

CHAPTER V

DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE AND DISRUPTED LIVELIHOOD

Many anthropological studies have discussed the effects of the developmental programs designed for the ethnic peoples in the Central Highlands. Two main types of arguments are found among these studies. Most studies carried out by the Vietnamese researchers argue that the development programs had brought great positive changes for the highlanders and their living areas, and the negative effects were actually just side-effects. On the other hand, some recent studies assert that the development programs were the technologies of power and had a political agenda meant to take away cultivable lands of the highlanders and prevent them from practicing their customs. One problem of these studies is that they lack of empirical evidence because none of them were based on intensive research in the Central Highlands.

This is not a place to supplement data for this problem; rather, this chapter is an attempt to go beyond such figures and provide a deeper understanding of the negative effects of the developmental programs in terms of the people's experiences. In particular, the chapter will point out that the development policies and programs have not only taken away resources for the livelihoods of ethnic people, but that they have also affected their cultural practices tremendously. They have also brought ethnic people to a marginality, disrupting their lives and culture. Although these arguments are constructed from data gathered at Buon Luoi alone, I believe, after traveling rather extensively through the living places of ethnic peoples in the Central Highlands, that such data present the common problems faced by ethnic peoples and show their situation under the imposition of socialist development programs.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part provides some insight of Buon Luoi before the arrival of the development programs of the socialist state. The second part will discuss the development practices and destruction of the livelihood of ethnic people. In third part, I will take a look at the consequences of the development programs. The final part is a summary of the discussion in the aforementioned parts.

5.1 The Bahnar and Forest-Based Livelihood in Buon Luoi before the Arrival of Socialist Developmental Programs

Buon Luoi, as I had learnt from my key informants during my fieldwork, was established in the early 1910's. The first inhabitants of Buon Luoi were sixty people from eight related families, who had to run away from their mountainous homeland in the southeast of Nghia Binh province (this area is administratively called Vinh Kim commune, Vinh Thanh district of Binh Dinh province), about 16 km northeast of the current location of Buon Luoi, after the French air force burned their old village. In terms of natural conditions, this new settlement area was a primary forest with land fertile enough for agricultural cultivation. The new residential place was carefully selected based on some main criteria including good drainage, water availability, accessibility to forests and the approval of supernatural beings. The pioneers had obtained their stable life in the new settlement area by following the same organization and regulations as in their homeland.

The stable life of villagers of Buon Luoi was intervened in 1936 when the French colonists started to control Buon Luoi and its surrounding regions. One military post was constructed three kilometers west of Buon Luoi at that time, or 800m in the east of Buon Luoi's current location, to take full control of the people and forests around Buon Luoi. After the construction of the outpost, colonist administrative system was established replacing the traditional heads of the village with an administrative chief of the village who was assigned by the colonists. The administrative chief of Buon Luoi was a young man who had been given the duty to organize all activities in the village in accordance with the rules of the colonists. The chief did not have a salary, but he did not have to pay taxes or contribute to public labor.

The colonists did not forbid the villagers from organizing their communal rituals, traditional law courts, or communal festivals, but all of these activities had to receive permission from, and they had to be carried out with the attendance of, the colonists. The villagers had to contribute their paddy, two buffaloes and minor forest products to the colonists as well as provide the labor for "public works" (road construction, timber exploitation) annually. At the same time, they were forced to exchange their products with the colonists for their all necessities, such as salt,

working instruments and gongs. For the villagers of Buon Luoi, the rules of the colonists violated their spirits, and they resisted the colonists by moving to more remote areas.

In the middle of 1945, some young men from Buon Luoi cooperated with a Japanese army and other Bahnar people living in the surrounding areas destroying the French post. After their success, the people from Buon Luoi returned to their living place and rebuild their village. At the end of 1945, the French had re-gained their power from the Japanese, but they did not have enough power to control people in such a remote place as Buon Luoi. The people of Buon Luoi then had a peaceful period of time in which they live their traditional way of life. People had planted and harvested a lot of paddy. Each family had several buffalos. Most of the families in the village had a good house. And every three years, the village organized a large ritual with a buffalo sacrifice for spirits and their ancestors.

This peaceful time for the villagers of Buon Luoi lasted until 1961, when the Republic of Vietnam established numerous adamant policies towards the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands that were aimed at expanding the state's power over mountains and assimilating the ethnic people into the Vietnamese cultural sphere. Under these policies, the traditional village headman was once again replaced by an administrative chief assigned by the administrative system, and all the cultural practices of the ethnic people were forbidden. Furthermore, the people of Buon Luoi were relocated from the forest areas to a resettlement area designed and constructed by the southern state of Vietnam through military pressure. A number of people from Buon Luoi, who could not escape from the pursuit and capture campaigns by the southern army, were brought into resettlement with a strict administrative management located at K'Nat, the current district town of K'Bang district. Meanwhile, villagers who escaped from the resettlement campaigns had to move frequently in the forests in order to hide from the southern Vietnamese army.

As I have stated above, in February 1964, villagers of Buon Luoi escaped from the concentration camp and returned to their own places. However, a better life did not await them. Buon Luoi and its surrounding areas had become a battlefield between the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and the southern Vietnamese army. Between 1964 and 1972, the village had become a target of attack of the

southern Vietnamese army. The current traditional village headman remembered that the southern army often used Agent Orange to destroy their cultivation areas and also bombed their village.

