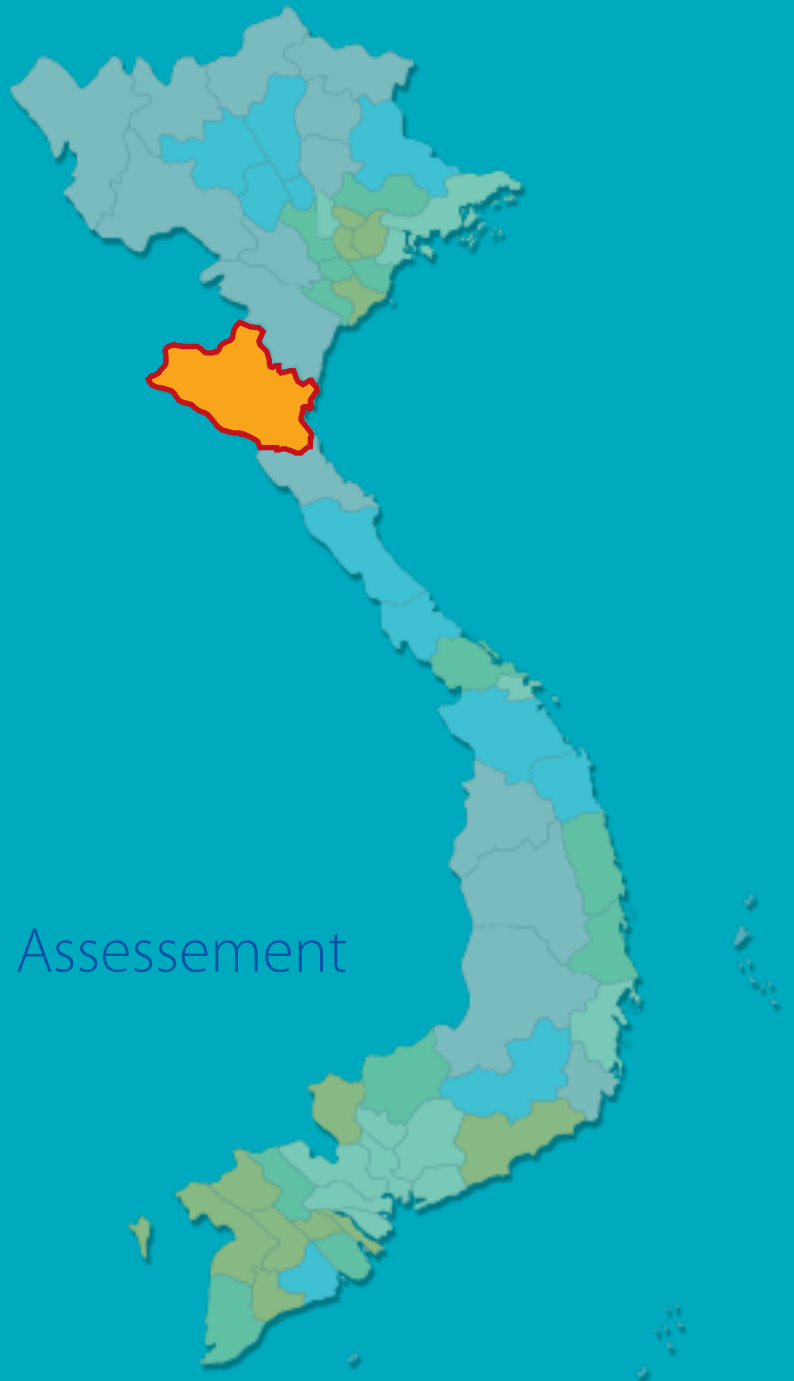


Poverty Task Force



Nghe An

Participatory Poverty Assessment

2003

Nghe An Participatory Poverty Assessment

July-August 2003

Foreword by Poverty Task Force

In May 2002, the Government of Vietnam finalized its Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) and embarked on a process to make the CPRGS a reality at local levels of Government. Through information campaigns and a series of regional workshops, officials from key national ministries have been explaining to representatives from local authorities how local level planning processes could be made more pro-poor, more evidence-based, more outcome-focused, better aligned to resource allocation decisions and better monitored.

During 2003 the Poverty Task Force (PTF) supported Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) in twelve provinces in Vietnam. These PPAs used a common research framework and methodology to investigate issues around poverty that were not well captured by the available quantitative data. The intention was to produce research which could be used, together with data from the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey, to inform the CPRGS secretariat on progress to date in implementing the CPRGS. The PPAs were also designed to provide information for new regional and national studies of poverty and these have now been published separately. The regional poverty assessments will, in turn, be used as an instrument in building capacity in pro-poor planning processes at sub-national levels of Government.

Eight donors contributed financial and human resources to support the PPAs underlying the preparation of this report and its complementary RPAs. These are the ADB, AusAID, DFID, GTZ, JICA, SCUK, UNDP and the World Bank. Each of the donors played a leading role in one of the regions of Vietnam. The distribution of regions among donors, summarized in Table, was based on the donors' trajectory in the field. By choosing regions where they are well-implanted, through projects and technical assistance activities, donors could take full advantage of the insights accumulated while working there.

Several teams conducted the PPA work in 43 communes scattered across the entire country. Among them were two international NGOs (Action Aid and SCUK) and various local NGOs and research institutes, including CRP, the Institute of Sociology (IOS), the Long An Primary Health Care Center, the Rural Development Service Center (RDSC) and Vietnam Solutions. In addition, two of the donors carried out the research by setting up teams of local researchers under their direct management. The local knowledge and expertise of these NGOs and research institutes was key to the quality of the exercise. A coordinating mechanism was set up for the PPAs. Members of most of the research teams were involved in drawing up the research framework and establishing a common

understanding of what was to be achieved from the field research. The latter was piloted by several of the teams and the research outline was modified to reflect the lessons learned. The final research framework covered the following areas of investigation:

- Perceptions of and trends in poverty, poverty dynamics and vulnerability;
- Progress in strengthening democracy at the grassroots level, especially the degree to which poor households can participate in a meaningful way in planning and budgeting processes;
- Challenges in the delivery of basic services, focusing on how poor households interact with service providers and how poor households can be empowered to claim their rights to basic services more effectively;
- The current mechanisms for delivery of social assistance (linked to the targeting work above) and how they might be improved;
- How the reform of the public administration is taking place at local levels of Government;
- The challenges of migration and the link between household mobility, poverty and access to services; and,
- Information about the environment of the poor and how it is changing.

These PPAs are now being published as a series. A separate report will synthesise the findings across the 43 communes and provide a more aggregated analysis of these themes. Another report summarizes the approach to the research, the methodology use and sets out the detailed research questions.

