

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE PROCESS OF PLACE-MAKING AS AN ADAPTIVE RESPONSE OF LOCAL PEOPLE TO THE CHANGES IN THE NEW LOCATION**

As we know, “Human being always identify oneself with a certain place that is determined not only by the natural surroundings of a particular place, but also the social relations between it and other places” (Lowe, 2003). Place comes into being through the interaction of people with sites and sites with people. Place is perceived as an element in deciding the behaviors and characteristics of the people, meanwhile the people always find out the way of construction and adaptation of certain place to survive and develop when faced with increasingly changes of physical, economic, social, cultural, political conditions.

For local people, place means an organization of house, the fields of the production system, the way of life, the other social relationship and so on. The local people may have more immediate and full relationship with the place and they retain more local control over their physical and social landscape where they live. Therefore, if having any changes of physical, economic, social, cultural, or political conditions, they often find out the way to reconstruct or adjust their own place to suit specific situation.

With the Cotu people, how do they construct their new place when moved to new location where have increasingly changes of natural and social conditions compare with the old place. This chapter demonstrates the process of place-making as an adaptive response of the Cotu people to the changes in new location. This chapter includes two sections. The first section is a profile of the Giong village consisting of its natural and socioeconomic characteristics, and the second section analyzes the process of place-making of the Cotu people in the new location after displaced from old village following Sedentarization program.

## **5.1 Natural and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Giong Village**

### **5.1.1 Natural Characteristics of Giong Village**

Giong is the largest and most densely populated village of Huong Nguyen commune and was mobilized to settle nearby Ta Luong mountain pass along the highway N<sup>o</sup> 49 from Hue city to Aluoi District and bounded by Hong Tien commune of Huong Tra District on the North, by Hong Ha commune on the Northwest, Huong Phong commune of A Luoi District on the West, by Huong Lam and Aroang of A Luoi District on the Southwest, and Quang Nam Province to the South. The village is located near the center of Huong Nguyen commune; about 50 - 100 meters from the center commune on the South, and is contiguous Ta Ra village on the Southwest and A Ri village on the North.

The Giong village is in a tropical climate location, which is characterized by two distinct seasons, hot and cold. The hot season is usually from April to August and comes with a southwest hot and dry season wind (called Laos wind) that raises the temperature from 37<sup>o</sup>-40<sup>o</sup>C. The cold season is from September to March and goes with the northeast season wind, which brings down the temperature to 12<sup>o</sup>-13<sup>o</sup>C. The time of less rain concentrates in the summer when the temperature is high and the humidity is low, resulting in a prolonged drought period (Report of Hydrometeorological Department of Thua Thien Hue province, 2004).

Average temperature for the year ranges from 22 to 25<sup>o</sup>C, and maximum temperature is 37 – 38<sup>o</sup>C concentrated on May and June, while minimum temperature is 10 – 12<sup>o</sup>C combined with rain in December and January. The yearly average rainfall is about 2690mm and distributed unequally in other months of the year. The maximum rainfall is concentrated in November, December and January. Every year, in September, October and November, rain is often prolonged and heavy causing serious soil erosion. Sometimes there are hail and hoarfrost in the summer that affects agricultural cultivation of local people (Report of Hydrometeorological Department of Thua Thien Hue province, 2004).

The village is located at the elevation of 280m above the sea level. Most land of Giong village is hills and mountains, forest, springs and small streams; its topography slopes in the Northwest – Southeast. According to the report of Giong

village's leader staff on the end of 2004, area of kinds of used land of the Giong village is apportioned following table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1 Current Land Use Areas in Giong Village**

<b>Types of Land Use</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Rice paddy	4.2	2.88
Swidden land (estimate)*	14.9	10.22
Home garden and Residential land	49.98	34.28
Forest plantation	42.4	29.07
Rubber plantation	34.35	23.55
Total area of Giong village	145.83	100

*Source:* Report of leader staff of Giong village in the end of 2004

*(i) Rice Paddy*

Rice paddy is reclaimed from virgin land around the streams and river that are alluvial and favorable for cultivating wet rice. Table 5.1 shows that the area of rice paddy is very limited, it only occupies 2.88 percent among total used land of the village. This is one of reasons cause the obstacles in the households' economic development and a food security of the villagers.

*(ii) Swidden Land*

Nowadays, swidden land is limited in areas of the Giong village, in particular, and also in Huong Nguyen commune in general. It is estimated about 10.22 percent of total used land of the village. Each household can only reclaim about 1,500 - 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land for practicing swidden in the regulated sphere of the government because the land in the hill around the commune was used for reforestation and the state absolutely forbid shifting cultivation. However, in present years, the local people used this land for planting rubber trees. Aside from such regulated land, local people still reclaim other areas in the deep forest without recognizing the local government to practice swidden. This area cannot estimate.

*(iii) Home Garden and Residential Land*

This kind of land exists whether or not recognized by the local government. Almost all home gardens and residential land is provided by the government when the

local people were moved to settle in the current location, about 1,000 - 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> per household; and in some cases, few households could be allocated or inherited land from the parents or they reclaimed themselves because they have separated as soon as they got married. Total area of land used for building the house and setting up home garden of the village is about 49.98 ha (occupy 34.28 percent).

*(iv) Land Used for Forest and Rubber Plantation*

Up to the end of 2004, the Giong villagers planted about 42.4 hectares with acacia and eucalyptus, and 34.35 hectares with rubber trees among total land areas used for afforestation of the village. Almost all the rest area is wasteland and bare hill that cannot cultivate.

### **5.1.2 Socio-Economic Characteristics**

#### **5.1.2.1 Demographic Characteristics**

Currently, the Giong village has 49 households about 286 people, among which male are 151 people and 135 other ones are female. The division of labor among the population of the Giong village is presented in table 5.2 below.

**Table 5.2 Population and Labor Division of the Giong Village**

Items	Quantity
Total households	49
Total population	286
Male	151
Female	135
Main labor*	145
Male labor	75
Female labor	70
Average number person per household	5.84
Main labor per household	2.96

\*Labor here means a person 18 - 55 years old for female and a person 18 - 60 years for male, able to engage in on-farm or off-farm work to help support the family.

*Source:* Report of Giong village mayor and People's Committee of commune, 2004

The average household size has decreased from eight in previous years to 5.84, primarily due to the splitting of large households into small ones. The number of household has increased from 15 (after 1975) to 49. Population growth rate has gone down from 3.3 percent to 2.7 percent in 2004. The number of laborer per household is high, about 2.96 laborers/household.

The current population in the village is generally young. Table 5.3 shows that 40.91 percent of the populations are 17 and below, the labor age is rarely high, about 50.69 percent, meanwhile only 8.39 percent is old age. This means that the number of persons that are able to engage in on-farm or off-farm work to help support the family from nowadays to next years is high.

**Table 5.3 Age Structure of the Giong Village (December, 2004)**

Age structure (in years)	Number	Percentage (%)
Total	286	100
Below < 5	24	8.39
5 - 17	93	32.52
Labor age (Male: 18-60 and Female: 18 - 55)	145	50.69
Old age (Male: above 60 and female: above 55)	24	8.39

*Source:* Report of Giong village mayor and People's Committee of commune, 2004

#### 5.1.2.2 Health and Education

Before resettlement to their new location, some diseases, such as malaria marsh fever, cholera, colic, polio, and other, prevailed in the community but there was not health care service in the community. The patients were cured by the powwows of the village or they only commended their destiny to God. Therefore, the death rate was high.

In recent years, people have gained access to health care services. Deaths in the village now are attributed to diseases, such as cancer and cirrhosis. Malnutrition rate among children have been reduced to 27 percent in 2004 from 37 percent in 1995. Children are vaccinated against major diseases and pregnant mothers are examined once a month. However, primary data supplemented by direct observation show that 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 showed that most the Cotu people of Giong village have stomach problems in the new location. Some ideas assert that the major cause of stomach problems is the source of water poisoned by dioxin brought from the war.

The school age of children in the Giong village is often old than the national average. Most of the children go to school at an advanced age, because formerly the old dwelling place did not have school and teaching staff, the parents were too busy to think about their children's education. However, according a current report of village mayor an estimated 100 percent children in school age have been gone to school. Although basic education is already implemented in this commune the educational level in the village remains low.

