

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study has sought to examine the process of adaptive responses of the Cotu people to Vietnamese Sedentarization program practiced in Huong Nguyen commune. The central focus of this study has been an analysis of how the Cotu people have been marginalized while the Sedentarization program aims to improve the life for them in the strategy of economic and social development of the country, and how they adapt themselves to the significant changes of physical, economic, social and political conditions in the new location. From the results of this study we can consider preliminarily whether the development of Cotu community is sustainable or unsustainable after resettlement in new circumstances.

This final chapter, first sums up what has been discussed in the previous chapter with particular emphasis upon some essential findings gained through my fieldwork in the Giong village. In addition, this chapter tries to analyze the major theoretical and empirical interpretations of the findings in the context of the Cotu community. Furthermore, this chapter also outlines the significance of the study.

#### **6.1 Main Findings of the Study**

As presented early, the Cotu people lived in small villages scattered along mountain slopes and valleys near the head of rivers and streams. Their life was based completely on natural resources through practicing shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering. They were blamed for “nomadic” and “deforestation” by the state. Therefore, the Sedentarization program practiced in Huong Nguyen commune aims to settle down the local people and to assist them to live a sedentary life and fixed farming, simultaneously aiming to protect the watershed forest in the region following strategies of sustainable development in mountainous area.

After nearly 10 years the Sedentarization program has brought some good conditions for local people to improve their life, such as; constructing local

infrastructure system and social welfare, supporting capital and scientific technology to develop new production modes. However, the program has also negatively affected both material and spiritual life of the local people. This demands that local people have to find out certain ways to cope with or adapt to unfavorable factors created from the program for their survival in new circumstances. Following are three main findings of this study concerning to the process of displacement, marginalization and place-making that is considered as a process of local adaptive responses of local people to the Sedentarization program.

Firstly, the Cotu people have been displaced from traditional village to settle along the highway No.49 and near Ta Luong stream far away from their previous dwelling a bout 100km and have favorable conditions for improving local infrastructures and other social services in order to be able to integrate with the outside world. The process of displacement following the Sedentarization program has excluded the local people from the access to forest resource and from practicing traditional culture, and included them to access to new scientific and technological knowledge in practicing farming activities and social welfare. This has created different impressions between different generations of the Cotu people. Some elder villagers express grief over what is far off by making comparison between the traditional village and the current ones, the middle aged villagers feel both unsatisfied and content about their current life. Meanwhile, some young villagers are pleased with their present life in new location.

Secondly, the Sedentarization program has brought some favorable conditions for local people to improve their life such as; local people can access to social services like school, clean water, electricity, health care services, road and means of communication, and they have been provided capital and trained in new cultivation techniques and methods. However, the program has also brought some unfavorable factors that are not easy to resolve in the short time for the local people. The right of access to natural resources of the villagers has gradually declined due to the control of the government over land and other forest resources, the prohibition in practicing traditional activities, and the scarcity of forest resources. The villagers have become increasingly dependant on external interventions, especial the state agency's

intervention; the poverty situation of the Giong villagers is still a significant problems; the local knowledge and identity has been ignored; and the role of the local institution has been reduced. This has impacted on both the material and spiritual life of the Cotu people.

Thirdly, in order to survive in the new circumstances with significant changes to the physical, economic, social and political conditions brought from the Sedentarization program and to integrate into the outside world, the Cotu people have attempted to reconstruct their new “home” that concerns both physical and social aspects. They have to pay special attention to build their house to look like the Kinh’s house style, simultaneously they try to keep traditional cultural characters of their traditional house on stilts such as the shape or interior decoration and so on in their new house. In addition, they have paid attention to construct their material life through setting up the production system by the way of access new production models and technologies and applying them together with combining selectively their experience and traditional knowledge on practicing the on-farm activities. At the same time, in order to ensure immediate food sources they have retained traditional livelihood activities although state authorities do not allow them to practice. Moreover, the Cotu people have looked forward to building a more stable and healthy way of living but it still keep specific characteristics of their ethnic by expanding the social networks, accessing to social services such as, 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. Furthermore, in the process of reconstructing their home, they have not passively accepted the external interventions, but they have still expressed their capacity and strength over controlling their physical and social landscape.