Fortunately, the villagers of Buon Luoi received great support from the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Some of its members came to stay in the village and participated in the everyday activities of the villagers. They showed great respect for the traditional village headman and worked closely with him in protecting the children, the village, and the cultivation areas from attacks by the southern army. They taught the villagers how to protect themselves from illnesses and sometimes sharing their knowledge on medicinal plants that the Bahnar could be used for treating stomachache and cold. They also taught children how to read and write the Bahnar language. In return for their help, the previous traditional village headmen became strongly supporters for the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. The villagers contributed a lot of paddy to the Front, and they encouraged their children to participate in it.

By the time of the reunification, Buon Luoi was a village of four hundred people living in thirty-eight families. Like many ethnic villages in the Central Highlands at the time, the village and lives of the villagers were organized and regulated by their knowledge. The common residential system was the three-generational family, which included a husband and wife, married children and their spouses, and their unmarried children and nephews. There were some families that had four generations living together. In the family, children gave respect to their parents. In their everyday life, the people of Buon Luoi survived through the exploitation of their physical surroundings. Their subsistence was based on agriculture with upland rice, livestock raising and gathering food in the forest. Upland rice was cultivated rotationally. There was only one rice crop per year. Annually, each family cultivated its upland rice on two or three plots, depending on their annual demand and working capacity. This annual plantation brought around three to four tons of rice to each family. In the rice fields, other kinds of food crops and vegetables were also cultivated in order to satisfy daily demand. Each plot was farmed on for three or four years, after which it was left to fallow. At the same time, villagers could gather numerous kinds of food and other products in the forest for daily consumption.

Livestock and cattle were raised for various purposes, such as food, rituals, or exchange for other goods. Villagers remembered that at one time their village had had a hundred buffaloes, several hundred goats and pigs, and great number of chickens.

5.2 Development Practices and Disrupted Livelihood

After the national reunification, the first development program to help this forest village and its people was called “Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement,” in 1976. My key informants told a story about how five cadres of the district authority, two of them ethnic cadres and the others lowland cadres, had come to in the village to persuade everyone to move to a new place where they could construct a new life with better living conditions, such as road systems, fresh water supplies, and a school for the children. Following the beautiful promises and instructions of the cadres, the villagers then spent many working days and great effort to construct houses and infrastructure in the planned area within one year, with the hope that they would have a better living place in the future.

As soon as they settled into the new residential area, however, the villagers realized that the FCFS program was in fact a program to regroup them. Villagers said that they were living in less convenient conditions than before. Each family was equally distributed around 600 m², a place that was enough for housing and a small vegetable garden. But most of families were not able to plant vegetables in their new residential land because it was far a way from water source. Everyday, villagers had to spend more time carrying water for their consumption and going to their agriculture plots. Villagers had hoped that their children would come to class for primary education in the new settlement place, but no class for the children was set up, because there was no teacher. Moreover, the stability of Buon Luoi had been shaken, since the program brought in additional twenty-one Bahnar families who had lived scattered in the forests around Buon Luoi due to the war and who had different cultural practices. Cultural practices of the villagers, who were the original people of Buon Luoi, were different from those of the immigrants leading to various arguments and conflicts among them. As a result, many people became disappointed with the new living place. Some of villagers decided to return and reconstructed their houses in the previous place. Meanwhile, other people, especially the immigrants, tried to find

another suitable living place and left Buon Luoi. Moreover, numerous peoples, who were unhappy with their living area in other places, had migrated to Buon Luoi. The combination of various peoples turned Buon Luoi into a very complicated village.

Following the program of FCFS was the arrival of collectivization with the establishment of an Agricultural Production Team (APT) at the end of 1976. This program can be seen as a technology of power to intervene organization in order to reorganize ethnic people. Indeed, after the founding of the APT, one hundred and eighty people of working age from sixty families of the new Buon Luoi had became members of this production team and the agricultural land of all families had been converted into properties of the APT (*tài sản tập thể*). Three people among those members were elected to be members of a management board of the APT, which included one chairman, one vice-chairman and one secretary in charge of accounting and store management. When collectivization began, the APT was allowed to be based on slash and burn cultivation, but it had to apply a socialist model of labor organization.

Within the framework of collectivization, members of the APT were divided into small specialized groups, for example, the slash-and-burn group, the transplanting group, or the child-care group, undertaking specific tasks. To comply with the socialist model of organizing labor and works, the APT's members had to come to the office of the APT at the their traditional communal men's house in the morning of working day in order to receive their daily task from the management board of the APT. Then, they went to work in the fields. At the end of the working day, all members of the specialist groups had to sit down together to analyze the work that one had achieved and to mark a grade for every person. Members whose work was evaluated as good level obtained a grade of 1; and members whose work was ranked at lower levels received lower grades. The grade of every working day of each member was recorded and used when the APT distributed products and income to its members. The villagers outside of the working age were annually given a certain number of grades. For instance, children under five years old were given 60 marks per year; children with age ranged from five to ten years old were given 72 marks per year. They were given an amount of the APT's products equivalent their earned grade (without their participation in APT's work). Besides the distribution of the APT's

products, members of the APT were provided with some important goods, for instance, salt, lighting oil, clothes and so forth, from the central government. The elder Bahnar, who I interviewed, had had high appreciation of the provided goods.