#### 5.1.2.3 House Condition

Traditional house style of Cotu people no longer exists in the Giong village as well as in Huong Nguyen commune, especially after fixed cultivation and settlement in 1996. Some people claim that they gave up the habit of building houses on stilts because of the war and avoiding condition of disdain of other people (Kinh people) and so on. Most houses in the Giong village are very small and mainly made of bamboo, small timber, and thatch; only a few houses are made of wood or bricks.

There are 40 dwelling units housing 49 households in the village. This means some families do not have their own houses and they have to live with relatives. In some cases married children still live with their parents because they are unable to build their houses for lack of timber, money, and land.

#### 5.1.2.4 Income Situation and Household Classification in Giong Village

According to Report of Huong Nguyen's People's Committee and my direct observation, income of Giong's people, in general, is very low. Income resource gained mainly from farming cultivation, gathering non-timber and social benefit. The average annual income of the Cotu people is around 500,000 – 750,000 VND compare to average annual income of the upland area of A Luoi District is 1500,000 - 2500,000 VND. The average yearly food per capita of the Cotu is about 250 – 260kg

per person, meanwhile average yearly food per capita of the upland area of A Luoi District is 360 - 382kg rice per person.

The Cotu people often rely on the criteria like income, stable level of house, investing capital in practicing production, number of labours and healthy situation to classify households. Following such criteria of household classification, Cotu households have been divided into four groups; better off, middle, poor and very poor households. Structure of household classification of the Giong village is presented in the table 5.4 below.

**Table 5.4 The Classification of Households in the Giong Village**

Household group	Numbers	Rate (%)	Criteria of household classification
Better off households	4	8.16	Monthly income is more than 80,000 - 120,000 VND; there is stable house made of wooden or brick and tile-roofed; and have monthly salary from the government with the Cotu people or income from trade of building materials with the Kinh people.
Middle households	8	16.33	Monthly income of 50,000-80,000VND; small stable or semi-stable house made of bamboo and thatch; and lack of capital for production activities.
Poor households	27	55.10	Monthly income is less than 50.000VND; unstable house made of bamboo and thatch, lack of food for consuming in family from 1-3 months; no have money to invest in production activities, etc.
Very poor households	10	20.41	Monthly income is less than 30.000VND; unstable house; and lack of food for consuming in family from 3-6months; have a lot of children, bad health or serious disease, lack of labor and capital, etc.

*Source:* Report of Huong Nguyen's People's Committee in December 2004

Table 5.4 above shows that the rate of poverty households of the Giong village is very high. Among total of 49 households of the village, there are 37 poor

and very poor households that occupy about 75.5% among total households of the village. Poor and very poor households have not enough food to eat from three to six months, they lack capital to invest in production activities, and so on.

## **5.2 The Process of Place-Making of the Cotu People in the New Location**

As mentioned in Chapter II, place making involves a construction, and the construction does not merely concern a construction of an actual physical place to live, but it is also concerned with construction of identity and, thereby, society, related to the memory or dream of a place where the people do not live. Therefore, in order to survive in the new location, the Cotu people have attempted to construct their own place appropriately to their current circumstances. First of all, they have attempted to rebuild a new “home” through hybridizing new things of modern lifestyle and their traditional cultural characters for constructing their houses, setting up the fields for livelihood activities, expanding social relation or social network with the outside world, and improving their spiritual life and so on. At the same time, they have attempted to prove their capacity in terms of local control over the physical and social landscape by the way of negotiating with the state agencies about issues related to their livelihood activities, custom and belief. They have also found a way to gain access to new information as well as modern technologies and to apply their experience and traditional knowledge on daily livelihood activities in order to ensure food source and look forward a stable and well-fed life. These issues are presented in the following sections below in order to illustrate the process of place-making of the Cotu people is considered as an adaptive response to the changes in new location.

### **5.2.1 Rebuilding a New ‘Home’**

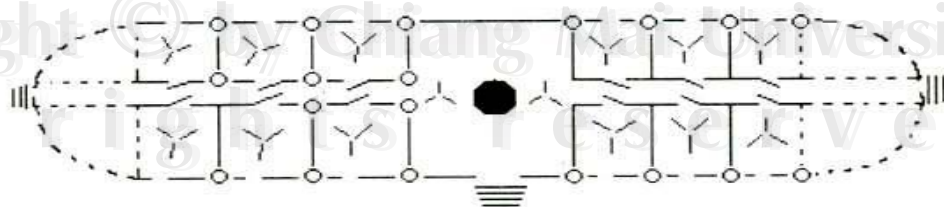
The terms “home” here is used to cover all things related to both material and spiritual conditions of the life of the local people that include house, livelihood activities, social relations, and other activities related to spiritual life of the people such as: culture, education, and health. Therefore, rebuilding a new “home” in a new location concerns not only the construction of an actual physical place to live, but also with construction of identity, and, thereby society.



In order to integrate with the new lifestyle in the new location, the Cotu people have attempted to apply new things of the modern lifestyle, together with maintaining their traditional cultural characters in rebuilding their new “home” that include reconstructing houses, setting up production system, expanding social relations with the outside world, and practicing the traditional rituals, changing the cultural lifestyle and improving healthcare, and protecting living environment, etc. appropriately. This has an important meaning in terms of both the material and spiritual life of the Cotu people in new era.

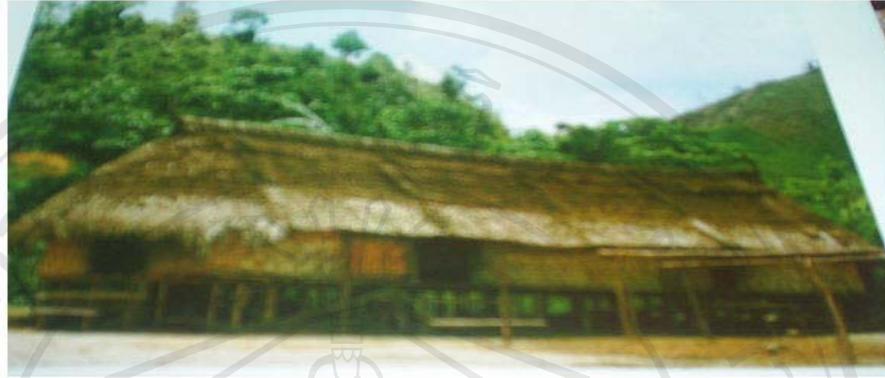
#### 5.2.1.1 Reconstructing New Houses - Integration of the Cotu with New Living Condition

In the past, the Cotu people live in longhouses, the oldest traditional house style of the Cotu people. This is a dwelling house of a clan with many generations, and many small families. The longhouse is called *Dung*. The size of this house is large, its length is normal about 20-30m, and sometimes it extends to 50-60m, depending on the number of people living inside. Its roof is made of rattan leaf, and its frame is made of bamboo or wood. It has two stairs at two gables. There are many kitchens for households living inside the house. Each kitchen is separated by a wall made of bamboo. Arranging and fixing space of family life in the house is performed following the role or position of the members in the house. Normally, the room of head of *Dung* is center of the longhouse. This is also a place used for organizing rituals in the clan, receiving guests, and storing treasures of the clan. The next rooms belong his sons and then are his grandsons’ rooms.



**Figure 5.1 Transection of the Traditional Longhouse of the Cotu People**

Source: Thong, 2004

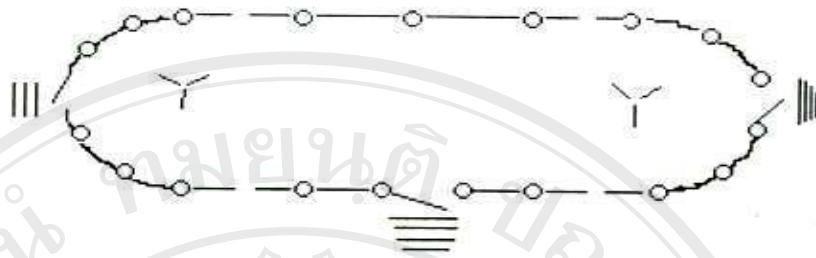


**Figure 5.2 Photo of Traditional Longhouse of the Cotu People**

*Source:* Thong, 2004

The longhouse is the remnant of ancient time of the Cotu community. Through the process of social development, the house style has gradually changed. The first period of time all members in the same long house often worked, ate and lived together. The next period of the time they worked and lived together, but they ate separately. Then due to the emergence of private ownership, the family is separated into the small families that live the same roof but work and eat separately. The final consequence from disaggregating the traditional longhouse is house on stilts that is a popular dwelling house style of small family.