Table: Partnerships for the Regional Poverty Work

Region	Provinces included in the region	Donor in charge of the RPAs	PPAs			Team in charge of the PPAs
			Province	District	Communes	
Northeast Uplands	Ha Giang , Cao Bang, Lao Cai, Bac Kan, Lang Son, Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai, Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Vinh Phuc, Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Quang Ninh	DFID and UNDP	Lao Cai	Bao Thang	Ban Cam Phong Nien	Ageless Consultants (funded by DFID)
				Muong Khuong	Pha Long Ta Gia Khau	
			Ha Giang	Vi Xuyen	Cao Bo Thuan Hoa	Action Aid (funded by UNDP)
				Dong Van	Sang Tung Thai Pin Tung	
Northwest Uplands	Lai Chau, Son La, Hoa Binh					
Red River Delta	Ha Noi, Hai Phong, Ha Tay, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Ha Nam, Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh	WB	Hai Duong	Nam Sach	Nam Sach Nam Trung	RDSC (funded by WB)
			Ha Tay	Dan Phuong	Tho An Lien Ha	
				My Duc	Te Tieu Phuc Lam	
North Central	Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue	GTZ and JICA	Nghe An	Nghi Loc	Nghi Thai	IOS (funded by JICA)
				Tuong Duong	Tam Dinh	
			Quang Tri	Hai Lang	Hai Son Hai An	Team comprising MOLISA, ILSSA and independent researchers (funded by GTZ)
				Gio Linh	Gio Thanh Linh Thuong	
Central Coast	Da Nang, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa	ADB	Quang Ngai	Son Ha	Son Ba Son Cao	Vietnam Solutions (funded by ADB)
				Tu Nghia	Nghia Tho Nghia An	

Table: Partnerships for the Regional Poverty Work (continued)

Region	Provinces included in the region	Donor in charge of the RPAs	PPAs			Team in charge of the PPAs
			Province	District	Communes	
Central Coast	Da Nang, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa	ADB	Quang Ngai	Son Ha	Son Ba Son Cao	Vietnam Solutions (funded by ADB)
				Tu Nghia	Nghia Tho Nghia An	
Central Highlands	Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Dak Lak	ADB	Dak Lak	EaHleo	Eaheo Ea Ral	Action Aid (funded by ADB)
				Dacrlap	Đao Nghia Quang Tan	
				Buon Ma Thuot city	Ea Tam town	
Southeast	HCMC, Lam Dong, Ninh Thuan, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Binh Than, Ba Ria-Vung Tau	WB	HCMC	Binh Chanh District	An Lac Township Tan Tao	SCUK (Funded by itself)
				District 8	Ward 4 Ward 5	
			Ninh Thuan	Ninh Phuoc	Phuoc Hai Phuoc Dinh	CRP (Funded by WB)
				Ninh Son	Luong Son My Son	
Mekong River Delta	Long An, Dong Thap, An Giang, Tien Giang, Vinh Long, Ben Tre, Kien Giang, Can Tho, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau	UNDP and AusAid	Dong Thap	Tam Nong	Phu Hiep Phu Tho	Long An Primary Health Care Centre (Funded by UNDP and AusAid)
				Thap Muoi	Thanh Loi	
			Ben Tre	Thanh Phu	My Hung Thoi Thanh	
				Mo Cay	Thanh Thoi	

Acronyms and Abbreviations

DOLISA	Department of Labor, Invalid and Social Affairs
GSO	General Statistics Office
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
IOS	Institute of Sociology
MOLISA	Ministry of Labor, Invalid and Social Affairs
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NCSSH	National Center for Social Science and Humanity
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PSO	Provincial Statistics Office
PTF	Poverty Task Force
VHLSS	Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey
VLSS	Vietnam Living Standards Survey

Acknowledgement

This report on the “Nghe An: Participatory Poverty Assessment” is a product of many people. In addition to the research team, who played the key role, we would like to highly appreciate the active and efficient participation of staff at all levels, from provincial, district, commune to village levels. In particular, the report was completed with important inputs from hundreds of local people, the majority of whom are the poor. This report could not have been completed without various forms of inputs from local officials and the local people.

Taking this opportunity, we would also like to express our sincere thanks for the support of the Nghe An Provincial People’s Committee, Department of Planning and Investment, Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, the People’s Committees of Nghi Loc and Tuong Duong Districts, the People’s Committees of Nghi Thai (Nghi Loc district) and Tam Dinh (Tuong Duong district) communes. Our thanks are also sent to staff representing various agencies, offices and mass organizations in Nghe An province for their precious time spent to work with the research team. Inputs from these people via interviews and discussions were very valuable. We would like to highly appreciate precious comments made by representatives from various departments and agencies, local authorities at all levels in the workshop held in Vinh on December 11, 2003 for the draft of this report. Our thanks are also conveyed to hundred of local people and staff of Thai Binh and Thai Cat villages (Nghi Thai commune, Nghi Loc district), Quang Yen and Dinh Huong villages (Tam Dinh commune, Tuong Duong district) who actively participated in the research.

We highly appreciate the participation of associated researchers from Vinh University. Their active participations strongly facilitated the success of the field study and the research.

Lastly, we expect this report contribute to future discussion on poverty reduction in Nghe An Province and Vietnam as a whole.

On behalf of the Research Team

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Executive Summary

1. Poverty and Its determinants

According to the VHLSS 2002/03, the general poverty rate of the North Central is 43.9%, and that of Nghe An Province is 43%. The food poverty rate is accordingly 17.5% for the region and 16% for Nghe An. As for the poverty rate in 2000 calculated by the Nghe An PSO, 19.7%, and that of the DOLISA by June 30, 2003 in Nghe An was 14.7%. DOLISA also indicated that the province was trying to decrease the poverty rate to less than 13%. In Nghi Loc and Tuong Duong districts, two survey sites of this study, the poverty incidence in 2000 was as follows (source: Nghe An PSO).

1.1. Inhabitants are better-off in recent years, especially in terms of their spiritual lives. There is a slight improvement in material life. However, the improvement is uneven and not stable. Most (75-88%) the non-poor and about half of the poor confirm that they are better-off in recent years. A small number of the poor (6%), however, thinks that they are worse-off. Whilst households are better-off thanks to their business development, their wealth is unstable. Thanks to improved living standards, children are better cared and educated. Lives of women, however, have not remarkably changed compared to that of men.

1.2. Reasons for improved living standards in recent years. Most inhabitants think that improved living standards can be attributed to the following:

- ✓ Integration of people's livelihood into market in conjunction with more effective agricultural development policy at local level;
- ✓ More loans granted to people;
- ✓ The introduction of new science and technology, holding training courses, agricultural promotion and donating of new seedlings and animal breeds;
- ✓ Local development projects;
- ✓ Livestock breeding and aquaculture are successful development
- ✓ Infrastructure is partially improved.

The fact that many poor households have access to loans from various sources has been mentioned some many times. Non-poor households are often able to borrow more than their poor counterparts (from 5 to 10 million VND for the former, and a maximum of 3 million VND for the latter). Non-poor households also utilize their loans more efficiently because they have manpower and skill. Some poor households have also accessed loans. However, because of lack of knowledge and technology, small scope for investment and short loan amortization periods, they cannot utilize loans effectively.

1.3 Determination of poor households at the locality. Poor households are identified based on the local income level, considering the poverty reduction "target" as assigned by higher levels of authority.

In accordance with the classification of living standards at Nghi Thai commune, 52% of households are classified as poor while this poverty incidence is 25% as per survey results of the Nghe An PSO in 2000. Poverty incidence is 70.8% in Tam Dinh, a mountainous commune while it is 61.2% according to the commune's classification and 68.22% according to Nghe An PSO in 2000.

As a matter of fact, apart from the income level criterion, which is only a rough measure, local people also adopt the following criteria to identify poor households on the following criteria:

- Households with elderly persons
- Households with school-children and a shortage of labor
- Households with chronically ill persons
- Households without assets, capital, poor housing conditions
- Households purely doing agriculture without any other source of income

Self-assessment of in the two locations, therefore, is very much different from the average level of the province. Self-assessment of local people shows that the incidence of poverty in two locations is approximately 50% (employing a lower criteria) while the average poverty incidence in the province is 14.7% (Nghe An PSO, as of 30 June 2003).

1.4. Poor household selection process. The selection processes at two research locations are basically identical although socio-economic conditions, poverty incidence, and ethnic composition differs from one location to another. Local people knew that they had to select the right families in order to provide certain benefits and supports to them. The selection process started from listing poor households based on their incomes, then submission of results to the Party and Fatherland Front for approval, and finally, public selection. This process was considered by local people as, democratic and transparent. "Sympathy", partiality or lobbying practices (wrong families, criteria) might have occurred, but very rarely.