For the Bahnar people in Buon Luoi, this socialist ways of organizing work, and of distributing products were ineffective and deficient. It was said that work assigned by the management board of the APT usually led to wasted time. For instance, people in the planting group had to spend time to wait for the completion of the tasks carried out by the land preparation group. On the other hand, many people under or above working age could work and earn enough food for their consumption, but they were given no work and received small amounts of food distributed by the APT. Another problem was about the distribution of products. According to some former members of the APT, because the distribution plan of APT was based on a working grade (or quality and quantity of work) for each person, thus the unhealthy people could not earn enough food for their consumption.

It was also analyzed that because of the ineffectiveness of this socialist way of organizing labor, the annual cultivated area was small and the productivity of the crops of the APT was very low. Consequently, the Bahnar families earned less food than before they joined the APT. Hence forth, there was a problem of a growing food shortage among the families of the village that accompanied the development of the APT. As was stated by my informants, every family in the village used to have paddy stored in its rice barn, but after two years of participating in the APT, fifty percent of the families in the village had used all the paddy in their rice barn, and after three years, eighty percent of the families had no paddy in their rice barn.

To obtain more rice for their survival, all the families of the village had to create their own field in the forests, although this kind of activities was considered as a resistance to the socialist state. To avoid the control of local authorities, the Bahnar families used areas that they used to cultivate during the wartime scattered inside the forests. Simultaneously, people outside of the working age were the main manpower to carry out production activities in these fields. For all families in the village, the cultivation in these fields had become the main sources of food along with other agricultural products for the families. My key informants remembered that their

“illegal cultivation areas” provided them with two-thirds of the rice they needed for their annual consumption.

Life of the Bahnar people underwent more difficulties, when a program on transmigration, “Constructing New Economic Zone”, brought lowlanders into their living place. The old villagers kept in mind the experience of when the first group of nine Kinh families, consisting of forty people from a province in the Red River delta, namely Hai Hung province, came to their village in the early 1980s. After the first group, a hundred families with a thousand people from various provinces in different regions, such as Thai Binh, Ha Tinh in the North, Quang Binh, Binh Dinh, and Quang Ngai in the Southern Central Coast, had come to settle in Buon Luoi. Those Kinh families settled in an area close to the Bahnar village. Laborers from those families had also joined the Bahnar’s APT. They had been assigned to ethnic working teams to work and to instruct the Bahnar in techniques of intensive wet-rice cultivation technology. Even though the Bahnar did not want to apply wet-rice cultivation technology to their crops, they were under both pressure and strong directives from the ethnic cadres, and they had to apply this model of cultivation technology. Contrary to the great efforts of the people, however, the wet-rice cultivation activities had brought only a very poor yield. One of the former leaders of the Buon Luoi APT vividly remembered as follows:

“Cultivation of wet rice technology from 1980 to 1982 brought nothing to APT. Annual income of APT was mainly from slash and burn cultivation. Furthermore, because APT’s labor force used for upland-rice cultivation was decreased, annual output of agricultural production of APT after applying wet rice cultivation technology had reduced around 20% to 30% in comparison with the previous annual output their customary shifting cultivation technology. And, paddy distributed from the APT to one labor had reduced from 320 kg (1978) to 240 kg (1982). This means that each person was allowed to consume around 20 kg of paddy or 13 kg of rice per month only”.

The failure of wet rice cultivation technology was an important topic of social argument. For the local authorities, this failure was a result from the lack of the ability to learn about new logic and apply new cultivation techniques of the Bahnar people. A cadre who came to Buon Luoi earlier under a transmigration program told me:

“It was very difficult to work with the Bahnar. Their life and their cultivation technology were under the influence of superstitions (*mê tín dị đoan*). They could not learn anything new. Only one thing that we (Kinh people) had not done for them was to pick up food and put it to their mouth.”

For the Bahnar, the failure of the wet-rice cultivation technology originated from disrespectfulness towards the guardian spirits of the land by the Kinh people. An over ninety-five-year-old man commented: “The Kinh were not afraid at the Gods and they did whatever they wanted, but the Gods did not give what the Kinh wanted.” Meanwhile, a sixty-five-year-old Bahnar woman had a story that:

“The Kinh always claim they have better knowledge and cultivation skills, and criticize how the Bahnar worked on their land. But, in fact, they do not know how to cultivate in this area. You know, cultivation in our homeland is not easy work. For example, there were many wildlife animals in this area at that time, and if you do not know how to deal with them, you would not have any crop. Truly, most of annual plantation areas planted by the Kinh brought nothing to the APT because all the seedlings used to be eaten by squirrels and rats at the beginning of the planting season. Also, about the timing of the rain, the Kinh usually made us start our planting season when there was no rain. That is why we did not have wet rice to harvest when we were working in APT”. (Interviewed on 28th May 2005)

After one half of a decade of living and working with the civilized model of production and wet-rice cultivation technology, one half of the Bahnar members left the APT and came back to using their traditional cultivation technology. At the end of 1986, to save the Buon Luoi APT from collapsing, local authorities divided it into two APTs, one for the Bahnar and the other for the Kinh. This policy had no effect. Both of the APTs operated badly. The Kinh APT continued unsuccessfully with wet-rice cultivation due to, “they only know how to cultivate wet-rice in their homeland, not here, the Central Highlands” (interview with the former Kinh chairman of the CEPC of So Pai Commune). Meanwhile, the Bahnar APT was not able to develop its production because one half of the cultivation land, which belonged to the Bahnar, had been transferred to the Kinh APT by the separation process. Besides that, there was a ban on shifting cultivation technology; cutting down forests for agricultural production was strictly forbidden. Consequently, the more the two co-operatives operated, the more difficulties were brought to the co-operatives’ members. Both APTs collapsed at the end of 1991.