The houses on stilts of the Cotu people often have from one to four generations living together. This house style is made of bamboo or wood, and it is roofed by palm leaf. Its shape is oval; the center of the house is a wooden stake five to six metres high. The house includes three doors, a main door is at the center of front wall and two doors are arranged at two gables of this house. There are two symmetrically arranged kitchens: the kitchen on the right side of the house is used by man and guests, and the kitchen on the left side of the house is used by women. The center of the house from the stake to its behind wall is a place of worship, and also a place of storing treasures of the family. The space below of the house is often surrounded by bamboo screens, and used for raising poultry and small livestock.



**Figure 5.3 Transection of the House on Stilts of the Cotu People**

*Source:* Thong, 2004



**Figure 5.4 Traditional House on Stilts of the Cotu People**

*Source:* Observed from my field work in the Giong village

Together with the life of fixed cultivation and settlement, the Cotu people have been set up their house following the Kinh's house style after moved to new location. The house on stilts is replaced by house on the ground. There are many different styles of ground house in the Cotu community. With rich families, their houses are made of reinforced concrete or wood, and built by the Kinh construction workers. With the poorer families, their houses are built similarly the house on stilts without the space below of the house; and some houses are thatched cottages that look like the house of the rural lowlander. However, although such ground houses are different shape but their interior decorations still keep the style of interior decoration of the house on stilts.

The typical image of the ground house of the Cotu people community now is a compartment without lean-to and window; and has the small kitchen house at the left gable of this house built successively with the main compartment in order to form the house consisting of two compartments. The main compartment is a place of daily family life and a place of worship, and the kitchen compartment is a place of rest of the family's members surrounding a cooking fire.



**Figure 5.5 Ground House of the Cotu People**

*Source:* Observed from my field work in the Giong village

Rebuilding new houses in new location has an important meaning in the life of the Cotu people. That is a connection of their traditional lifestyle with the new lifestyle. On the one hand, they have to build their house to look like the Kinh house style following the support in terms of material for construction and the guidance of the state because the state do not allow them to log timber for constructing house. Furthermore, they do not like the outsiders consider them as “indigent,” “backward,” or “undeveloped” due to their house on stilts so that they can integrate with modern lifestyle without ethnical discrimination. On the other hand, they still keep their traditional cultural characters of their traditional house on stilts such as the shape or interior decoration and so on. Especially, they build the *Guol* (community's house) following their traditional house on stilts in the center of village. This is a place to maintain antiquities and to organize traditional cultural activities of their community.



Some villagers show that topography of their current dwelling place is not complicated, and it has not high mountain, and thick and humid forest like the old dwelling place, so constructing their houses following the ground house style is rather convenient for daily family life and suitable for physical condition in new location. Therefore, it can be said that constructing the ground house of the Cotu people in the new location is the first step of expression of adaptation's process to new kind of culture- the Kinh's culture but still keep special nuance of their ethnic.

#### 5.2.1.2 Setting up a Production System

The Giong village is a homogenous ethnic group - Cotu people - whose traditional activities are shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering forest products. After resettlement in the new location, due to increasingly changes in terms of physical, economic, social, political and cultural conditions, the livelihood activities of the Cotu people have to change accordingly, and setting up a production system appropriately is very necessary to ensure food security in their daily lives. The production system have been set up depending mainly on natural resource-based activities including both on-farm and off-farm activities.

##### a) On-Farm Activities

The on-farm activities of the Cotu people are diverse. They include swidden cultivation, wet rice cultivation, home gardening, animal husbandry, afforestation, and forest protection. This is the result of combination scientific knowledge and new technologies supplied by the state agency with local knowledge and real experience of the local people in order to look forward to stable and well-fed life.

##### (i) *Swidden Cultivation*

Swidden practice is deeply rooted in the behavior of the Cotu people. For most of the local people, swidden activity contributes to ensuring food security for the households all year round. Before moving to the new location, the local people practiced swidden following shifting cultivation. They have abundant experience in finding and classifying soil, selecting appropriate crop varieties with soil condition, and determining the fallow time and the seasonal schedule of each step in swidden cultivation (discussed in Chapter III).



In the new location, the swidden practice of local people has had basic changes; they have to change from shifting cultivation in the forest to fixed cultivation on hill slopes that is not far from their dwelling place due to limited arable land area and prohibited by the government. Along with acquainting new technology and productive method trained by the development workers, the selection of crops for swidden cultivation and application of traditional varieties planted in swidden areas are the ways by which the Cotu farmers are able to adapt to the poor soil condition and limited arable land area here.

There are three models of swidden cultivation practiced in the Giong village. These models are accumulated from the combination of real experience and new production's mode. The first model is *lua ba trang* (light rice, or three-month-rice) that mixes maize and cassava. Rice and maize are sowed at the same time, beginning in March, the sowing season. This rice species grows in three months and when they are almost ready to blossom, the local people plant the cassava and other crops in between the three-month rice and maize. Both the rice and maize are harvested after three months; the cassava is left behind and harvested only a year later.

The second model is *lua mua* (heavy rice or seasonal rice) that mixes with maize. Rice and maize are sowed at the same time in May and harvested in November. This model occupies a small area because of infertile soil with canebrakes and weeds, and lacking water.

The third is cassava monoculture, which occupies a large area. Cassava grows well on soils that support few other species, so it is considered as a successful crop even if the yield is gradually declining. The duration from planting to harvesting is often one year. During harvest season, the people only harvest gradually, concentrating only during the months of July and August, except November and December because of the heavy rains. In recent years, local people have planted the rubber trees on the land area planted cassava.

These models have retained some characteristics of traditional cultivation of the Cotu people. They still depend entirely on physical condition such as rainwater, climate, soil conditions, etc. Moreover, technical cultivation of such models such as seasonal calendar, selecting crop and intercrops' method, etc. base on the real experience of the local people.

According to my direct observation and some interviews, although the form of intercropping or overlapping crops seems adequate, the productivity of these models is still low because of the poor soil and the unsatisfactory investment of local people in terms of fertilizers, pesticides in swidden cultivation. The average annual productivity of dry rice estimate 1,400 - 1,600kg per hectare, of maize is 3,900 - 4,000kg per hectare, and 4,000- 4,200kg per hectare is average annual productivity of cassava. However, the process of change from shifting cultivation to fixed cultivation with three cultivation models above also manifested to some extent the adaptation of the local people in new location.

*(ii) Wet-rice Cultivation*

Cultivating wet rice is a new activity, which the Cotu people are interested in practicing, adjusting and adapting to in the recent years, because it can provide essential food for their family. They have set up fields on the alluvial along the Ta Luong streams and other small streams, the lowest area of the village for sowing and transplanting two-crop rice per year: winter-spring and summer-autumn crops. The sowing and transplanting time of winter-spring rice is from December to May while for the summer-autumn crop, is from June to October. The total area of rice paddy in the Giong village is about 4.2 hectares, the area of each household is very small, about 500 - 1,500 square meters divided into many different plots at different places.

They have been trained in cultivation techniques and supported varieties, fertilizer, and pesticides by the state for this cultivation activity. According to some interviewees, average annual yield at present is about 300 - 430 kg per hectare, and with an area of paddy field as mentioned above it can provide enough food for the household consume from three to four months per year.