Therefore, it can be said that although the sedentarization program has brought out some difficult problems for the local people, they have attempted to reconstruct their new “home” that combines the characteristics of the modern life style and the traditional lifestyle aimed to construct their life to become more stable and healthy way of living, but it still retain specific characteristics of their ethnic group. At the

same time, they have tried to prove, somewhat, their adaptive capacity and strength in controlling their life in their new location. This proved that the process of reconstruct the new “home” has an important meaning in the material and spiritual life of local people, because it can assist local people to integrate with the outside world and help them retain their traditional culture and customs.

Following these results, question remains whether development of the Cotu community after resettlement in the new location is sustainable or not? This is a problem that is not easy to identify in the short term while sustainability is a long-term strategy. However, based on the criteria of sustainable development to deeply analyze difficulties, which the local people are facing due to the consequence from implementing the Sedentarization program, I argue that the development of the community is difficult to achieve sustainability if there are not adjustments in terms of shortcomings in the current conditions. This is an important foundation that can help us judge preliminarily about the interaction between Sedentarization program with the strategy of sustainable development in the upland areas of Vietnam that is attracting the attention of social researchers and policymakers of Vietnam in current decades.

With the target of hunger elimination and poverty reduction, and of natural resources’ protection in the upland areas of Vietnam, the Sedentarization program is considered as the first important step in the strategy looking towards sustainable development in the upland areas where fifty ethnic groups are living. However, through analyzing the process of implementation and consequences of the program in Giong village, I argue that the Sedentarization program will have the opposite impact with the strategy of sustainable development if there are not appropriate adjustments in terms of shortcomings in the designing or forming and implementing process of the program.

## **6.2 Theoretical Discussion of Findings**

In the strategy of economic and social development and integrate into the world of the country in the present decades, the Vietnamese government has placed a high priority on developing mountain areas, especially improving the living conditions for the ethnic minority groups who are nomads and shifting cultivators, together with protecting natural resources through developmental programs and

projects such as; Sedentarization program, New Economic Zones' program, program 327, and hunger elimination and poverty reduction for extremely difficult ethnic group, and so on. Sedentarization is one of the country's largest programs that aims to settle down non-sedentary and semi-sedentary people with the state expectations over improving living conditions for local people and creating a good environment for sustainable development in the mountain regions.

Implementing the Sedentarization program is considered as a multiple process related to displacing the local people from their traditional dwelling place to settle in new locations where there are changes to the physical, economic and social conditions. This process is similar to the case of displacement of more than 100,000 Shihalese farmer families following the Mahaweil project in Sri Lanka (Sørensen, 1997). According to Sørensen, the displacement process here involves in resettlement or relocation that people are constrained to move. This process is not simply experienced as an inner condition but is also a social event, which compels all within its scope to reconsider and renegotiate their identities. Therefore, this process stretches its influence in many directions and continues to include new aspects in an ongoing process of identification.

Similarly, the process of displacement of the Cotu people in Huong Nguyen commune and in Giong village is a multiple process where the state has used its power to constrain local people to move to the location demarcated by state authorities in order to improve the living conditions for the local people and protecting the watershed forest in the regions. This process has resulted in different feelings between different generations of the local people because of its negative and positive impacts on them.

Generally, the conventional development practice attempts to modify the lifestyles of the "underdeveloped people" to better reflect national or western standards of what constitutes a good life, politically, economically, and socially (Kampe, 1997). The ideology of development process is that help the poor people escape difficulties through the development programs and projects that aim at the improvement of people' living condition, reduction of poverty and elimination of hunger and so on. However, the development process not only improves the life of the



poor people to become better, but also creates marginality for them. It impoverishes the poor not simply in terms of material but also spiritual life. "It weakens the already destitute and it strikes at the soul of the powerless making them see incompetent. It breaks down or weakens their traditional social and cultural structure including system of values, religious beliefs, customary law, languages as well as local knowledge" (McElwee, 1999). The process also makes the powerless lose their ability to control their own livelihood, and more seriously, in some cases, their local rights to the lands and resources are denied. In such situation, local people are pushed into a corner because their livelihood and their means of survival are controlled by powerful actors in society in development process (Davies and Young, 1996).