Practically speaking, the collapse of the APTs did not bring the sad stories of collectivization to an end. I had collected more stories that the Bahnar people, whose agricultural land had been transferred to the Kinh APT in the past, had faced more serious problems. I found that twenty families of Buon Luoi had no cultivation land

after the breakup of the APT because the lands, which they had contributed when they joined the co-operative, had been given to the Kinh APT, and they could not reclaim these lands from the Kinh. In dealing with this situation, these families had to make great attempts to cultivate in various small plots of land, where they had cultivated many years ago in order to survive. Families who owned cultivation lands next to the cultivated areas of the Kinh were also in trouble. Many Bahnar people told me that the Kinh people had applied very sophisticated ways to invade cultivation lands of the Bahnar. For instance, some Kinh people used to transgress their cultivation lands through creating new boundaries. Some used creeper crops to invade cultivation land; other Kinh people even cleared the crops planted by the Bahnar in order to force the Bahnar to give up their cultivation land. Under such pressure, most of Bahnar families had to give up their cultivation areas close to the cultivation areas of the Kinh by selling them to the Kinh under unfair conditions and for small amounts of money.

Another development program, which had also left a deep mark on the local perception of government development programs, was the CNWL&NC program. Actually, this program came to Buon Luoi at the same time as the FCFS program, but it was actively operated only after 1978. As I have mentioned in Chapter III, the main purpose of this program at the village was to erase ethnic knowledge and customary practices. In practice, therefore, it had tried to bring an understanding to the Bahnar to make them see that their ritual practices, house styles, traditional clothes, thoughts and behaviors were backwards and superstitious practices, the cause of their poverty, sickness, sufferings or, for short, their lower development stage. The second key performance was to help villagers to solve their problems. It promoted the Bahnar to give up their ritual practices, to change their house style, to use modern clothes and more importantly, to conform to national laws and regulations. Under guidelines of cadres, village regulations, customary practices, and the position and role of the traditional village headman were all abolished. The traditional communal men's house was no longer a place of common customary practices. Old men did not have to come to the traditional communal men's house to teach young boys about Bahnar culture, subsistent ethics and other subjects. Young and unmarried males also were not required to stay overnight in the traditional communal men's house. Moreover, anyone who tried to practice traditional culture was treated as a criminal.

For the Bahnar people in Buon Luoi, the erasing of their customary practices created serious negative impacts on the villagers' lives. The first and clearest impact was about losing the ability to protect the properties and life of the villagers. A seventy-year-old man in Buon Luoi told me a story that the Bahnar families were used to storing their cultivated products and keeping cattle in their cultivation places. This way of storing cultivated products and raising cattle served several purposes, such as, to save their products in the case of fire and to protect their living place. Up until the arrival of the Kinh people, the villagers had never seen any villager stealing products of others. Even during the wars, when people in Buon Luoi sometimes ran away from their living places for two or three years, their properties remained as they were left. In the village, if someone dropped something and others found it, the finder would bring those things to the traditional communal men's house and the person who lost it could come to retrieve his or her property. Since the migration of the Kinh people to Buon Luoi, villagers had lost a lot of agricultural products and animals. They caught a number of Kinh thieves, but they had to release them without punishment because they were not allowed to use the traditional law's court. Some thieves had even attacked the villagers who caught them after they were released, but the Bahnar villagers could not do anything about it. In an attempt to protect their properties from the Kinh thieves, the Bahnar families had to bring back home all of their products and cattle. These activities changed the small village into a dirty and polluted place. Within ten years of living in such a dirty and polluted environment (1983 - 1992), 180 villagers had caught serious illnesses and died. To avoiding the disease and to separate the Bahnar families from the Kinh families, the villagers made a decision and moved their village to the current place in early 1993.

The last program of constructing socialism in Buon Luoi was the "Constructing Large-Scale Production for Socialism" program, which also formed in 1976. The main objective of the program was to transform the region, in which Buon Luoi was located, into an economic area based on forestry production and it was to be directly managed by the central government. Following Decision No. 307/TTg of the Prime Minister, dated July 15, 1976, all the primary forests around Buon Luoi were changed into national property, controlled and exploited for national demand by an army unit. The statistics of K'Bang district recorded that the army unit had exploited

around one hundred thousand cubic meters of logs annually for national consumption (Communist Executive Board of K'Bang, 2003).

In 1979, the socialist state made a decision to change the army unit into an economic unit, namely Kong-Ha-Nung Forestry, Agriculture and Industry Corporation, aiming at to enlarge exploitation activities for national demand (Decision No. 439/TTg of the Prime Minister, dated December 12, 1979; cited in Communist Executive Board of K'Bang district, 2003). The corporation had established a number of forest enterprises to manage the forests and to exploit timber. Following this new establishment, ten thousand hectares of primary forests in Buon Luoi, or ninety percent of the natural area of So Pai commune, became the property of a state enterprise, namely So Pai State Forest Enterprise (SPSFE). This state forest enterprise was given legal rights “to prevent all people from harvesting forest products and to harvest timber according to the annual plan of the government” (interview with director of SPSFE on August 31, 2005).

To achieve its mandate, the SPSFE created two forest check points, one located at the head of Buon Luoi and the other located at the entrance to So Pai commune. Additionally, a mobile protection team was established to patrol the forests each day in order to control the cultivation activities of people. It had also hired a number of lowlanders “who have good skills” to exploit the forests (interview with director of SPSFE on August 31, 2005). “Annually, it contributes a thousand cubic meters of log for national demand and a million VND for government’s tax revenue” (SPSFE’s report, 2005). Some data of production results of SPSFE is presented in Table 5.1 below.