Average annual yield of wet rice of Giong village is about 300 - 430 kg per hectare which is low in comparison with its average annual yield of the neighboring communes, such as Hong Ha commune: 550 - 720kg per year, Huong Lam commune: 570 - 750 kg per year (report of Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of A Luoi District). According to some interviewees, the main causes of low yield is due to poor soil and a long period of cultivation without supplying enough fertilization. In addition, the local people lack knowledge and experience of wetland agricultural

production, and they don't have money to invest in cultivation. Furthermore, the wet-rice areas are located near streams and depend on supplying water from the streams and rainwater. Therefore, during the summer when the streams are dry, the paddies are also dry; conversely, during the rainy season, these streams are often flooded and the water flows and carries away the plants, flooding the paddies and turning them into sandy fields. This is also one of many reasons why productivity of paddies is low and unsustainable, if there is not satisfactory investment from the farmers, the dedicated technical assistance of the development workers and the capital support of the government.

Although the production of wet rice cultivation in Giong village is low, but this is the first step of the adaptation in the process of place-making of the Cotu in the new location, at the same time, this is a basic premise for looking forward to food security in the coming years.

#### *(iii) Home Garden Activities*

The Cotu people have set up home gardens surrounding their house with an estimated area of about 1,000 square meters or less. The typical feature of the home-gardens of the Cotu people in the new location is mostly fruit trees such as banana, orange, lemon, mango, persimmon, and pineapple supplied by development workers. Along with planting fruit trees, some traditional food crops, such as arrowroot, taro, sugarcane, corn, sweet potatoes, cassava, brown bean and so on are planted in shady areas of fruit trees in the gardens. This proves that home-gardens of Cotu people is diverse in crop variety and a garden model of hybridization between traditional home-garden's and modern home-garden's characteristics which implies sustainability, because if one kind of species suffers from a crop failure, the people still have other food sources for consuming in their family.

#### *(iv) Animal Husbandry*

In present years, animal husbandry is one activity within the Cotu community. Many households expand their hog, buffalo, and cattle-raising activities by using the method of semi-free-range in village or keeping them in sties or herding instead of leaving them unbridled as was done previously, and they also focus on raising fresh fish in earth ponds near their house (area of each pond is about 50 - 100 square meters).

Thanks to training by agricultural extension staff from the DARD and teachers of Faculty of Animal Science of Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry, the villagers know how to use sub-products from swidden cultivation like leaves and roots of cassava and sweet potato, maize's seed and other ones for raising (see table 5.5 below), and how to care and prevent disease for such animal raised.

**Table 5.5 Types of Food Used for Raising Animals in the Giong Village**

Types of animals	Foods (%)
Chicken	70% of cassava; 30% of maize
Pig	80% of cassava; 20% leaf of sweet potato
Buffalo	Grass
Cow	Grass
Fish	70% of grass and cassava leaf; 20% cassava root; 10% of bran

*Source:* Household survey on December 2004.

The animal husbandry activity is meaningful with the Cotu people in the recent years. It provides not only products used for offering and worshiping, and sacrifice ritual like in the past, but also food for consuming in their daily family and sometimes for selling. Table 5.6 below is description of changes in raising animals of the Cotu people in the new location.

**Table 5.6 List of Domesticated Animals of the Giong Village in the Past and Present**

Past		Present	
Animals	Utility	Animals	Utility
Chicken	Food/sacrifice	Chicken	Food, sacrifice and selling
Pig	Food/ sacrifice	Pig	Sacrifice and selling
Buffalo	Sacrifice	Buffalo	Sacrifice, traction, plough, and selling
		Cow	Sacrifice, animal traction and selling
		Duck	Food and selling
		Fish	Food, celebration and selling

*Source:* Household survey on December 2004.

*(v) Afforestation and Forest Protection Activities*

Local people have also participated in reforestation, protecting and managing natural forest in stipulated area of household and community. They often plant trees such as eucalyptus, acacia, pine, and bamboo. According to report of village mayor and People's committee of Huong Nguyen commune in 2004, total area of artificial forest is 71 hectares planting eucalyptus and acacia, and 34.61 hectares is rubber tree's areas. In addition, the local people of the village take part in protecting and managing 15 hectares natural forest that belong watershed of Bo River.

*b) Off-Farm Activities*

Hunting or trapping activities are carried out simultaneously with the swidden cycle. The swiddeners use traps around their fields to lure game, protect the plants and improve their meals. At present, the hunting or trapping have become difficult because some species of wild animals and plants have been placed on the protected list, and these practices can be considered as illegal activities. Besides, forest resources are increasingly diminishing for many reasons, but primarily because access to forest resources has become open for a long time.

Although hunting is prohibited by the government some people in Giong village consider it as a source of income. They set up many traps in the forest, and once in a while they go to the forest to check on them. Wild animals, such as snakes, wild pigs, weasels, turtles, tortoises, yield high income for them. Tigers and bears are almost gone. The local people also use one kind of special tree cover made of batteries, fishing-net and fishing-rod to catch fish, a protein source, especially for children.

Forest product gathering is also a popular activity of the Cotu people in the Giong village. The local people focus on non-timber forest products (NTFPs). All households in Giong depend on the forest for fuel-wood. Women and children cut and collect dry branches and trees for using in their family. The Cotu people also collect rattan, palm (*Calamus*, *Licula* sp.) and honey for cash income. Honey is a source of high income but it is more difficult to find than rattan, which provides a regular income for them. These activities are normally implemented by the men.

Logging timber is an illegal activity, but some people in Giong still undertake this activity because of the relatively high income it provides. They learned this from



the Kinh, who migrated to A Luoi District in the NEZs. Mostly young men carry out this activity in their free time, after the harvests. Besides, knit work is also an activity performed in free time of few households for household use.

In sum, in the new location the Cotu people focus on establishing the production system based on the combination of their indigenous knowledge and new knowledge and technology acquired from the popularization of the development workers. They engage in diverse and complex on-farm activities such as swidden cultivation, wet rice cultivation, gardening, raising animals, and forest-based activities. Although the income from activities in the present years is insignificant, all such activities have manifested the adaptation of the Cotu people to new location, and are meaningful in their life. They can help local people survive in condition of changes to physical, social and political environments in the current period, and at the same time, they provide the basic premises for developing economy and looking forward to food security and stable life in the future.

#### 5.2.1.3 Expanding Social Relations of the Giong Village

In the past, the Giong villagers lived isolated in remote areas, their village was traditionally constructed by households within same clans. So social relationship in the village of the Cotu was simple; it included the relationships among the clans and households in the village; and the administrative management of the village belonged the representatives such as *Takoh Vêêl* (village head) and *P'taha* (a council of village elders).

However, in the new context the Giong village is increasingly influenced by the outsiders factors including state agencies, Kinh lowland traders, and local people of other villages in the same commune. Their life is no longer limited to their own village but expanded to communicate with several villages in the commune and other outside factors. Therefore, the Giong villagers have to adapt to the new context by opening and adopting the external intervention and constructing relationships with the outsiders to stabilize their life.

Beside the traditional social relations like family relation, kinship relations and neighborhood relations in the village, the Giong villagers have set up new relationships with the people of other villages to exchange labors, crop species, and

tools of farming cultivation, with the Kinh traders who live in the commune in order to exchange goods. For example, some individuals have harvested rattan, aloe wood, bamboo shoots, and hunt wild animals to sell for the Kinh traders. Vice versa, the Kinh traders supply salt, clothes, sugar and building materials such as cement, steel, and bricks.

Moreover, the relationship between the villagers and state authorities have been built in practicing state policies related to livelihood, awareness over political, cultural, social and environmental aspects in the new era. State authorities take responsibility for transmitting information concerning such politics, and the villagers receive that information to fulfill such policies with the consultant and support of state officials.

Normally, the relationship between the state authorities and the villagers clearly originates from negotiation relation. For example, in the state policy of hunger elimination and poverty reduction for the ethnic minority groups living remote areas, the Giong villagers have signed the contract of loan with the state officials to invest in new production models such as planting rubber trees and developing home garden. In the contact, the state officials are responsibly for training techniques, providing money, crop variety, fertilizer, and pesticides for the villagers; the villagers have to return the products harvested to state officials to refund for initial expenditures invested.

At the same time, through expanding social network with the outsiders, local people can state their aspiration and the urgent matters in their life. This helps state agencies understand more regarding the needs, capacities and aspiration of the local people in order to adjust or set up support policies and regulations appropriately.