A target number of poor households were assigned to each commune, according to which number of poor households must be reduced every year in order to show achievement in the hunger eradication and poverty reduction movement to higher level. Or it may be that the government could not afford to subsidize all poor households. Hence, "achievement" or "emulation" factors have affected selection criteria and results.

Most interviewees (81%) responded that they have participated in the selection

process, and this percentage does not differ much among groups (male/female, poor/non-poor, Kinh ethnicity/minority groups).

1.5. Benefits of Poor Households. Poor households are aware of 4 following privileges given to them: Tuition fee exemption/rebate for secondary schools; health insurance certificates; exemption from agriculture tax; and access to concessional loans. Among these 4 privileges, “access to concessional loans” seems to be the most effective for the poor.

In Tuong Duong mountainous district, poor households further benefited from other schemes such as grants of iodine salt, grants of medicine, health insurance, textbooks and notebooks. People are made aware of these benefits through meetings or communications with commune workers. The poor also know that they should contact commune workers if they are to receive such benefits.

However, policy implementation in some locations was neither good, nor transparent. At some locations, local banks and organizations are hesitant to lend money to the poor because they are afraid of possible bad debts. As a result, un-favorable policy implementation also limited effectiveness of these policies in term of poverty reduction.

1.6. Creating non-farming jobs for the poor

The access of poor households to non-farming occupations is still limited. There are only a small number of household enterprises in these areas. The poor, therefore, could not have sufficient opportunities to find jobs in these enterprises. A number of people have been moving to other provinces to do business in order to gain a stable income. However, only non-poor households are able to run business because poor households cannot afford to pay for initial costs.

Some traditional occupations such as bamboo and cane knitting have been recovered, which *employed some employees from poor households*. However, these businesses have not expanded sufficiently because of a shortage of raw materials and lack of access to markets. Aquaculture is a new occupation in coastal communes. However, *only middle-income households* can run this business because poor households do not have the capital, skill and manpower.

1.7. The poor often encounter risks: calamities resulting in crop loss, animal epidemics; diseases (partially because environmental pollution); house burning (houses of the poor are often made of inflammable bamboo). **The poor believe in a likelihood of escape from the poverty, but they are always wary of risks, especially in absence of effective countermeasures against risks.**

In order to mitigate risks in business and life, the poor think it necessary to do the followings: (1) to diversify their livelihoods, (2) to be given long-term concessional loans, (3) to save their money, (4) to be trained in the transfer of technology, (5) to be self-reliant and help each other (in terms of labor, way of doing business). To

this end, the poor expect the state to effectively implement the hunger eradication and poverty reduction policy.

1.8. Local experiences in escaping from poverty. At both communes in the survey, certain lessons about escaping from poverty have been explained by people and commune workers. These include family solidarity, a sense of advancement, avoidance of laziness; knowledge of running business; access to loans and effective loan utilization; self-reliance and saving.

2. Current patterns of participation in local decision-making

People knew almost all of the commune officials. But those officials only came to visit commune officials only when they saw it as necessary. Among issues of Decree 29, top 3 issues that local people "know" the most (from 60-70%) are: the policies of poverty reduction loans, contributions, and public works construction plans.

The rate of poor and very poor household knowing about these issues is very low - around 20-25% while this rate is from 70-100% among non-poor households. Minority people and women know commune officials less than Kinh and men do.

Women and the poor rarely attend village meetings. Men still play a dominant role in social affairs. Women only attend meetings when men are not available.

3. Basic public services delivery mechanism to the poor

Education

3.1. Mass involvement in education has improved in localities. Nghe An has been actively investing in education. Apart from tuition fees, many expenses and contributions have been mobilized from people such as money to buy notebooks textbooks and educational tool kits, school uniforms, contributions for upgrading school facilities, improvement of teacher salary (teaching subsidy), youth fund, parents fund, medical insurance, etc. Parents associations bridges between school and families, through which families and people participate in educational activities as well as supervise teaching and learning activities.

Schools treat the voice of the parents association as a reference for its management. This implies the involvement of people in educational activities at local level. The rate of households attending parental meetings is rather high (71.0%), even among poor households.

3.2. Barriers to mass involvement in education and participation of the poor

1. *Contributions are still very costly to the poor.* Therefore, poor pupils are likely to drop out. This also creates the inferiority complex for poor pupils

because they are reminded before the class of late payment of tuition fees and other contributions.

2. *Expenses and contributions at semi-public schools are much higher, which are costly to middle-income households.* Because poor pupils usually have modest learning outcomes, they have to attend semi-public schools. Consequently, they have to pay higher tuition fees, and it results in more drop-outs.
3. *Because the poor rarely participate in parents associations, their voices are of little importance.*
4. *Educational support policies are less effective. Especially in mountainous areas, these supports are not “adequate enough” to maintain poor pupils’ schooling and ensure effective anti-illiteracy.*

In some cases, regulations of tuition fee rebates and exemptions are not followed to family planning policy, which makes it impossible to support poor households with numerous children.

3.3. Illiteracy and anti-illiteracy activities for women and the poor. In Tam Dinh mountainous commune, there are many illiterate people and people who have lapsed into illiteracy in every age group, even those of 20 years old. A majority of them are women, who used to be literate but have now become illiterate again due to no use it for long time.

People suggest that they should have more access to literacy classes by means of (1) simple encouragement such as provision of oil for lamps, notebooks, textbooks, pens, or (2) organization of literacy classes during their free time.

Health care

3.4. Health care services at the commune have improved, but not sufficient. Improvement of Commune Health centers should be continued. In particular, the capacity and professional ethics of commune health-care workers should be improved. Many people, even the poor, go to see private doctors because private doctors are more qualified and the poor allow them to defer payment.

3.5. There are certain impediments in granting of medical insurance certificates for the poor. As a matter of fact, not every poor household has been granted medical insurance certificates. It is very cumbersome and time consuming to process medical insurance certificates. Each medical insurance certificate is only valid for the certificate holder, and cannot be used by other members of the family.

3.6. The use of Medical insurance certificate does not bring practical and visible benefits for the poor. Medical insurance certificates cannot be used in the case of higher referral, even for the emergency. In the mountainous and isolated areas, it takes long time for local people to travel to the commune health centre, and the use of medical insurance certificate might not be the best choice for the poor.

Medical insurance certificates are only effective for resident treatment, acute or chronic sicknesses. But certificates must be used at the designated level. However, these cases are less than cases where certificates are not usable or ineffectively used. *Generally, medical insurance certificate has not yet brought into play its effectiveness as a social service in support for the poor.*

Agriculture extension

3.7. Agriculture extension services have assisted the development of local production

The Commune's agriculture extension program has made agricultural activities more efficient through the provision of new breeds, NPK fertilizer, insecticide, etc. Some products can be bought on credit, which partially supports poor households. Many training courses on breeds, animal husbandry and aquaculture were conducted. Households have actively attended these courses because they lack knowledge and they wish to increase productivity.

3.8. However, capacity of the poor in absorption and application of agriculture extension knowledge is very limited.

In practice, the poor have little chances to apply their acquired knowledge because they are less-educated and information is not relevant to their background. The poor still have inferior complex in active contact with agriculture extension workers.

3.9. Women have actively participated in agriculture extension services, especially those from non-poor households. The situation "women do, men study" is prevalent. Recently, the Women's Union has paid attention to encouraging women's participation in agriculture extension services. Although poor women are more aware of this, their participation is still limited.

