the outside world because they don’t like the outsiders defame and despise them as “backward,” “destitute” and “uncivilized.” With the middle people, they are the mainstays of their community and family, they have to accept changes created from such external interventions to suit to development strategy of the country, but at the same time, they have a responsibility to maintain traditional cultural character of their community.

4.3 Summary

Sedentarization is a significant program of Vietnamese government that has been designed and implemented more specifically for ethnic minorities living isolated in high mountains and having limited contacts with the outside world. Depending on each period of history, and socioeconomic and political conditions of the country and of each region, the Sedentarization program has been implemented under different forms. However, the main target of the program is to settle down ethnic groups practicing swidden cultivation and to assist them to live a sedentary life and fixed farming. This aims to improve their living condition and create a good foundation for sustainable development in the mountainous regions.

With the Cotu people of Huong Nguyen Commune generally and of Giong village particularly who were considered as “backward,” “nomadic,” and “deforestation,” the program was launched in 1995 aimed to displace them from their old village to a new location near the road in order to create favorable conditions for developing economy and improving their standard of living. The program has brought about improved chances for access to social services, integrated with the new lifestyle and improving living conditions.

However, due to changes of the living circumstances and ways of life, the Giong villagers have to face some problems that are not easy to resolve in the short time. Firstly, the right of access to natural resources of the villagers has been gradually declined due to the control of the government over land and other forest resources, the prohibition in practicing traditional activities like; shifting cultivation, hunting and logging, and the their current dwelling place far away from the forest, and due to the scarcity of non-timber. It can be said that the villagers have been marginalized from using the forest resources.

Secondly, the villagers have been more and more depended on the external interventions, especially state agency’s intervention. The state controls all land and forest. On the one hand, villagers lack experience, knowledge, and capital in practicing new production activities, so all currently livelihood activities of the villagers have been governed by the state. The consultation in terms of new cultivation techniques and methods, the establishment of market consumer of food

produced, as well as the support capital and other material for production activities of the state agencies are indispensable to the Giong villagers living new location.

Thirdly, poverty situation of the Giong villager still happen significantly. Poor and very poor households occupy about 75.5% among total households of the village; malnutrition rate among children is rather high, about 27 percent in 2004; most the villagers have stomach problems. Fourthly, local knowledge in terms of swidden cultivation of the Giong villagers has been ignored. Especially, some traditional varieties and technical phases have been gradually lost in oblivion due to the prohibition of the state over practicing traditional activities like slash and burn cultivation. Fifthly, traditional cultural characters, such as the Cotu language, traditional dress style and house style, and so on of the Cotu people is step by step lost. Finally, the roles of local institutions have been reduced because of the presence of the state agencies and their literacy criteria. The roles of *Takoh Vêêl* and village elders have become invisible in the administrative mechanism of the local authorities in the current Cotu society. They only play a consulting role over practicing tradition and customs of the Cotu community for the current village leaders.

Before the changes as well as the challenges brought about from the process of displacement following the Sedentarization program, the Cotu people have impressions on the experience of displacement - process of forced displacement. Different age groups of the Cotu people have different impressions on the displacement process. Some elder villagers express grieving over what is far off by making comparison between the traditional village and the current ones, the middle villagers feel both unsatisfied and content about their current life depending on different aspects. Meanwhile, some young villagers are pleased with their present life in their new location.