#### 5.2.1.4 Rituals and Customary Practice in Innovative Era

Since the old days, the Cotu people have believed that *Yangs* (spirits) exist everywhere and that the *Yangs* are owners of all things in natural landscape and can decide their survival. These beliefs are often manifested through the rituals and taboos that have brought them strengths in facing the difficulties in the life. Those rituals and taboos are carried out at both household level and community level. However, due to increasing changes of physical, economic and social conditions, those rituals as well

as taboos have been also changed to suit the current situation. This section will make clear changes in the sense and form of the Cotu's rituals and their adjustment of moral norms of behavior.

The Cotu people still maintain rituals and taboos relating to daily livelihood activities such as "*Bhuôi xót haroo*" (prayer Rice spirit before harvesting), "*Bhuôi haroo temê*" (new rice ritual), and buffalo sacrifice ritual, etc. At the same time, in order to change their image in the eyes of outsiders and to prove that they are not static and backward, they have adjusted some rituals or taboos concerning moral norms of behavior such as rituals and taboos in birth, and marriage. For instance, in the Cotu culture, if a mother dies within two weeks after giving birth, her newborn baby must be buried with her. The Cotu perceive that the baby needs mother's milk to survive, and the mother also need to be with the baby. If the baby is not buried, the mother's soul will return to claim her child and will bring bad luck to the whole community. Nowadays, this custom is no longer practiced. If the mother dies after giving birth, the baby will be raised by their relatives.

Another case concerning the marriage custom, according to the traditional marital regulations of the Cotu community, women in the community could not allow to get married with a lowlander, and to become pregnant premarital; and with married women, if her husband died she must be buried with her husband or she must be become a wife of her husband's brother, and so on. If whoever violates those regulations must be punished through sacrificing offerings to organize traditional rituals for praying the spirits and the community for forgiveness. Nowadays, those regulations are no longer in effect but they are adjusted to suit the current situation.

A female informant stated that in the past, a woman who become pregnant premarital was considered a violator of Cotu marital norms. She would not be accepted by the community because she had humiliated the ancestors and spirits and violated the moral norms of the community. She would be punished and certain rituals had to be performed in order to ask for their forgiveness from the spirits and the community. For example, she would be sent away the community; she would receive permission to come back home after she had given birth and finished the time of confinement. After coming back home, she must sacrifice offerings to organize the rituals for her violation with the spirits and the community. She must sacrifice one

60kg pig, some wine and several other items, and she must build a fire and step across it while the community witness. Nevertheless, nowadays, though premarital pregnancy women are not respected by the people, they are still accepted as members of the community. They are not forced to sacrifice offerings as they would have had to in the past. However, some rituals have to be performed within their family to pray for the support of the ancestral spirits.

Besides, some customs such as the custom of piercing ears and grinding teeth to mark mature age, custom of collective hunting, blood and head hunting have been abolished because they are no longer suitable with the present situation. The blood and head hunting, collective hunting of the Cotu people are often despised by the outsiders who think that they are backward and barbarous, and those custom are prohibited by the government.

#### 5.1.2.5 Changing Cultural Lifestyle and Improving Healthcare

In order to integrate with modern life, the Cotu people not only concentrate on creating a well-fed and stable life but also look forward to building a civilized and healthy way of living. They have attempted to access information about science and technology, cultural education, and healthcare, and so on through studying from social information means, learning at school, participating in activity of cultural exchanges and responding to propaganda over healthcare. Especially, they have attached special importance to studying and healthcare of their children. They have tried to create good conditions so their children can go to school and take part in activities of cultural exchanges and education about healthcare.

Besides, they have also paid attention to maintaining cultural characters of their community such as their language, traditional dress, and traditional cultural activity in community's ceremonies. Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Sau, a Party cell secretary of Giong village shows that the local authorities cooperate with the village elders attempt to find out the way to recover writing of the Cotu language in order to teach their children because their children presently can speak the Cotu language but they do not know how to write and read their own language. They also encourage the younger generation to wearing traditional dress in activities of cultural exchanges as well as in traditional festivals; Moreover, they retain organizing cultural activity of the

community at the *Guol*. This helps the young people can understand deeply about the validity of their traditional culture, and through that they have to take responsibilities for preserving cultural characters of their community.

Nevertheless, they have abandoned practicing customs that influence negatively to the health and moral norms of behavior, for example, custom of abstaining with the pregnant and childbirth women, custom of using wizardry or spell for treatment.

A female informant expressed to me that in the past, women must observe some taboos and abstain during the time of pregnancy while they still have to work hard until giving birth. They do not eat meat of some animals like snake, tortoise, porcupine, mouse because they think that if they eat meat of those animals character and shape of her baby will look like such animals. They are not allowed to come to places of worship because they are afraid punishment of the spirits, they must stay at a small hut in the forest's edge from beginning childbirth time to finishing the time of confinement. In general, the taboo and abstaining while pregnant and childbirth women based mainly on feeling and belief. This causes some accidents for pregnant women and this is one of the reasons that cause the high death rate in childbirth in Cotu communities.

Nowadays, pregnant women no longer experience those taboo and abstaining. They are cared health better by the medical organization of the community. They are trained about the way of caring for their health during the time of pregnancy, giving birth and breast-feed, and the way of raising their child, they and their child are vaccinated; and they can give birth at the commune's medical station or at the district's hospital.

Similarly, the sick are examined and treated medically by doctors or nurses instead of by sorcerer as the past. All people can access to medical services of the commune such as; they can be examined and treated free, and supported money for food during the time of staying in hospital for treatment. However, the Cotu people still retain the traditional treatment methods from medical herbs for the common complaints like influenza, diarrhoea, and dysentery, and the simple rituals to pray for good health.



### 5.2.1.6 Protecting the Environment

Since a long time ago, forests have been seen as the means of subsistence for the Cotu people. It not only supplies a subsistent material source but also is cultural landscape where the villagers practice ritual and ceremonies. It can be said that nobody can understand forest better than the villagers. They have been aware of important role of conserving the forest. They think that the forest is conserved means their life is also protected. Therefore the villagers had set up the customary laws to protect forest (see Chapter 3).

After resettlement in the new location, they are still been aware of the important roles of conserving the forest, although the forest has been controlled by the government. A village elder stated in the commune's meeting over launching movement of environmental protection on 23<sup>th</sup> December 2004:

We have lived because of the forest. Trees are our grandfathers, our sisters and bothers. The trees have value since the time they are small. Some of them even yield fruit for us to eat. The forest is useful for the climate because it can make rain. If all trees are cut, the rain will disappear. Without trees strong winds will destroy our crops and the weather will be very hot... We consider the forest as equal to our lives. If there's no forest, we will die. Nowadays, although we no longer live in forest as the past, but forest is very important with our life. We have to take responsibilities for protecting it because we protect forest means we protect our living environment.

(Mr. Ho Van Thu, 55 year olds,)

Therefore, when having state policy over planting and conserving the forest, many households take part in reclaiming fallow land for planting the forest and receive the forest from the government for caring and protecting according to the state regulations. Local people have also applied their local knowledge as well as customary laws on practicing reforestation and protecting their forest in order to ensure the forest grow and contribute to enhancing income source as well as protecting living environment in the future.

In short, in order to adapt to the changes of physical, social, cultural and political conditions in the new location, and to integrate with the modern lifestyle the Cotu people have paid attention to access modern knowledge and scientific technology from the outside worlds, together with maintaining their traditional culture and custom for rebuilding their new "home." They have built their new house to resemble the Kinh's house style, but it still keeps traditional cultural characters such

as interior decoration or shape of the house. They have established the production system including both on-farm and off-farm activities based on applying new production technology and modes and inheriting their real experience and traditional knowledge. They have also paid attention to expanding social relations with outsiders, changing their cultural life, improving the health, protecting the living environment, and so on. This prove that rebuilding the new “home” of the Cotu people is a manifestation of the process of adaptive response to the changes in the new location, and is a connection to their traditional lifestyle with the new lifestyle.