3.10. Agriculture extension services should respond to needs of the poor, such as

1. *Help increase income and diversify sources of income to fight against poverty, help the poor to deal with frequent risks such as drought, insects, epidemics.*
2. *Provide market information, support product selling.*
3. *Provide agriculture extension services with deferred payment for the poor.*

4. Coverage by social assistance program

4.1. Formal social relief system has in part affected those under policy coverage. Social relief, however, affects to a limited extent poor households, who are not covered by policy. Poor households face many difficulties and risks such as crop loss, epidemics, sickness, etc. They are given little formal supports. *They have to count on themselves and other people in community. Traditional/informal social relief network in rural areas seems to be effective and plays a significant role in the recent context.*

4.2. Sudden supports are often belated, small and less effective. Families under policy coverage, elderly people are those who receive regular supports. These supports are made from commune budget once or twice a year.

Other social relief schemes applied to poor households are rebate and exemption from contributions such as exemption from agriculture tax, exemption from public works, rebate of school building contributions for pupils, etc. Ethnic Minority people are also given exclusive supports or programs such as tuition fees rebate, free provision of primary textbooks and other supports from Program 135 or resettlement program. Selection of households for granting supports was made pretty well. People give priority to the poorest households. A contingency fund contributed by people has been established at one village. However, little people know this fund or know how to use it.

4.3. People and local officials thought that social relief schemes *only assists partially the poor in overcoming initial difficulties.*

Besides, social relief programs for mountainous areas seem to create and maintain passivity or a wait for help from higher levels or social organizations among a part of the poor. In general, people view the implementation of social relief programs as relatively fair. However, poor and very poor households underestimate the fairness of these programs.

5. Public Administration Services

5.1. Currently, people at the commune level know where to go and whom to meet if they want to have their documents certified. In general, people find the administration procedures at commune level to be quite favorable. Since village officials and people have close community contacts, people sometimes are in the habit of coming to officials' houses to get signatures, and they feel happy with such a work style of village officials. Not only people, but also owners of small-sized enterprises are given favorable administration procedures.

5.2. People do not complain about the attitude of commune officials or fees to be paid when they go through administration procedure. People seem to appreciate the "one-door administration" services. At remote areas, it is time-consuming for people to go to village/district, and sometimes they do not meet right authorities.

5.3. The fact that commune workers will become government official will not affect significantly relationship between village staff and people. However, people request that village staff must be professionally qualified, formally trained, maintain working time and be prestigious to people.

6. Migration and environment

Migration

6.1. There are few migrants from Nghe An so far. A small number of people migrated to adjacent areas or other provinces/cities to do short-term or seasonal business. Majority of people (over 90%) migrated to other cities/areas for longer term (more than 1 year), and they worked for enterprises, companies. Recently, labor export is considered as a new type of migration.

Male migrants predominate (male 61.7%, female 38.3%). Young people account for over 70%, and children account for 28.3%. About 71.2% migrated to other provinces, and 3.4% migrated as labor export. Members of middle-income families often migrate far way, down to the south. They remit money to their families, but not much. There is little women migrating far away, but they remit more money to their families. Members of poor families do not travel far away because they do not have initial capital. They often make ends meet in adjacent areas by simple jobs such as bread selling, scratch collection, etc.

The main reasons for migration inflow are marriage, employment at local establishments. **The main reasons for migration outflow** are economic reasons.

6.2. Impacts of migration on local situation

The most positive and important impact is that almost migrants have helped raising income and reducing poverty for their families and locality. However, since they have little capital, they have to do simple jobs with low income. Therefore, they cannot support their families much. Besides, migration helps improve awareness and change way of thinking and doing of people to make them more self-confident and active.

Negative impact is that migrants may face difficulties at workplace because they lack information and knowledge. Migrants sometimes face discrimination from indigenous people because of discrepancies in race, language, and life-style. Some ethnic minority people complain that Kinh migrants make some change in their living conditions and lifestyle, land use and give rise to social evils.

6.3. Implementation of migration policy is not very good. Some migration policies are not practical or not well implemented, resulting in difficulties or disadvantages for migrant families. Since immigration procedures are complex for migrant families, they could not join community and rarely be given privileges from the government. Due attention has not yet been paid to management and supervision of migrants at departure and destination.

6.4. Migration trend and long-term solution. Recently, domestic migration flow to provinces/cities is increasing. Labor export is a new trend, which is considered as effective for local economic development. However, migration and labor export is only a temporary solution when the locality is not able to generate many jobs on site. In principle, they consider it necessary to develop local and household

economies in a sustainable manner, and thus skills and communication ability of laborers should be improved in immediate and long term.

Environment

6.5. People's awareness of environment and environmental issues. People living in locations under the survey do not have a clear perception of environment. However, they are aware of some environment problems through concrete examples. According to their opinions, there are three major environmental problems at Tuong Duong and Nghi Loc, i.e., water resource pollution, arable land pollution and severe climate. Apart from that, people are also aware of hygienic safety.

Almost half of interviewees are using spring water (minority people at Tuong Duong district), which is not hygienic. In Nghi Loc, people are facing fresh water resources pollution problem because of untreated waste water from Vinh City. This problem has adversely affected people's health and production activities of the locality. Industrial waste water also pollutes arable land and water surface for aquaculture activities at the locality.

6.6. Local environment protection

Although people are still poor and not knowledgeable, local people have a sense of environment protection. Meanwhile, local government is yet to have concrete environment protection measures, and is dependent on interventions from higher levels.

At Tuong Duong district, many poor households are exploiting forest resources without considering economic and environmental problems in the future. Local people think education in forestation and forest protection should be delivered more for people to improve their awareness. At the same time, local economic development will help poor households to run business to reduce deforestation practices. Participatory approach to forest protection is a new and effective manner implemented recently in Nghe An.

6.7. Social relations in environmental issues. There have been manifestations of environmental conflicts among benefit groups: ordinary people and entrepreneurs at locality have had different assessments of impacts produced by enterprise's production activities on environment. More than half of interviewees confirmed that wastes from enterprises have adverse impacts on their living environment. Environmental issues have been addressed by people through village meetings, or through proposals to district and provincial governments, or even litigation. However, these voices of concern seem not to be strong enough. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs, when being asked, always confirm that their business

almost does not create any environmental impacts or conflicts to the community.

7. People's recommendations on actions for poverty reduction

7.1. People's suggestions on direct actions to reduce poverty

1. Build and improve agricultural infrastructure to reduce risks of crop loss and epidemics.
2. Equip the poor with relevant knowledge of science and technology so that they can master knowledge. More attention should be paid to business management knowledge, household economy and cost-effectiveness.
3. Improve access of the poor to loans with longer maturity.
4. Develop non-farm occupations and supplemental jobs, encourage the poor to learn from each other to develop new occupations.
5. Foster a sense of self-reliance among the poor with the support of local government in terms of infrastructure, job placement, etc.
6. Implement policies properly, develop projects in the locality with community participation to ensure a transparent and public implementation process.

7.2. People's suggestions on Democracy, participation and empowerment

1. Commune staff should be more capable, responsible, enthusiastic and intimate with people.
2. Strengthen education, knowledge and thoughts for people.
3. Improve information flows to people through meetings, direct information diffusion and mass media.

7.3. People's suggestions on educational supports for the poor

1. More investment for schools in order to reduce pupils' contributions. End collecting school building expenses at areas where the poor and minority groups are living. Poor pupils everywhere should be exempted from school building expenses.
2. Develop the Study Promotion Fund for poor pupils, especially poor pupils with good study outcomes.
3. Reduction of tuition fees at semi-public schools and classes.
4. Subsidies in-kind (textbooks, papers, pens, notebooks, accommodation, rice) for poor pupils from remote and mountainous areas.