The Sedentarization programs in upland area of GiaLai - Komtum and Lam Dong is one of the evidences of the impoverishment of the local people (Salemink, 2000). The poor have to follow what has been availablely designed (McCaskill, 1997), because the inner essence of the Sedentarization program is the state want to exclude the local people from the access to the forest resource and to assimilate them into the economic and social life of the larger society (Rambo, 1995, Kampe, 1997). So it can be said that the Sedentarization program used as a tool in order to control what people do and their access to natural resources instead of using territorialization and mapping to control people and natural resources within the boundaries as Vandergeest and Peluso (1995:388) mentioned.

After resettlement in the new location, some problems the Cotu people must suffer from the Sedentarization program are declined rights of access to forest resources, dependence on the external intervention, poverty situation, loss of local knowledge and identity, and ignored the role of local institution and so on. In other words, the Cotu people have been marginalized from access to natural resources and practice of traditional livelihood and cultural activities.

Under such circumstances, how do the local people react? According to Scott (1985), local people also have their own power, their own weapons to resist marginalization. In some cases they have used local knowledge, real experiences, customary laws, and social memory through collective strategies or individual tactics in order to react against those who make them become marginalized (Scott, 1985,

Peluso, 1992). The change in their livelihood, the gossiping about the state officials, the intentional ignorance of state policy, the demonstration and violent fighting are ways of directly expressing their response.

However, in several cases, the local people have made adaptive response to those who make them become marginalized. They have different solutions and tactics to avoid the challenges to their survival. They always try to avoid provoking powerful actors into any retaliatory action that might exacerbate their difficulty, they often apply strategies of adaptation to minimize adverse effects on them; and they find themselves in a dialectical situation in which they are in an attempt to adjust to new conditions (Bryant and Bailey, 1997). Moreover, they adapt to enclosure by extending the time spent pursuing livelihood needs or to diverse social and economic coping strategies, and they modify their traditional economic practices (Piseth, 2000). Some cases they try to apply modern technology or external knowledge together with retaining important aspects of indigenous knowledge or traditional culture in their daily practices, for example the Makong people living in the Thuong Trach commune (Diem, 2004). After excluded from the forest due to the setting up Phong Nha - Ke Bang national park of the Vietnamese government, most of Makong households have gradually adapted to the state intervention. They have accepted new crop varieties to increase productivity rather than expanding the production area. They have accessed and practiced the new production modes provided by the resettlement and border police such as; wet rice cultivation, and gardening. Meanwhile, they still retain their traditional shifting cultivation because it is a part of their life and their identity.

Similarly, the Cotu people do not react violently to state policy, but they have made adaptive response to changes of physical, social, economic and political conditions brought out from the Sedentarization program. Each household has identified their own way to maintain their survival and their livelihood. Most of them have attempted to adapt to such changes by making their own place appropriate to the new situation.

As we know, place refers not only a physical area but also the social role in the human society (Olwig, 1997), people have more immediate and full relationship with place, because place is politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions (Rodman, 1992), and it comes into being through the

interaction of people with sites, sites with people (Lowe, 2003). So a sense of place should be determined not only by the natural surroundings of a particular place, but also the social relations between it and other places (Rodman, 1992). Place is perceived as an element in deciding the behavior and characteristic of people, meanwhile they always find out the way of construction and adaptation to certain places to survive when having increasingly changes in terms of physical, economic, social, cultural, and political conditions (Toren, 1995).

Therefore, making a place often involves a construction, rather than merely a discovery or difference (Gupta and Ferguson, 1999). Construction here 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 (Hasger, 1997). This is similar to of the cases of displaced people, both forced displacement and unforced displacement and refugees that Toren (1995) mentioned. After being removed from their traditional village to the new location, they established their own place by making new house and new community, creating the new fields to cultivation, participating in social economic and cultural activities in new location through approach new ways of life in that location simultaneously apply selectively the traditional ways of life and so on.

Similarly, after displaced from their traditional village to settle in the new location, the Cotu people in my research site have attempted to construct their new “home” that concerns both physical and social aspects. They have accessed to new issues related to their livelihood, cultural and social activities, simultaneously applied selectively the traditional ways of life in order to look forward to building a more stable and healthy way of living, while retaining specific characteristics of their ethnic group in the new location, and to integrate with the outside world. They have proved the strength of local control over their physical and social landscape through negotiating with the state authorities over problems related to their life.