### **5.2.2 Local Control Over the Physical and Social Landscape**

Traditionally, most local people who lived in remote mountains occupied and managed forest resources in the residents of their community freely, and they established a society isolated from the outside. So they could themselves adjust and control their life appropriately in each specific situation. Nowadays, forest resources are managed by the government, and the government has governed most activities of the local people. Problems that attracted the attention of many researchers are how the local people react to the external forces and whether they can themselves control their life while they have to suffer from such forces. In case of the Giong villagers, in order to examine such problems, I start to study the conflicts in the Giong village when the government moved them to the new location. Simultaneously, I investigate how such conflicts have been resolved.

#### **5.2.2.1 Conflicts in the Giong Village**

As presented in the pervious chapters, the Cotu people lived closely with the forest; they could freely own forest resources surrounding their dwelling places and their community following community regulations. They had power over deciding on their work concerning their livelihoods as well as their life in the traditional village. However, after being displaced to the new location following the Sedentarization program, they have become powerless because they are controlled by state authorities and excluded from natural resources. They seldom have opportunities to take part in making decision on their ways of life, and they have to observe state regulations in

terms of rights of land ownership, rights of other forest resource's use and management, production activities and so on. As discussed in Chapter IV, the Cotu have to face serious problems in their new location, such as; they have gradually lost the rights of access to natural resources and practice traditional activities, they have to depend more on the intervention of the outsiders, cultivation land is poor and limited, and they have to become acquainted with new production technology and methods, and so on (presented in Chapter IV).

Living in such situations, lacking cultivation land, increasing poverty, and suffering from the management of state authorities in the new location, the conflicts between the local people and state authorities as well as between local people and local people are unavoidable. These conflicts are a consequence of the struggle for existence of the villagers living in the new location. These conflicts have occurred since the Sedentarization program initiated in 1995 until now.

The conflicts between state authorities and households were a regular occurrence in the first three years of resettlement in the new location. Many households could not believe anything that state authorities said and directed them to do. They felt dissatisfied because the state forced them to move to a new location where they have to face many difficulties. As a villager complained during an interview on October 24<sup>th</sup> 2004:

I was one of the village representatives who came to here to survey the new village following the state authorities' request at the end of 1995. When we arrived here at that time, we were very displeased. We have been surprised at why state authorities wanted us to move here where land is very poor with much alang grass and cane, and surrounding the dwelling place and the commune is bare hills and far away from the forest. After such observation, there were strong arguments between the state authorities and the representatives over whether we should or should not move here. However, due to the force of the state authorities and the encouragement of the local authorities, we must accept replacing our dwelling place. However, we still thought that it is not easy to have a better life in new location than old traditional village.

(Mr. Ho Avo Tich, 57 year olds)

Not only the local people have been discontented with the constraint of state authorities, but the local authorities also have been dissatisfied with some issues concerning the villagers' life. For instance, the plantation of fruit trees in home garden

of households has caused troublesome problems for the local authorities. Mr. Ho Xuan Thuy, president of Huong Nguyen commune, confided:

We have felt tired the complaint of the households to take part in the project of planting fruit trees provided by the Sedentarization program. That is the product consumer and the payment of debt for the bank. They have asked us find a way to resolve the products they created because they cannot sell them. Furthermore, they have delayed the time of debt payment because they have not yet gained income from the activity while it cost them a lot of time, money and effort. It is difficult for us. At present, we don't know how to consume the large amount of the products while many households of commune have those products, on the other hand; and how to explain the lateness of debt payment of the local people to the state authorities.

(Mr. Ho Xuan Thuy, 42 year olds, interviewed on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2004)

Another problem that the local authorities have to confront is the conflict of cultivation land among the villagers of the commune and even among households in the same village. Mr. Ho Xuan Phong, president of people's council of Huong Nguyen observed:

Formerly, the distance among villages of the commune was very far, about one or two days by foot; each village appropriated a separate region. After we moved here, such villages have been arranged closely; moreover the cultivation land is very poor and limited. Therefore, the conflicts of cultivation land among the villages and even among households in the same village have frequently occurred. For instance, the struggle between Tara villagers and Giong villagers in deploying land to plant rubber tree two years ago; another case, the fight over selecting swidden plots between Mr. Ho Xuan Bac and Le Van Ben household of Giong village last year, and so on. It can be said that the local authorities we have to resolve those conflicts daily.

(Mr. Ho Xuan Phong, 40 year olds, interviewed on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2004)

Confronting with such real problems, how have the local people and the state authorities resolved them? Different from other places, the conflicts occurred between the local people and the state agencies have often been resolved through everyday resistances or struggles like the case of the Malagasy resistance against the *tavy* (Jarosz, 1993), or the case of the *Lua* people of *Doi Phu Kha* of *Nan* province, northern Thailand struggled with the Royal Forestry Department officials (Yos, 2003); and even through social movement like Chipko movement of northern Indian (Shiva, 1988). But in case of the Giong village, the conflicts have been solved by negotiation between the villagers and the state authorities.

#### 5.2.2.2 Negotiation: A Solution to the Conflicts in Giong Village

Before the conflicts occurred in the Giong village as mentioned above, there have been ongoing negotiations between the state agencies, local authorities and villagers in terms of land ownership, livelihood strategies, social relationship, and administrative management. These negotiations aim to construct a stable life for the local people in such situation. Through these negotiations, the local people can state their aspiration and the urgent matters in their life. This helps the state agencies and the local authorities understand the needs, capacities and aspiration of the local people in order to set up the support policies and regulations appropriately over livelihood and cultural activities. Conversely, through these negotiations, state agencies can explain state regulations and policies concerning the life of the local people, and deal with somewhat the difficulties for them. Negotiation often occurs under different forms depending on specific situations. In the Giong context, it happens following three forms: (i) Negotiation between villagers and local authorities; (ii) Negotiation between local authorities and state officials; and (iii) negotiation between villagers and state officials.

During my fieldwork, I saw negotiation between villagers and local authorities is popular in the Giong village. It concentrates on livelihood strategies, which involves swidden land ownership, traditional livelihood activities, support policies for developing production, and so on. Meanwhile, negotiation between local authorities and state officials often aim at indicating to the role of the village elders in administrative management and social relation, simultaneously, through that negotiation process local authorities retransmit the aspirations and the urgent matters of the villagers which they are understood from villagers to state officials. Negotiation between local people and state officials occur less frequent. They focus on the problems concerning livelihood that local authorities cannot resolve, such as the policies of loan from the bank, and of food consumer. Therefore, it can be said that livelihood strategies are one of the most important issues related to negotiation forms in Giong village. Negotiation based on livelihood strategies is considered as a good way to resolve the conflicts happened in the life of the Cotu people.



Ensuring livelihood for the local people living in remote areas is seen as a necessary and important strategy of the Vietnamese government in the present period. But it also is a complicated issue that often creates certain conflicts in the daily life of the local people in the community.

With the Cotu people, conflicts related to livelihood activities appeared clearly in the new location. Such conflicts have been resolved somewhat through negotiating between villagers and local authorities or state officials, as well as between local authorities and state officials. Below are some examples, which the Cotu people negotiate with the local authorities or the state officials about some issues involving their livelihood activities like land ownership, traditional livelihood practice, and protection of forest resources.

Formerly, the villagers could occupy land for cultivation land more freely, but today land ownership of the villagers has been governed by the government. The villagers are allowed to cultivate farming on areas regulated by the government. However, in the context of exhausted and limited cultivation land of the Giong villagers, the land ownership under the state control does not meet their demand. They often reflect the inadequacy of cultivation land's use. As case of Mr. Le Van Chuong, he present his opinion at a village meeting on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2004:

In the old village, my family occupied five to seven swidden plots (one plot about 1,000 - 1,500 square meters); but now my family only has 1,000 square meters of rice paddy, 1,500 square meters of swidden land and 1,000 square meters of house and home garden. I see land here is not as good as the old village, so the farming here is more difficult. This is very difficulty for me to produce enough food for daily consumer of my family with eight members. Another problem is that my family doesn't know how to resolve is my oldest son who got married last two years still have no land to build a house and set up home garden, and farm land while he want to separate from my family. I would like to request the government bring out the policy of land allocation more flexibly.