5. Removal of cumbersome procedures, which define that poor pupils have to pay tuition fees in advance and than it will be refunded only after their family are certificated as the poor household.

7.4. The provision of Health care certificate for the poor: Should expire for 2 years and the certificate should be more significant. Certificate grant and usage procedure should be simplified so that the poor can make use of health-care privileges. The certificate should allow other family members to access to health-care services.

7.5. Provision of agriculture extension services for the poor should be changed:

1. Agriculture extension services should pay more attentions to such issues as *market price, product selling, and information on credit borrowing*.
2. Agriculture extension workers should be formally trained be enthusiastic and willing to work with the poor everyday on farm.
3. Train the poor by a “hands-on” manner in the most necessary knowledge; provide on-site services, deferred payment, etc.
4. Agriculture extension services should be integrated with credit lending for poor households.
5. Link agriculture extension projects with forestation projects at mountainous districts. Support the sustainable use of forest resources.
6. Link agriculture extension activities with technical improvements.
7. Make use of soil resource to increase source of foodstuff for minority people, who do not have horticulture practices.

7.6. Social relief is very necessary for a part of the poor, especially for those, who experience sudden risks or little labor capability. In order to improve effectiveness of these programmes:

1. Measures of support *must be clear, transparent and community participation-based*, especially poor households themselves.
2. Focus on *long-term anti-risk measures* such as diversification of sources of income, development of non-farm activities, provision of market information and product selling, etc.

Overview

Background of the Nghe An PPA

Objectives and issues of the PPA

With the aim to update information on poverty and to support the implementation of national development strategies at central and local level, a series of studies have been conducted by the Poverty Task Force which consists of the government agencies and donors (the World Bank, other donors, and NGOs). Those studies focus on evaluating the situation of poverty in eight regions of the country (namely, Tay Bac, Dong Bac, the Red River Delta, the North Central, the Central, the Central Highlands, the South East and the Mekong Delta). This study consists of the followings:

1. Quantitative data analysis on regional poverty and inequality profiles based on the VHLSS 2002
2. Assessment of targeting indicators
3. Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA)

Under this framework, a series of PPA aim to describe an overall picture of poverty in each region as well as to provide inputs to develop the *Vietnam Development Report* for 2004 titled "Poverty" which was presented at 2003 CG meeting. Findings of this PPA also are expected to provide inputs for Nghe An province to formulate its annual socio-economic development plan.

This PPA conducted in Nghe An Province is one of 12 studies in selected provinces and cities. The study was conducted by a research team from the Institute of Sociology, the National Centre of Social Science and Humanities commissioned by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in August and September, 2003.

A great number social targets and poverty reduction targets have been measured in household surveys through the use of quantitative indicators. However, many aspects and gaps in the picture of poverty must be filled by qualitative information. This PPA was conducted in response to these needs. In accordance with the time frame agreed among the Poverty Task Force members, this study mainly focused on 5 key issues, including:

1. Poverty and its determinants
2. Current patterns of participation in local decision-making
3. Basic public service delivery mechanisms to the poor
4. Coverage by social assistance programs
5. Delivery of public administration services

Two other issues are included in this study, for example, how migration and the environment influence on poverty reduction in the community.

The study was strongly and actively supported by Nghe An Provincial People's Committee, Department of Planning and Investment (DPI), Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA) and other agencies and mass organizations, as well as agencies and offices in Nghi Loc and Tuong Duong Districts, in Nghi Thai and Tam Dinh Communes that were selected to be survey sites.

A team of lecturers from Vinh University also participated in this research. With rich knowledge about local poverty, their inputs and participation greatly enriched the findings of the research.

Methodology of the PPA

Method

The following common methods have been applied in this PPA:

1. Collecting secondary data and information from staff working at the provincial, district, commune and village levels
2. Conducting in-depth interviews (staff having responsibilities relevant to the study topic and some key households)
3. Conducting focused group discussions regarding 6 topics that are inputs for 6 issues covered in the report
4. Holding meetings to classify poor/rich households in the villages to enable to compare with results from VHLSS that was conducted in 2002
5. Informal talks and observation in the field to provide more inputs for poverty assessment in the research sites (observations in terms of infrastructure, housing and daily life of the local population)

In addition, a questionnaire was designed to conduct face-to-face interviews in line with the Terms of Reference of this PPA. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of the study objectives/topics. 160 households living in Nghi Thai and Tam Dinh communes were interviewed with this questionnaire.

Sample size

After discussed with the Nghe An People's Committee, the DPI and DOLISA, two districts have been selected for this PPA as sites: the one is Tuong Duong District which is located in a mountainous area. The other is Nghi Loc District which is located in the coastal area.

In Tuong Duong District, Tam Dinh commune was selected. In the selected commune, two villages were selected: Quang Yen and Dinh Huong villages. In Nghi Loc district, Nghi Thai commune was selected with Thai Binh and Thai Cat villages. Information relating to those two districts is presented later on.

Methods applied	Administrative levels in the study					Total number of interviews	Number of respondents/ Participants in the interview	Total number of participants in the interview
	Province	District	Commune	Village	Households			
Secondary information collection	1 x 1	1 x 2	1 x 2	1 x 4	0	9	2	18
Semi-structured individual interview	15 x 1	15 x 2	15 x 2	2 x 4	10 x 4 villages	123	1	123
Focus-group discussions	0	0	3 x 2	0	3 x 4 villages	18	12	216
Households classification	0	0	1 x 2	1 x 4	1 x 4 villages	10	30	300
Other PPA methods	0	0	1 x 2	0	1 x 4 villages	6	12	72
Total number of samples	16	32	48	16	60	166		729

Characteristics of the PPA site

Nghe AN Province

Nghe An Province is located in the North Central Region. The province borders Thanh Hoa province in the North, Ha Tinh province in the South, Lao PDR in the West and the Eastern Sea in the East. The province is divided into coastal, highland and mountainous areas. The province covers an area of 16,487.29 square km. The border with Lao PDR is 119 km long and has a national border gate, Nam Cam, located on highway No. 7A. The coast is 84 km long which is convenient for beaches (Cua Lo beach). Cua Lo port was constructed to enable 10,000-ton ships to enter.

Highway No. 1A, Highway No. 7A, the Ho Chi Minh Highway, Highway No. 46, Highway No. 48 and the National Railway run through this province. Highway No. 1A and the Ho Chi Minh Highway connect the North and the South while Highway No. 7 A and Highway No. 48 connect the East and the West.

Vinh is the major city of the province and Cua Lo is a provincial town. There are 7 lowland districts, including Dien Chau, Quynh Luu, Nghi Loc, Hung Nguyen, Nam Dan, Do Luong and 10 mountainous districts, including Thanh Chuong, Anh Son, Yen Thanh, Nghia Dan, Tan Ky, Quy Chau, Quy Hop, Que Phong, Con Cuong, Tuong Duong and Ky Son. Roads for cars and vans have not yet been constructed in 10 communes of 4 mountainous districts: Ky Son, Tuong Duong, Que Phong and Anh Son.

Statistics collected from the Provincial Statistics Office (PSO) found that the population in Nghe An in 2002 was 2,943,570, out of which females are 1,502,520. The natural population growth rate was 1.6 percent in 2002 and the population of the working age was 1,638,345 people (female accounting for 828,736 people). 304,110 people live in urban areas and 2,639,450 people live in the rural areas. There are 16 ethnic minority groups living in the province with the total number 401,050 people. The Thai have the largest population with 283,129 people; Tho ethnic group has 57,736 people including both Dan Lai and Tay Poong groups; KhoMu ethnic group has 28,687 people and H'Mong group has 27,640 people. Poor household incidence in the 10 mountainous districts is 23.9 %.