Until now, SPSFE has been assessed as a good State forest enterprise in terms of protection of the forest and timber exploitation. Since 2001, SPSFE has been selected as one of the model units for sustainable forest management supported by WWF, IUCN and the Vietnamese government. It has received a number of international experts from developed countries, such as UK or Netherlands, and Vietnamese university lecturers to work on sustainable forest management. Those international and national experts then organized a number of training courses for people from other state forest enterprises in different regions of Vietnam to learn about sustainable forest management.

Table 5.1 Production results of SPSFE

Year	Exploited volume (m ³)	Annual revenue (mill. VND)	Tax contribution	Annual benefit (mill. VND)	Number of labor	Payment for contracts on forest protection (mill. VND)
1993	8,273	957	623	450	46	305
1994	3,348	2,445	399	489	58	204
1995	4,219	3,152	1,032	499	58	488
1996	4,950	3,899	1,847	1,001	55	160
1997	3,966	3,656	1,673	856	55	290
1998	4,226	3,700	1,888	973	55	345
1999	2,800	3,483	1,999	859	50	-
2000	3,345	3,240	2,002	865	21	204
2001	3,369	3,611	2,339	1,167	21	99
2002	5,615	5,922	3,345	1,960	19	171
2003	3,476	4,987	2,750	1,683	19	191

(Source: SPSFE, May 2005)

What SPSFE did not present in its public reports was that the area and quality of forest had changed dramatically after thirty years under its management. As I had read through the internal reports of SPSFE, most of the remaining primary forests in Buon Luoi, which had contained biodiversity with many highly valuable species and a large stumpage volume, had become poor forests which contain only small trees with a small stumpage volume, around 140 m³/ha (see Table 5.2 for more information).

Table 5.2 Data of the forests and forestland of SPSFE

No.	Item	1991			2000		
		Area (ha)	Total stumpage volume (m ³)	Mean of stumpage volume (m ³ /ha)	Area (ha)	Total stumpage volume (m ³)	Mean of stumpage volume (m ³ /ha)
1	Forest	9,784.7	1,519,509	155.29	9,565.3	1,344,829	140.59
1.1	Rich forest	1,142.1	229,562	201.00	615.4	172,312	280.00
1.2	Medium forest	4,342.7	712,198	164.00	3,013.5	542,430	180.00
1.3	Poor forest	3,892.6	577,749	148.42	5,936.4	630,087	106.14
1.4	Manmade forest	407.3	-	-	0.5	-	-
2	Bare land	1,104.1			1,179.8		

(Source: SPSFE, May 2005)

SPSFE public reports also ignored the impacts on the everyday life of the Bahnar. For the Bahnar people in Buon Luoi, the creation of the SPSFE and its forest

management had deeply affected their everyday life. These effects, as I had recorded from my conversation with an older person of Buon Luoi, were:

“Because we are not allowed to collect even a small log in the forests, we can not construct our traditional communal men’s house with the traditional style. Nowadays our traditional communal house has been broken but we cannot repair it. Ten of our poor families are living under serious broken houses, also, because they do not have wood for constructing the new ones. One-third of the families in our village are living in small houses made of bricks and steel roofs, but this does not mean that they like this style or their economy is better than the others. It is because they are not allowed to collect materials from the forests.

You know, many of them are now crying in the new house. The first reason for their crying is that the house made of bricks costs a lot of money and to have a new house those families have to borrow money, but now they cannot have money for repayment. Second, the small houses with steel roofs are very hot during the day and noisy during the rains. Third, and the most important one, those families cannot create a place with traditional form for making ritual practices.” (From group discussion of the elder people at Buon Luoi on June 15, 2005)

Another effect of the program “Constructing Large-Scale Production for Socialism” was microclimatic change. The Bahnar people had often expressed to me their preference for the forest particularly during hot days. They complained about having to endure the very hot condition in their village because the cutting of forests for logging and agriculture had affected the microclimate of the area: “It was very hot in the day because of the lack of forest cover,” said a ninety-five-year-old man. People also recognized that it was very difficult to have good crops today due to irregularity of rainfalls.

The new development ideas and programs originating from renovation initiatives came to Buon Luoi later than other places, due to the establishment of a new administrative system in its area¹. In the memory of many villagers, the arrival

¹ Following Decree No. 181/HDBT of the Council of Ministers (Government) dated on December 28, 1984, An Khe district was divided into two districts, namely An Khe and K’Bang district, of which new An Khe district occupies 60.5% (or 199.1 km²) of natural area of former An Khe district, and K’Bang district occupies 39.5% (or 129.9 km²) of natural area of former An Khe district. On May 19, 1985, the administrative authority of K’Bang district was founded and its office was located in the current center of So Pai commune. After its foundation, the administrative authority of K’Bang district divided Son Lang commune into two smaller communes, Son Lang and So Pai commune. The administrative authority of So Pai commune was founded in Buon Luoi at the end of 1985.

After a large flood occurred at the area of K’Bang district office in 1987, the district office moved to its current place, K’Nat town, and the former office area of K’Bang district has become the center of So Pai commune.

of the new development ideas and programs was around the middle of 1990's and started with meetings convincing the Bahnar that "the family now becomes a self-help-economic unit and its activities are operated in accordance with market orientation," and "the government policies are giving equal opportunities to farmers to enjoy the benefits from commercial crops, effectiveness of land utilization, and the high productivity and quality of products" (Dang Thi Loan, Le Du Phong and Hoang Van Hoa, 2006: 228).