(Mr. Le Van Chuong, 42 year olds)

A lot of Giong village's members in the meeting approved of the proposal of Mr Le Van Chuong.

Aside from land ownership, the prohibition and punishment of practicing traditional activities like shifting cultivation, hunting and logging has been also argued in the village meeting or through the reality stories of the villagers. The story of Mr. Vuon Cot Troi is a specific example.

Mr. Vuon Cot Troi, 45 year olds, has five children. He often goes to the forest for hunting and trapping wild animals. Therefore, state authorities consider him as an illegal forest exploiter. State authorities have reminded and warned him about such illegal activities many times. However, he cannot give up such activities because he thinks that such activities often bring in high income in order to sustain his family's life while the farming cultivation of his family have some difficulties such as; poor soil, lack of land and capital, as well as knowledge for new farming models. He related a story about his negotiation with a ranger who is responsible for forest protection in the scope of Huong Nguyen commune and the local authorities of the commune and Giong village to me when I visited his family on the second fieldwork on the end of November 2004. He said that the once he was arrested by the ranger on the way to come back home from the forest. The ranger took him to Committee of Huong Nguyen commune. There, the ranger seized all his products and imposed a fine upon Mr Vuon Cot Troi with the amount of 200,000 VND. However, he did not agree. He explained that he only trapped and hunted the small and normal animals, sometimes logged branches of big trees and cut down rattan for consuming in his family and exchanging salt, sugar and clothes. Those issues did not contribute seriously to forest resource degradation. He replied to the ranger and local authorities that he could not pay such fine because his family not only does not have money, but also does not have enough food to eat. He could suffer from being placed in confinement there if the ranger and local authorities request. Finally, the ranger and local authorities permitted him to return home with the products he exploited from the forest. At present, he sometimes goes to forest to practice such activities.

The same case of Mr. Vuon Cot Troi, some the Giong villagers have returned the old village to practice cultivation, gathering and trapping on free time. However, not only local people of village but even some of the local authorities sometimes come back the forest for gathering, trapping and hunting as the case of Mr. Ho Van Dung, Giong village mayor. He explained that sometimes, especially when the family and the village organize ceremonies such as; New Rice Ritual, and New Year he has gone to forest to trap and hunt wild animals, cut down the rattan and so on for daily family consumer and exchanging clothes, and salt and so on.

The protection of forest resources has also been debated in Giong village and Huong Nguyen commune. Many state officials still blame deforestation on the local people due to the practice of traditional livelihood activities of the local people. They bring out the regulations for fining the villagers, but the villagers sometimes reclaim these regulations. The villagers contend that they have lived closely with the forest so they know where they can practice traditional livelihood activities and how to do to protect their living environment. For instance, they seldom exploit natural resources from the scared forest and ghost forest where there is a lot of big trees and resident of many wild animals; they know how to prevent the fire spread to the next swidden plot or to such forests when they practice slash and burn cultivation, and so on.

Indeed, it is unreasonable to blame the villagers for deforestation entirely. The state officials should consider the villagers as forest protectors actively. With the difficult situation at present with the Giong villagers, state officials often feign ignorance about punishment of the activities considered as illegal.

Aside from negotiation based on livelihood strategies, administrative management is being negotiated in the Giong village. In the past, Giong villagers lived isolated in remote areas, their village was traditionally constructed by households within some clans, and controlled by the administrative management of the village belonged the representatives such as *Takoh Vêl* (village head) and *P'taha* (a council of village elders) (see more in Chapter III). After resettlement in the new location, the traditional institution is replaced by the state's administrative management apparatus to suit the new situation; most activities have been governed by state authorities, and the role of the village elders have gradually recognized in administrative management. This causes arguments in Giong village.

Although the villagers have accepted changes of community institution to suit the new situation. They as well as the current local authorities have still recognized state agencies about the role of the council of the village elders in all activities of the community, especially in maintaining traditional culture and belief, and in organizing the village. For example, Mr. Ho Xuan Thanh, Secretary to the Giong village's Youth Communist Union, stated with a manager from Cultural and Information Department of the Aluoi District in *Guol* (the inauguration of the community house) in the Giong village:

We could finish this works (Guol) thanks to the support of the state agencies, and especially the consultant of the village elders. They have experience in structure design, interior decoration, ritual and traditional cultural organization, etc. Therefore, in managing administration in general, and in organizing activities relating to maintenance of traditional cultural characters, we need to have their voices.

(Mr. Ho Xuan Thanh, Secretary to the Giong village's Youth Communist Union, 28 year olds, on 23 November 2004).

On the evidence of observed events above, I argue the Cotu people always make their voices heard in terms of local control over the physical and social landscape appropriately in new context through negotiating with the state authorities in order to look forwards to constructing a good life in new location.

### **5.2.3 The Cotu People Look Forward to Food Security**

Food security is a current hot issue in Vietnam, particularly for the ethnic minorities who are being marginalized during the process of development and are living under the poverty line. Food security is understood as ensuring that a household or a group of people has access to food sources, and their adaptation to those food sources when natural and social conditions change.

In Giong village, after relocation in the new location, the rate of poverty is still very high (about 75.5% of poor and very poor households), food shortage also occurs from three to six months with many poor households, and malnutrition rate among children is rather high (about 27% in 2004), and so on. Therefore, ensuring food source for the villagers is very necessary in the current time.

Traditionally, food source of the Cotu people was mainly based on their income that came from shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering. Nowadays, before the changes of natural and social conditions, how food source of a household in Giong village come from?

As mentioned previously, the Cotu people have attempted to maintain their life in the new context by setting up the production systems through combining and applying new production technologies and traditional knowledge in on-farm activities, simultaneously, by practicing traditional livelihood activities in strategy of their livelihood because this is also a basis to ensure food source for their existence. This proves that food sources of households in the Giong village have been created from

different income sources that come from on-farm and off-farm activities, and the state subsidies and social benefits in new context.

#### 5.2.3.1 Income From On-Farm Activities

Formerly, income from on-farm activities of the Giong villagers concentrated mainly on shifting cultivation. Nowadays, such income becomes more diversified due to the diversification of on-farming activities including swidden cultivation, wet rice cultivation, gardening, animal husbandry, and afforestation and forest protection, and so on. However, receiving income from these activities is not easy. This shows an adaptation process, as well as an investment of capital, labor, and technical knowledge in a new production condition. This is a consequence of changes from shifting cultivation to fixed cultivation, from merely practicing swidden cultivation to additional wet-rice cultivation, gardening, livestock breeding, and from accessing to natural resources freely to being controlled by the government in terms such resources.

Therefore, the first matter of the Cotu people in accessing food sources for existing in their new location is adopting new production models popularized by state officials. That means the villagers have to adopt new crop varieties, and adapt to new techniques such as using fertilizer and pesticides in cultivation, changing the structure of crops and animals. Aside from adopting new production technologies, the villagers still attach importance to maintenance or application of traditional knowledge in production activities, such as; selecting local varieties, storing seed, and arranging crops suit each soil type classified according to traditional method as mentioned in Chapter III.

As presented above, in order to survive under this pressure from changes in natural and social conditions, the Cotu people have changed their livelihood similar to the Kinh's activities like wet-rice cultivation, cash crop plantation, and home gardening activities. Such activities have gradually become familiar for them and become an indispensable part of their households because they play a key role over supplying main food source for the local people.

However, in order to increase productivity or enhance income of such activities, the selecting variety has been considered as one of the most important



factors in practicing such activities in new context. The villagers have adopted new rice varieties supplied by state officials or exchanged with other ethnic group, such as wet rice IR38, CN2, CR203; some crop species like mongrel maize, beans (green, black, and red), peanut rubber; and other fruit trees like: mango, orange, lemon, mango, persimmon; and so on. At the same time, the villagers have maintained the local crop varieties such as dry rice, cassava, taro, and sweet potato.

It can be said that retaining traditional species and adding more new species to the set of crop plants reveal the adaptation of the Cotu in the new situation. A case study below can illustrate strategy of ensuring food source of the Giong people in new context.