The total revenue of the province in 2002 was VND 10,870,701 of which revenue from Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery accounts for 40.4 %. 25.8 % of revenue is generated by industry and construction. Revenue from services accounts for 33.9 %. The monthly average per capita income was VND 240,000 in 2001, of which the monthly average income was VND 603,000 in the areas and VND 208,000 in rural areas respectively.

Education and health care services have reached villages. There are 678 primary schools with 375,265 pupils in the 2002-2003. There are 489 lower secondary schools locating in the province with 319,962 pupils and 84 upper secondary schools with 121,434 pupils. There is one University in the province. There are

6,000 hospital beds.

Nghe Loc District

Nghe Loc district is located in the Southeast of Nghe An province. Located in a plain area, the natural area of Nghe Loc district is 739.09 square km. The District borders Dien Chau district in the North, Yen Thanh in the West, Cua Lo town in the East and Vinh City in the South. Highway No. 1 runs through the district. Although the district is close to the coast, the amount of rainfall is the smallest compared to other districts in the province. Land in this district, particularly the area of land located in the West of Highway No. 1, is not fertile. Only peanuts, sesame and sweet potatoes can grow. However, the yield is very poor. Besides that Non-agricultural trades have not developed in this district. Therefore, Nghe Loc is considered one of the poor coastal communes in Nghe An province.

There is one district town, Quan Hanh, and 33 communes in the district. Quan Hanh is the administrative centre of the district. There are 3 mountainous and 4 coastal communes. The population of the district is 213,996 people of which 109,055 are female. The population in the working age is 119,530, out of which are 60,853 female.

Agriculture, fishery and aquiculture are key industries in the district. Key crops in the area are rice, peanuts, sesame, and maize. The average productivity of rice production per capita is 310 kilograms annually. There are 33 enterprises locating in the district. Total revenue generated from these industries in 2002 was VND 153,832 million.

There are 37 primary schools with 27,024 pupils and 5 junior secondary schools with 8,481 pupils in the 2002-2003.

According to the statistics collected from the survey on hunger and poverty conducted by the province in 2000, the incidence of poor households of Nghe Loc District is 17.4 percent and the average percentage of poor households in the province is 19.7 percent.

Nghe Thai Commune

Nghe Thai commune is located in the lowland area, 5 km away from Vinh City in the Northeast. The commune is 20 km away from the Nghe Loc District center.

There are 11 villages in the commune with the total population of 8,200 with 1,776 households. A total of 4,019 people are now of working age. Education levels in this commune are poor, and then it is very difficult for people living in this commune to absorb modern and advanced technologies with their current background.

Nghe Thai is a poor agricultural commune. Severe natural conditions have significantly limited agricultural production in the commune. The natural area of the commune is 905.4 hectares, of which, paddy rice area is 264.3 hectares. 113.0

hectare is used for raising other crops. Lands for forestry account for 124.6 hectares.

Asphalt roads are not yet available in the commune. Inter-communal roads are made of sand and soil, and then those are not convenient for travel even in the dry weather. Cars can only reach 8 out of 11 villages in the commune.

There is one health center in Nghi Thai commune with 5 staff including 3 nurses and 2 assistant doctors. There is one primary school with 945 pupils studying in 30 classes with 15 classrooms. There is also a lower secondary schools located in this commune with 849 pupils, studying in 19 classes. Pupils have to study in two shifts in 12 classrooms. Facilities and equipment in those two schools are very poor. Pupils are studying in an old building and teaching aids are hardly available. The majority of the teachers graduated from pedagogical colleges and only a few of teachers are university graduates.

Nghi Thai is one of the poorest communes in the district due to poor production capacity, dependency on natural conditions, poor educational level and little opportunities of non-agricultural activities. *It is estimated that the incidence of poor household in Nghi Thai commune is 25 % (according to PSO and DOLISA in 2000).* With the aim to achieve poverty reduction, agricultural and production activities have been promoted by the commune. The following activities have been implemented:

- New kinds of trees have been introduced. New varieties of trees with high yields have been introduced. The area of paddy rice has been reduced, and then rice is substituted by a new variety of peanut. In addition, more vegetables and other high quality crops are raised to supply Cua Lo Town and Vinh City.
- A new kind of hybrid cow has been offered to the households. The model of farms raising chicken and ducks for eggs is promoted.
- Promoting non-agricultural employment: developing bamboo and rattan products and handicraft trades. Now, thousands of people are engaged in handicraft trades with the average income of VND 400-500, 000 per month
- A certain proportion of the workforce had been migrated to Ho Chi Minh City to work in footwear or garment industries. Other workers have been sent abroad as foreign workers.

Nghi Thai commune is entitled to various hunger eradication and poverty reduction programs such as the Vietnam-Germany Loan program with the budget of VND 500 million. Another project, which is funded by the World Bank with the budget of VND 2.7 billion, aims at upgrading commune infrastructure commenced in 2002.

Tuong Duong District

Tuong Duong is a mountainous district located in the West of Nghe An Province. It is one of the poorest districts in the province. Tuong Duong is 200 km away

from Vinh City, and shares a border with Laos.

The area of cultivated land in this commune is 1,026.07 hectares, of which 1,916 hectares is used for regular cultivation. The area of land being irrigated is very small. 21,846 hectares of forest is being cared for by the commune.

The population of Tuong Duong is 72,000 people living in 13,717 households of which 35,684 are female. The annual population growth rate is 1.6 percent. The number of people of working age is 28,600 people, out of which 13,553 people are female.

With regard to the ethnic groups living in Tuong Duong commune by June 30th, 2003, approximately two thirds of the population is of Thai ethnicity. Kinh accounts for 9 % and the remaining are from Kh'mó, H'mong and Tay.

Total population:	72,888	people
Of which		
Thai	53,714	(73.7%)
Kh' Mu	8,520	(11.7%)
Kinh	6,548	(9.0%)
H'Mong	2,866	(3.9%)
Tay	564	(0.8%)
H'du	515	(0.7%)
Others	161	(0.2%)

The district is comprised of two communes and 1 provincial town, Hoa Binh. There are 545 km of roads, of which 38 km are asphalted and 507 km are paved with rock. In addition, there are 99 km of waterways in the district.

There are 24 health care centers including 1 hospital, 3 inter-communal health centers and 20 commune health centers, with the total of 193 beds. There are 272 health workers including 17 university graduates, 68 who have graduated from secondary technical health care school and the remaining are nurses and midwives.

There are 58 schools in the area including 39 primary schools, 17 lower secondary schools and two upper secondary schools. There are 163 classes at the kindergarten level, 853 classes at primary level, 306 classes at lower secondary level and 41 classes at upper secondary level. There are 1,462 teachers teaching in those institutions and the number of pupils at all levels is 22, 218.

Revenue generated from productions in the district in 2002 was VND 127,108 billion (constant price in 1994). The total annual revenue keeps growing in the recent years with the rate of 10-15 %. The economic structure is as follows:

- Agriculture-Forestry-Fishery: 53.6%
(of which forestry accounts for one third)

- Handicraft and construction:	37.4%
- Commerce and services:	9.0%

Recently, economic structure is changing with the development of forestry, agriculture and fisheries. The proportions of industry and handicrafts and commerce and services are also increasing. Handicraft and construction in this area focuses on producing materials for construction, food processing and timber processing. 686 people are conducting small business and offering private services (accounting for 2.4 % of the labour force). Total food productivity (rice equivalent) is 11,384 tons over the cultivated area of 11,916 hectares. The average productivity is 0.117 tons per hectare.