An important aspect of the renovation policy of Vietnamese government towards the Bahnar people in such a place as Buon Luoi was to replace ethnic subsistent cultivation with commercial plantation. Following the meetings to introduce the renovation policies, the main laborers of families in the village were invited to join a number of short training courses on how to plant coffee, cashew and peppers organized by "Program on Commercial Plantation" (*Trồng Cây Hàng Hóa*). After the training course, Bahnar people were given about one hundred or two hundred seedlings for "implementing trial plantation to see how commercial plantation is effective" as well as "to learn how their income will be improved if they apply commercial plantation" (interview with a senior staff of Division of Agriculture, K'Bang district, on October 24, 2005).

What are the effects of commercial plantation? According to the Bahnar in Buon Luoi, when coffee planting was introduced to their village, the small and quiet village quickly became a noisy and crowded place. Everyday, many Kinh people came in and out from the early morning to midnight to buy cultivable land from the Bahnar. Everybody talked about coffee plantations, and almost all of the families in Buon Luoi had tried to create their own coffee gardens. In an attempt to plant coffee, some families sold a part of their cultivable land in order to have money for investment, while others borrowed money or made agreements to join investment with the Kinh people for coffee plantation.

When I asked if they found the coffee plantations effective, most of the Bahnar families who had planted coffee told me that their decision on the coffee plantation was a serious mistake. The reason for them seeing the coffee plantation as a mistake was that this plantation required a large investment. Precisely, the more the trees grew, the more investment required. If a family did not have enough money for

annual investment with careful maintainence, the coffee trees would be stunted and they would not bear fruit. Meanwhile, the price of coffee went down dramatically. Villagers reported that when the villagers started to plant coffee, the price of fresh bean was at 6,000 VND/kg, and five years later it reduced to 800 VND/kg. Hence, the more people invested in their plantations, the more they lose their money. One half of the families who had planted coffee had to replace their coffee plantations by maize cultivation in order to stop losing money. For the H'Lung family, coffee planting had become a tragedy (see the story of this family mentioned in chapter I). After the great attempt to change their life by planting coffee, the H'Lung family had to move into the forest in order to maintain their survival with minor forest products.

Another case of coffee production tragedy was Tăm's family. This family had become economically better off than other families in the village because of the hard-working nature of all of its members. By 1997, the family decided to develop a coffee plantation in order to earn more income. It sold one buffalo and two hectares of its cultivation land for investment into coffee plantation. With amount of money collected from it selling, the family planted two hectares of coffee. Its coffee was growing up very well. Four years later, the family had received the first coffee crop that amounted to two tons of fresh coffee beans. However, the cash collected from selling these coffee beans was very small because the price was very low. In the following year, it harvested more than 4 tons of fresh coffee beans. But the amount of money received from the selling was equal to what it had received in the previous years as the price had fallen down dramatically.

In early 2002, Tăm's family decided to sell its coffee garden in an attempt to stop its loss of money. Then the family moved deep into the forest with a hope that they could use some lands, which they had used once a very long time ago, in order to feed its eight members. Because the cultivation land was far from the village, members of the family used to stay in the forest cottage for saving the time to work on their plot except for the second son, who is not satisfied with the "boring life" in the forest. The son used to come back to the village to enjoy the "modern life." In his "modern life", he joined a band of young boys, who also hated the forest life. He changed his name to Dat, meaning "success" in Vietnamese. The "modern life" could not be maintained without money, Dat had stolen some saving money and sold eight bronze cooking posts

of family for his spending. The parents were very angry with Dat and they had made strong criticisms to Dat. He committed suicide one day that he received two serious information, which were: first, he would be put into law court because of his participation in commit rape; and second, his parents were on the way going back to the village to give him punishment.

While the attempt to introduce coffee planting was almost a total failure, the efforts to establish commercial crops with maize had been moderately successful. As I had observed, maize became the most important crop among the Bahnar families. Most of the cultivation land was used for maize plantations. There were two crops per year. Nowadays, maize production contributed from 40% to 60% of the annual income of Bahnar families in Buon Luoi. In my attempt to examine the effects of maize cultivation, I found that they were more dependent on and exposed to exploitation by outsiders and external agencies. As the maize produced by the families was for sale, people were driven to produce more, so that they could purchase more. To produce more, people had to use new varieties of seedlings and artificial fertilizers. All of these production inputs were expensive in comparison with the financial capacity of the Bahnar families. Therefore, the Bahnar entailed greater dependence on loans from Kinh traders and shopkeepers. I had accounted that there were only six families in the village that had no debt with Kinh traders or shopkeepers. For villagers who had large debts with the Kinh, their cultivation lands were in a vulnerable position, because the lenders could take these lands if the indebted cannot return the loans within the time of the loan schedule.