The family of Mr. Le Van Thoi, 57 year olds and Mrs. Tran Thi Hoa, 46 year olds has nine children including five boys and four girls. The oldest boy is 26 and the youngest girl is 12 year olds. The number of labor of this family is seven persons. They have owned three *sao*<sup>1</sup> of paddy field, one hectare of swidden plots, three *sao* of home garden, and 1.8 hectares of artificial forest. The husband of this family showed that on April of 1996, his family moved here and started to reclaim land for farming cultivation. Under the encouragement and support of the state officials, his family has deployed practicing new cultivation models consisting of wet-rice cultivation, home gardening, aforestration, and raising animals.

With wet-rice cultivation, this family had some difficulties in the first two years. Although they were trained cultivation technique and provided high yield variety, fertilizer and pesticides, but productivity is low, about 80 - 90 kg/*sao* due to lack of experience. According to Mr. Thoi, presently this activity has brought his family a considerable food source. His family can harvest about 800 - 1000kg rice (average yield is about 150 - 200 kg/*sao*/crop).

Together with wet-rice cultivation, this family received some fruit trees' varieties from the state officials like mango, sapocheas, orange, lemon, and persimmon for setting up home garden with some kind of vegetables intercropped. Such fruit trees could harvest fruit in last two years.

Especially, on swidden plots, his family has applied intensive cultivation techniques with intercropping some kind of plants like dry rice, cassava, taro, sweet potato, bean, maize, etc. Mr. Hoa contented that thanks to planting such kind of plants on the swidden field, her family has enough food to eat; simultaneously, she could have used such products for raising pig and chicken - This is also an income source that can help her children go to school.

(Interview Mr. Le Van Thoi, 57 year olds and Mrs. Tran Thi Hoa, 46 year olds on 22 November 2004)

Aside from diversifying varieties of plants in farming cultivation system, adapting new technologies in such system is also a special necessary factor for increasing income source for household in new situation.

<sup>1</sup> Unit of measurement in the Central and South Vietnam, 1 *sao* = 500m<sup>2</sup>

Presently, due to changes to the mode of production from shifting cultivation into fixed cultivation, or from monoculture into polyculture in swidden practice, and application new production mode like wet-rice cultivation, home gardening, cash crop plantation, the Cotu people have attempted to learn to use new technologies, together employ the experiences accumulated on farming production system. They know how to set up paddy field, as well as home garden, how to prepare or improve land before cultivation of such plants, and how to use fertilizer and pesticides for caring wet-rice and other plants.

Especially, in practicing swidden cultivation, by the real experiences and combining with new technologies learned, the local people know how to arrange logically the structure of crop plants in different kinds of land with different fertility levels. Trained on models SALT (Slope Agricultural Land Technique), combined with their own experiences, the local people know how to plant trees or lay stone along the contour line to prevent soil-erosion. Some species such as banana, pineapple and bean are planted regularly because these species are relatively stable, high consumption market and yield high income compared to other crops. Thus, in the land-use practices of the Cotu, aside from planting rice, maize, beans and cassava to meet their food needs, they also practice intercropping to increase the yield in an area, and choose crop plants to meet market needs. On average soil they intercrop cassava with banana for cash income. On infertile soil, depleted by cultivation for some time, some households plant cassava.

The Cotu also know how to arrange the structure of crop plants in different topography. On a sloping land, they plant dry rice, maize, bean, cassava, and trees. Rice sowed is local species with the high resistance to drought. On flat lands, near the river or streams and home garden, the Cotu often cultivate crops species and fruit trees, and raises pigs, buffaloes, and cows. In the alluvial land, the Cotu sows wet rice. Two kinds of crops are planted each year, a winter-spring crop and a summer-autumn crop. Aside from wet-rice paddies, some areas are utilized for fishponds.

Through observation, presently, practicing on-farm activities mentioned above, have not brought high income, but this is the first step manifesting a process of adaptation to new farming production models of the villagers in strategies to ensure food source in the next time.

### 5.2.3.2 Income From Off-Farm Activities

In addition to on-farm activities, off-farm activities such as hunting and trapping wild animals, fishing and gathering non-timber forest products have also brought remarkable income sources for several households in Giong villagers. Forest products collected like rattan, honey, bamboo shoots, mushroom, and so on have been used not only for their daily food and house construction, but also for exchanging or trading with outsiders.

Among off-farm activities, non-timber forest products' collection is carried out frequently by women and children in Giong village. Mrs. Can Hua explained to me that she and her children have gone to forest to collect mushroom, bamboo shoots, and other vegetables, even snails for daily family meal and animal husbandry. At the same time, they have gathered *Dot*<sup>2</sup> flowers, *La Non*<sup>3</sup> and waste iron like bomb or grenade casing, airplane and tank parts used in the war to sell for the Kinh traders. She shows that 1kg *Dot* flower can earn about 1,000 - 1,500 VND, and 1 kg of waste iron is about 500 - 1,000 VND. She estimated that when *Dot* has a lot of flowers, her family can earn about 10,000 - 15,000 VND in a day, and that sometimes if lucky, her family can save about 10,000 - 20,000 VND from selling waste iron.

Hunting or trapping, fishing and collecting rattan and honey are practiced by men in Giong village, although these activities have been prohibited. Such activities also bring a substantial income for their family. Mr. Ho Van Dung, the Giong village mayor, contents that after finishing on-farm activities the man villagers often go to forest to practice hunting or trapping, fishing and collecting rattan, honey. They often stay in the forest about 7 - 10 days in a trip and they can earn about 200,000 - 300,000 VND if the rangers do not see them. They sell or exchange products from such activities for lowland products such as agricultural tools, rubber slippers, clothes, salt and other food items.

In recent years, these off-farm activities of Giong villagers has become more and more difficult, and income source from such activities is less and less lower due to the scarce of forest products and state prohibition. However, in order to ensure food

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<sup>2</sup> Kind of reed used for making broom

<sup>3</sup> Leaf of a shrub used for making a kind of hat in the Central of Vietnam

source for survival of their family in difficult situation here, the villagers, somehow, still practice such activities. This can be seen as the villagers attempting to adapt to challenges of the life in the new context through maintaining their traditional activities.

In sum, through examining income source from the livelihood activities of the Cotu people in Giong village we can see that the villagers have attempted to adapt to the changes of natural and social conditions. They have learned new farming production modes and techniques, and applied the local knowledge or the experiences accumulated on the farming production activities; at the same time, they have still maintained the traditional livelihood practices in order to look forward to strategy of food security for survival before the challenges of the life in new location.

### **5.3 Summary**

In the new location, although the Cotu people have suffered from the pressures of changes to natural, economic, social and political conditions but they have attempted to adapt to such changes. The adaptation of local people in the new location is manifested through their process of place-making that concerns not only the construction of a physical place, but also with the construction of identity and social landscape.

First of all, the Cotu people have paid special attention to the construction of their new “home.” This is a result of the connection of access to modern knowledge and scientific technology from the outside worlds, and inheriting their traditional culture and custom for building their new house, setting up the production system, expanding the social relations, accessing to social services; school, medical station, means of common communication, practicing cultural exchanges with other groups, maintaining their cultural characters and identities, and participating in protecting the living environment, and so on in order to integrate into the modern life and look forward to building a stable, well-fed and healthy life but while still maintaining specific characteristics of their ethnic/ culture.

In addition, in the process of constructing their own place, they have not passively accepted the external interventions such as state policies and regulations, the

control of the state authorities, and market. They have still expressed their capacity and strength over controlling their physical and social landscape through reacting some unreasonable issues related to their livelihood, custom and belief, and negotiating with state authorities to resolve the conflicts that have occurred after they have been moved to the new location.

Especially, the Cotu people have paid great attention to practice several livelihood strategies to ensure immediate food source for survival of their family in new location in the current period, simultaneously, to create the basic premises for developing economy, ensuring food security and building stable and well-fed life. They have focused on practicing on-farm activities by the way they have tried to access to new production models and technologies and applying them together with combining selectively their experience and traditional knowledge on the on-farm activities. At the same time, in order to ensure immediate food source for their survival in the new location they have retained traditional livelihood activities although the state authorities do not allow them to practice.