Tuong Duong is one of the districts with the highest incidence of poor households in Nghe An province, taking only after Ky Son district. *Data of the survey conducted in 2000 by PSO and DOLISA shows that incidence of poor households in Tuong Duong was 61.2 %. Reports from the district show that the poor households in the commune are 46.2 % by the first half of 2003 with 33,471 poor people, a reduction of 2.9 % compared to the last half of 2002.*

29,649 poor people (equivalent to 88.6 % of the poor) have been offered health insurance certificates.

Loans have been offered to 3,738 households with the amount of (debit of) VND 9,957 billion. Undue debts not have been paid account for VND 762 million. The amount of VND 903.4 million has been offered to job placement programmes. The district has allocated 32 tons of rice to its population during difficult months to save its population from hunger. The district also spent the amount of VND 120 million to procure female calves for 8 extremely difficult communes in 2002. Gifts have been sent to 68 victims of Agent Orange and 32 poor households.

The hunger elimination and poverty reduction program has substantially improved the livelihoods of the commune's population, particularly the poor. However, loans have not been utilized and advanced technologies have not been applied in the daily life. Furthermore, cooperation among concerned agencies is not strong or effective enough in implementing particular programmes.

Tam Dinh Commune

Tam Dinh is a mountainous commune in Tuong Duong district. The commune is located 200 km away from Vinh City and 20 km away from Hoa Binh town (the district town of Tuong Duong). The natural area of land in this commune is 13,600 hectares with 68.8 hectares of paddy rice. They raise two crops a year. However, there is no irrigation system available in this commune. There are 7,462.3 hectares of forest land including the Pu Mat nature reserve area along Highway No 7. The majority of the local population (accounting for 98.8 %) is of Thai ethnicity.

The commune comprises of 7 villages, including Quang Phuc, Quang Yen, Quang

Thin, Dinh Phong, Dinh Tien, Dinh Thang, and Dinh Huong. Travel and transport in these villages are very difficult in some cases. In order to come to the commune centre, local people have to take boats, and then walk or take motorbike taxis. There is no marketplace in the commune center. There is one lower secondary school, two primary schools and other kindergarten classes with the total number of 1,133 pupils. Compulsory primary education is being promoted in the commune.

There are 779 households living in Tam Dinh commune at the moment with 3,934 people, out of which 1,888 people are female. 1,573 people in the commune are of working age.

Highway No. 7 runs through this commune. Villages located along the Highway are better off and these villages are targets of the Pu Mat project. Villages located on the other side of Lam River are poorer due to poor transport system and a lack of paddy fields. Those communes do not often have access to mass media during the flooding season. During the growing season, local people often go to their terraced fields, bringing bamboo shoots and dried meats for food.

Total revenue from agriculture and forest production in 2002 was VND 1,604,464 thousand. The average income per capita (rice equivalent) is 239.7 kg and VND 35,000 (money equivalent) per month. Seven hunger eradication and poverty reduction programs and the Programme No 135 are now on-going in the commune since 1998 with the total budget of VND 609.5 million. 229 households are beneficiaries of the programs (accounting for 37.4 percent of the commune households). A great number of workshops have been conducted by the Pu Mat Project to transfer the technical knowledge in afforestation, planting orchards, growing rice, raising buffaloes, pigs, and ducks and developing 31 hectares of forest gardens.

Tam Dinh is one of the most difficult communes in Nghe An province under Program 135. However, livelihoods of the local population have been improving of late. In 2000, *findings of the survey conducted by PSO and DOLISA indicated that the incidence of hunger and poverty in Tam Dinh is 68.2 %*. Reports of the commune indicated that there were 503 hungry and poor households in 2000 with the average income of less than VND 80,000 per month (accounting for 61.6 % of the commune's households). The proportion of hungry and poor households was substantially reduced to 38 % in 2002. Over 50 % of the poor households have managed to escape from poverty. Commune reports show that 213 poor households have escaped from poverty over the last two years.

According to commune staff, loans offered by the government have improved the livelihood of the community. Following Decree 02 issued by the government regarding plantation development, the amount of loans has increased by VND 5 to 10 million. Agriculture extension activities have also brought positive benefits to the local population. In cases where members of the family have migrated to other places and countries to work, the family can receive remittances that help them to

rapidly escape from poverty.

In 2003, 1,393 health insurance cards have been offered to the poor. 26 households having victims of Agent Orange have received supports. The commune has allocated 2,500 kg of rice to the poor for hunger eradication. 9,248 kg of iodine salt has been provided to the community, and each pupil has received from 6-11 notebooks for their study.

Chapter 1: Poverty and Its Determinants

Current perspectives

Situation and trend of poverty reduction in Nghe An Province

Similarly to other provinces, Nghe An has gained substantial achievements in hunger eradication and poverty alleviation for the last decade. However, being characterized as a province with severe climate, poor socio-economic development, slow growth rate and over 50 percent of districts and communes are mountainous ones, Nghe An is classified as one of the poor provinces of the country.

At the VLSS 1992/93 and 1997/98, data on poverty was not disaggregated by province, and only its data by region is available at present. Thus, seeing the poverty rate in the North Central at the time, general poverty rate are 74.5%, 48.1%, and food poverty rate is 35.5%, 19.0% respectively. According to the VHLSS 2002/03, general poverty rate is 43.9%, and food poverty rate is 17.5%.

In early 1996, by MOLISA standard, poverty incidence was 36 % (if the old poverty line was applied) whilst the national poverty incidence was 24 percent. Particularly, poverty incidence in the mountainous areas was over 60 percent. Results of the Survey on Poverty conducted by PSO show that poverty incidence in Nghe An province in 2000 was 19.7 %. However, data provided by DOLISA shows that the poverty rate was 14.7 % by June 2003, of which 0.12 % of households are entitled to social relief programs. It is targeted that by the end of 2003, poverty incidence will decrease to fewer than 13 percent.

One of the targets in Provincial target programme for hunger eradication and poverty reduction is to decrease poverty rate to less than 10% by 2005 (by MOLISA standard). To achieve these objectives, Nghe An Province consider introducing the following measures:

1. To raise awareness on hunger eradication and poverty reduction
2. To implement hunger eradication and poverty reduction projects and programmes effectively reaching to the poor directly
3. To support the poor in terms of health care, education, agriculture, forestry, fishery extension and transfer of advanced technologies
4. To strengthen the capacity of staff engaging in hunger eradication and poverty reduction activities at the commune level.

Characteristics of the poor

According to the interviewee of this PPA, generally speaking, living standard in Nghe An Province has been improved *mainly in terms of cultural and spiritual life*.

However, living conditions have risen a little in term of material life. The number of household having transport means such as motorbikes and bicycles has increased because those are needed for people to do business. However, these improvements are not seen evenly in Nghe An.

Access to audio-visual equipment has improved in the commune. At present, 80 percent of households own TV sets although those are only black-and-white (prices range between 100,000 - 150,000 VND per unit). These sets enable them to learn about current events and access other information. Many localities in the province also organize cultural, sporting and singing events for the youth.

Both middle-age respondents and old age respondents in two selected survey areas shared the same view with regard to the material and spiritual improvements in their communities. This view is also shared by Thai ethnic minority living in Tuong Duong and Kinh people living in Nghi Loc District as follows.