The second development program implemented under advocacy of an innovation process and in parallel with the Commercial Plantation was Land and Forest Allocation (*Giao Đất Giao Rừng*), and the Bahnar were high priority beneficiaries. The reason for putting a high priority on Land and Forest Allocation (LFA) for the Bahnar people, according to the head of the Division of Resource and Environment of K'Bang district, was to prevent outsiders from invading the cultivated land of those people, and to help ethnic people to have legal rights to borrow money from banks for their production. Practically speaking, this program did not run smoothly. To date, 109 families in Buon Luoi received land certificates for their cultivation lands. However, there were only 23. 6 ha areas accounting for 10 percent

of the current cultivation area of the Bahnar that was allocated for Bahnar families. The other ninety percent of cultivation area of the Bahnar had not been allocated with certificates due to the location of this cultivation area, which was in the forest, and which was assigned to SPSFE. The land allocation did not actually help the Bahnar people to protect their land as the surrounding lands had no certificate certifying how large they were. It also did not support the Bahnar to borrow money as the banks refused to lend money to families with small-allocations of land.

Following policy of land and forest allocation, sixty-two families in Buon Luoi were allocated forest on contract from SPSFE. The total area of forests allocated on contract was 1,236.38 ha or 20 ha per family on average. Legally, the Bahnar families had the right to harvest minor forest products in combination with some payment for protection activities from SPSFE - 50,000 VND/ha/year. Most of the families had received less than 50,000 VND/ha/year in payment because their forests were always invaded by outsiders. The families could also gather very little minor forest products as these products had become common assets and were a scarcity today. As I had observed during my fieldwork in Buon Luoi, there were a hundred Kinh people going to forests allocated on contract to the Bahnar everyday and the Bahnar could not prevent them from collecting minor forest products (rattan, honey, fruits, wild animals, etc.). I interviewed some people who came to collect minor forest products in the contracted forests and asked them if they knew about the contract between the Bahnar and SPSFE, and they all said that they knew, but they did not care about that because “the forests are the state’s property.”

Similar to the program on LFA, Programs of Poverty Alleviation (PPA), which was launched in Buon Luoi in 1999, brought very little benefit to the Bahnar as well. Most of the financial investment of the PPA for this small village has been put into construction of a dam with an advocacy that the dam could provide water for wet-rice cultivation of the Bahnar. However, as I had witnessed, a dam, which was constructed with more than 2.5 billion VND by the PPA, did not provide any water for the wet-rice fields of the Bahnar. Meanwhile, other supports by PPA also had no value. For instance, maize seeds distributed for planting for Bahnar families by the PPA were “low quality,” and “families, who had used these maize seeds for their planting, harvested nothing” (collected from meeting between village and

representatives of Communal people's committee, on June 13, 2005). In the middle of 2006, the PPA had some investment for constructing houses for some of the poorer families in the village. During my visit to Buon Luoi in January 2007, I saw five of the families in Buon Luoi receive houses constructed by the PPA for a few months, but they could not stay in these houses because the houses had no doors or windows. Moreover, the style of those houses was totally different from the Bahnar style. They were in fact constructed with the house style of the Kinh people.

According to the government decision No. 163/2006/QD-TTg (dated July 11, 2007) of the Prime Minister, Buon Luoi was one of the locations in which poverty has been alleviated, and the PPA for this village was completed. For the Bahnar of Buon Luoi, this was an unfair decision for two reasons. The first reason for this conclusion, as I have mentioned, was that the villagers had received very few benefits from PPA. The second reason was that the decision did not reflect the actual situation of the people in the village. According to classification of the villagers, a hundred and twenty four people from twenty-four families were starving, which means they lacked rice for eating for about two or three months annually, and the families were living in small cottages. Eighty-seven people from twenty-three families were living in poverty. They had enough rice to eat but their families had no valuable assets. One hundred and seventy nine people from fifty families were of the middle-class. These people had enough rice to eat, their living houses were better than the houses of the hungry and the poor; and the families had some valuable assets, such as motorbikes, cows or buffaloes. The remaining fifty-eight people of twelve families were better off. These people were not worried about rice. They were living in better houses and they owned more valuable assets, such as a good motorbike, a TV set, and so forth.

5.3 Other Social Consequences Created by Development Programs

5.3.1 Absence of Sharing

Most of the Bahnar of Buon Luoi who I interviewed asserted that their fellow villagers did not share their food as much as before. Interviewees told me that in the past villagers went to hunt for subsistence purposes and they shared their products with their neighbours and eventually with all families in the village. Nowadays, they hunted for commercial reasons and they were no longer willing shared their products

with one another. If people had good game they would quickly sell it to traders for cash.

Land sharing was also non-existent. Previously, people could borrow lands in the fallow period of others to produce more food. This type of sharing no longer exists. I had found that twenty families of the village were leasing a part of their cultivation land to the Kinh people in the neighbouring villages, while forty-five families were poor and they had very little cultivation land to feed their families. When I asked the families who leased their land to the Kinh whether they could take back their lands and lease them to the poor, they told me that they had to lease their land to the Kinh in order to borrow some money for the family production. When I asked the poor why they did not rent land from others for producing more food, what they said to me was:

“Villagers now care about how much they can receive from leasing the land than to help each other. We have many times to ask them to lease their lands to us. But they do not agree because we cannot pay them as much as the Kinh Do.”

I found that the answer of the poor reflected the essence of the situation. The fact is that land leasers could have the same portion of annual harvesting crops from land leasing to the poor Bahnar as they received from the Kinh. But the annual total volume of crop that the poor paid to the leasers was usually lesser than the Kinh’s volume because the Kinh had better productivity. Therefore, land leasers preferred the Kinh to the poor Bahnar in leasing their land. In other words, some villagers now paid attention to their own benefits than to help the others.

The tradition of labor exchange among families had also changed. In the past, villagers helped each other during planting and harvesting times without calculating what they would receive. Nowadays they calculated for how much they could earn from their working days. The people who wanted to have support from other villagers had to provide good food in order to obtain more support in the future.