However, whether the development of their community after reconstruction in the new location is sustainability or not. This problem is discussed further through theory of sustainable development. As mentioned in the Chapter II, sustainability is “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (the Brundtland Commission). In order to achieve



true sustainability, together with developing economy, both environmental integrity and social justice must be simultaneously realized and maintained. Therefore, for a community to be truly sustainable, it must adopt a three-pronged approach that considers economic and social resources, as well as the quality of natural environment. At the same time, the sustainability of the community must be considered not only in the short term, but also in the long term.

With the Cotu community that has just been reconstructed in new location for nearly ten years, the identification of its sustainability is very difficult in the current time. However, based on the results of my fieldwork, I focus on analyzing primarily its sustainability from aspect of social justice that relates to the fair and equitable distribution of essential resources and power, fairly applied laws and regulations in order to know whether the development of the Cotu community in new location is sustainable or not.

As analyzed in the pervious chapters, after moving to the new location, local people have been controlled by state authorities, most activities related to livelihood strategy, community organization, as well as environmental management of the local people have been governed by the state. This means that power is concentrated with state authorities, the local people have become powerless. They have attempted to adapt themselves in new circumstances by negotiating with state authorities to prove their capacity and strengths over controlling their physical and social landscapes, of applying new technology, methods, as well as modern knowledge together with maintaining traditional knowledge and custom to look forward to building the stable life over both material and mental. However, I think that with such efforts, their community or their life is difficult to achieve true sustainability if there is not the state intervention in resolving the present shortcomings, because they have to depend on the management of the state. They cannot solve all problem themselves such as; allocation of cultivation land, finding consumer market of products, and natural resource management, and so on while they are powerless.

Therefore, only based on the criterion of distribution of power in social justice, we can see that sustainability of the Cotu community or the life of the local people in the new location is difficult to achieve if the state does not implement appropriate adjustments with current difficulties of the Giong village like lack of cultivation land

and invested capital for production, and lack of consumer market. This also impact considerably on the strategy of development of the upland areas in Vietnam.

As mentioned earlier, the strategy of development in the Vietnamese upland areas aims to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty, stabilize the life for ethnic groups and to create condition for them integrate with the modern lifestyle, at the same time, contribute to environmental protection through some development programs and projects. Sedentarization is one of important programs directly concerning development strategies. However, during the process of implementation, the Sedentarization program has both positive and negative impacts on the material and spiritual life of the local people, sometimes it causes inconvenient consequences to the general development strategy of the upland areas. For example, the living standard of Hmong people in Lao Cai province still continues to be fairly low, with some households experiencing a two to three month food shortage although they were settled following the program on the Sedentarization; some households were even retuning to their old community to use old swidden fields while maintaining a primary residence in the resettled state-built village (McElwee, 1999).

Linking with the case of the Cotu people in Giong village, we see that they have to suffer a lack of cultivation land, production capital and consume market. Some households lack food to eat from three to six months per year. Therefore, I think that the Sedentarization program is difficult to satisfy the targets of the strategy of sustainable development in the upland areas if there are not appropriate adjustments in terms of shortcomings in the designing process of the policymakers, and if there is not cooperation between the local people and the policymaker in forming and implementing process of the program.

### **6.3. Significance of the Study**

This study attempted to mak an empirical contribution to the process of local adaptive responses to Vietnamese Sedentarization program in the context of Huong Nguyen commune in A Luoi District, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam. Through the process of fieldwork in Giong village, Huong Nguyen commune, the study explores how local people have been marginalized after displaced from their old village to settle in a

new location following the Sedentarization program that aims to reduce poverty and eliminate hunger and to improve living condition for them. At the same time, this study attempted to depict the process of place-making of the Cotu people in new location in order to understand how they adapt to significant changes of physical, social, cultural, and political conditions caused from the process of displacement.

Through analyzing the main findings, it is hoped that this study will shed new light on whether the Cotu community of the Giong village is sustainable or unsustainable development after reconstruct in their new location. From this foundation it will help the government to reflect on some mistakes in the implementing process of the Sedentarization program and then make the appropriate adjustments following a certain specific time and context in order to look towards a strategy of sustainable development in the upland areas of Vietnam where fifty ethnic group are living.