5.3.2 An Emergence of a New Living Style among the Bahnar Youth and Family Conflicts

In my several visits to the families at Buon Luoi, I often heard a common complaint from the parents that their children were very lazy and selfish; they asked their parents to provide them with modern living conditions, but they did not want to help their parents. I observed that the younger generation in the village now liked watching movies on television, riding on new motorbikes, smoking expensive cigarettes, and drinking expensive wine and alcoholic beverages rather than to work for their parents. Young boys formed bands of drinking and playing. During the daytime, they came to play billiards in the surrounding Kinh villages. People without noticing before could not realize that they were Bahnar because they wore modern clothes (t-shirts and jeans), their hair was colored and they spoke Viet language. In the evening, they travelled to neighbouring Bahnar villages to find their sexual partners. To earn money for their modern consumption, one young boy had become a robber. He was caught by the policemen when he was holding up people for money on the road near Buon Luoi. Another well-known story was that an 18-year-old boy from Buon Luoi married a fifty-year-old Bahnar woman in a neighbouring village. Three months after living with the old woman, the young boy sold a part of the cultivation land belonging to the woman for cash and then left her.

Most of the youth in the village hold the point of view that what was happening in their life was consequence of the backwardness and irresponsibility of their parents. When I organized a group discussion with thirty-two members of the Youth Union in Buon Luoi, some young boys commented: “Our parents are very stupid, and that is why we are still stupid people.” I then asked them why did they have that opinion. Their answer was:

“Previously, our parents had had buffalos, pigs and plenty of food. But they had used most of them for ritual ceremonies. That is a reason why we have nothing today. On the other hand, they are afraid of everything and they cannot carry out activities as the Kinh do. This is a reason why our life has not improved.”

I then asked the traditional village headman to give them some stories related to the worldview of the Bahnar. After they listened to stories of the traditional village headman, the young boys said to me: “Why do you believe in such kinds of stories?

You need to be re-educated from the first class of primary school.” Then, they stood up and left the group discussion.

Given the deferent agreements on current way of life between the parents and children, it is not surprisingly that arguments between the young and their parents happened quite regularly among the Bahnar families. In a number of cases, the arguments became noisy or developed into fights. I once observed an eighteen-year-old girl kicking her mother badly when the mother complained about her laziness and asked her to give up her relations with her group of friends.

In avoiding these family conflicts, many families allowed their children to get marriage at a young age and then force them to become an independent family. Some families eventually forced their unmarried children to become an independent unit. In other cases, the parents separated themselves from their children by moving into the forests. Such attempts reflected clearly in the current family structure in Buon Luoi. Currently, the most common residential type at Buon Luoi today was a two-generational family, which included the husband and wife and their children. I found sixty-nine of one hundred and nine families (63.3%) comprising of two generations; twenty-six families (23.85%) comprising of three generations; three families (2.52%) with four generations; and the remaining eleven (10.33%) only one generation. The other social statement, which could also be seen as evidence of the parents’ attempt to deal with the family’s conflicts, was that most old parents were living in their cultivation areas and leaving their children to take care of themselves in the village houses.

Gender equality was also serious problem in the Bahnar family, especially in the families of young couples. During my fieldwork in Buon Luoi, I witnessed that some women of young families run into and hired in the house of traditional village’s headman at the midnight in avoiding maltreatments of their drunken husbands.

5.4 Summary

I have discussed two fundamental questions: How development programs had operated at the local level, and how the development programs had affected ethnic people. I have exposed that Buon Luoi and its people had experienced a number of development programs implemented by the socialist state since the national

reunification. The Bahnar participated in development program with a strong belief that their life would be improved. During the period of constructing socialism, the Bahnar moved to new settlement areas designed by the FCFC. They contributed their agricultural lands and joined the agricultural production team in order to obtain a better mode of production. They also shared their resources with immigrants. Under the guidelines of the program called CNWL&NC, the Bahnar had learned and practiced a new way of life and a new culture. When renovation processes came to the village, many of them made great attempts to develop commercial crops with a hope that these crops were the means to improve their life.

In actual fact, the Bahnar received very little benefit from the development program. To be precise, the more the Bahnar people engaged in the development, the more they lost the resources that were necessary for maintaining their lives. After three decades of being beneficiaries of development program, the Bahnar found themselves living under the very great pressure of resource scarcity. Nowadays, in their homeland with abundant resources and favorable conditions for agricultural production, the Bahnar did not have enough cultivable land for feeding their families. They also had no forest resources for preparing their houses. They eventually lost the ability to maintain their remaining resources.

At the same time, the cultural practices of the Bahnar were seriously destroyed. Traditional village regulations were abolished. The traditional village headman lost his role in villagers' lives. The younger generation of boys no longer came to the men's traditional communal house to learn about their history and culture.

The disrupted livelihood and destruction of the cultural practices of the village created serious consequences. Practices of sharing resources among villagers were disappearing. The once harmonious lives of the families had been undergoing tremendous change. Children did not respect their parents. Husbands treated their wives badly. For short, in the Bahnar village today villagers had to live with not only resource scarcity but also social conflicts.



Picture 5.1 A ritual for ancestors in Buon Luoi



Picture 5.2 In the house of organizer of the ritual for ancestors



Picture 5.3 Traditional village's headman of Buon Luoi is making a ritual to ask *Yang(s)* about illness of an old man lived in neighboring village



Picture 5.4 A ritual for planting upland rice