Living standard is better than three years ago because the State has provided small loans for the people to use it to partially improve their standards of living. But on the other hand, they also owe large debts; if they sell their household appliances and other things to pay these debts, then they will become very poor. Their living conditions have actually improved thanks to loans, but when the debt payment comes to its due, people fall back into poor and hunger situation again. Some households have become slightly better off, but after paying debts, their living conditions return back to the common level. It can be said that the people's living standard have gotten a little better in economic terms, but the improvement is not evident and is uneven. (Focus group discussion, male, aged 70, Nghi Thai commune)

In the recent years, thanks to the government and local administration's provision of information and knowledge, living standard in villages and communes is better than before. There is change in the economy although it's insignificant. Transportation means, road, electricity, school and health facilities show a marked improvement. But, there is little recorded improvement in agricultural cultivation and livestock breeding because here are limitations in regard to the land in the province. There is no variety in breeding animals. Crops production is hampered in a haphazard manner, and a proper model for planting trees is yet to be formed. (Male, aged 49, Thai ethnicity, Tam Dinh commune, Tuong Duong district)

As livings standard improves both culturally and materially, local people said that children are mainly beneficial most because of better education services. In contrast, women's lives don't change so much.

Life is better and everybody enjoys the improvement. Children's conditions are more improved compared with others in term of education because they receive more and better care. (Focus group discussion, male, aged 37, Nghi Thai commune)

Local perception of the factor for poverty reduction in the past

In this regard, the majority of people attribute the improvement to the following reasons:

- ✓ Integration of people's livelihood into market in conjunction with more effective agricultural development policy at local level
- ✓ More loans granted to people
- ✓ The introduction of new science and technology, holding training courses, agricultural promotion and donating of new seedlings and animal breeds
- ✓ Local development projects
- ✓ Livestock breeding and aquaculture are successful development
- ✓ Infrastructure is partially improved

Analysis of 160 quantitative questionnaires shows that local people living in Tuong Duong and Nghi Loc have mentioned various reasons for improvements in their lives. The most common reasons were as follows. These are objectives one.

Factors	Percentage
Investment made by the Government	90.2%
Having development projects executed in the province	87.9%
Applying modern technical know-how, techniques	65.6%
Funding from donors	58.1%
Electricity and water supply	58.4%
Developed means of communication	58.0%
More employments generated	55.7%
Improved training and education services	53.3%

Loan is one of the reasons for improving living standards and reducing poverty for many poor household. In Nghi Thai commune, those households that have a decent and average living standard were able to borrow, by mortgaging their property, more capital than poor households (They were entitled to borrow 5-10 million VND). As for poor households, they borrow money from the Women's Union or other mass organizations: each may borrow 3 million VND at the most. Usually, they use this capital for livestock, thus generating income for their families.

A household is classified as poor in Thai Binh village. There are five daughters in her family with no property. Last year, she was given 3 million-VND as a loan at low interest rate for two years. She used the funds to buy a calf at the price of 3 million VND. After one year, she sold it for 4 million VND. She used the sum to buy a new calf and spent the rest to cover the family's other spending. This year, her family is excluded from the list of poor households.

On the one hand, external supports provide resources for the local people to

improve their livelihood. However, it might make local people passive and rely solely on the external resources rather than trying to mobilize and utilize internal strengths and resources.

People's lives have gotten better thanks to loans granted by Government and projects (like Pu Mat). Previously, people could borrow 1-2 million VND, but now they can get 5-10 million VND in loans thanks to the government's Decree 02 on farm development (of course not all households are entitled to borrow so much). Furthermore, information dissemination and education about agricultural development has brought partial efficiency to some households because it helps them know (1) what plants they should grow and (2) what animals they should raise so as to obtain the highest economic efficiency. Also, a number of families (about 120 households) have children working in far-away places like Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong province, Hai Phong and Nam Dinh cities or working abroad as foreign labourers. Their children remit money home to support their families (nearly 3 million VND per household on an average). (Deputy Chairman of the People's Committee of Tam Dinh commune)

Disparity of living standard between the poor and the non-poor

Concerning uneven improvement, we can see differences in the ways that the poor and the non-poor assess the improvements in their lives in recent years. While the majority of the non-poor have a positive evaluation of improvement of their living standard, only a half of the poor perceives improving their living standard positively. Some of the poor even perceive their situation getting worse than before. This was especially stated in a focus group discussion of poor households.

Figures from a quantitative survey of over 160 households in the two communes also show the same situation: 50-55 % of poor households felt that life has improved while 75-88 % of non-poor households shared the same view. Similarly, approximately 6 % of poor household have same view that life had become worse, while only 1 % of the non-poor households' group gave the same answer.

Even for those households that have enjoyed better living conditions thanks to their development of production and business, a quantitative survey shows that these improvements are unstable. The case of a male, a director of a small enterprise located in Nghi Thai commune cited below can serve as an example.

My assessment is that the economic life of households in my village in recent past years has improved a little each year. This is due to income gained by grown children who move away to do business and send their earnings to their relatives at home. The latter use these funds to expand trade and handicrafts, thus creating more jobs. My family has had a carpentry workshop for ten years. It's a sideline but its earnings are much higher than farming. My workshop employs 4-5 workers, all of whom are local people. The revenue from its workshop fluctuates between 20 and 30 million VND. I buy wood in my hometown and from the State agencies. The land used to the workshop belongs to my family. I carry out business in a popular way: if someone wants to have some carpentry done, then we will come to do the work for them. I cannot expand my business now. My employees' income is rather high: each gets

800,000-1 million VND per month. The whole village has over 10 carpentry workshops like mine. The people's demand for the carpentry is growing, but it's difficult to develop the trade as raw material is rare. The prices of raw material are high while the prices of finished products are cheap; that's why we have to take our remuneration as profit. I cannot have access to raw materials because at present the State prohibits the exploitation of wood and we can only make use of sources not prohibited. With this wood supply situation, it's sure I have to limit production. As my carpentry workshop is a small one and operates at home, I haven't gone through any procedures with the commune's administration, nor have I to pay any tax. The commune's administration agrees to let people conduct their business. (Male, aged 47, completed the seventh grade, owner of a carpentry workshop in Thai Binh village, Nghi Thai commune)

Cause of poverty: local perception

Agricultural production

With regard to difficulties experienced by the commune in poverty alleviation, a farmer, Kinh ethnicity in Tuong Duong had the following comments:

There has not been much improvement in the commune's living standard so far because most of the inhabitants here depend on terraced fields. As we have no wet fields, we have to rely on nature. In the years when farming is favorable, people have enough food to feed themselves for 6-8 months, but the majority (two-thirds of the population) lack food to keep them alive for between 6-8 months. Thanks to the Government's granting of loans (our cooperative alone received a 100-million loan), people in the commune have been able to use the borrowed funds to raise common animals. This also made living standard a little better. (Focus group discussion, male, aged 47, Kinh ethnicity, Dinh Huong village, Tam Dinh commune)

My family does farming, which depends entirely on the weather and nature. One of my sons has to do another job with a low wage. Each day, after paying all of his expenses, he gives the family 5,000VND. As such, I can save my money to buy a small buffalo, a bike or to repair the house. (Female, aged 52, Thai Cat village).

In-effective use of loan

A number of other poor households also received loans. But the efficiency of the loans was limited because of poor technical knowledge, restricted investments due to limited capital and at times short loan durations. A farmer in Nghi Loc has following comment:

Recently the Social Policy Bank also has lent 2 million VND to each poor household. Some families used the cash to buy calves others raised pigs, which improved their lives to a degree. However, the duration of the loans is very short and interest must be paid monthly. For example, if they purchased a calf, they would have to sell it very quickly in order to repay the debt in time. If they fail to make repayment when it is due, the bank will fine them by charging a higher interest rate, so the poor will be in a

miserable condition too. I think the policy to help the poor is appropriate, but the duration of the loans given to them is too short and they cannot manage to pay them in time. (Male, aged 53, in Thai Binh village).

Although it is not stipulated in written documents, households in the two villages of Nghi Thai commune shares common understanding that if a certain family has borrowed a loan from one source and was unable to pay it all, the family would not be entitled to another loan from other sources. Due to this limitation, the poor were at times unable to have access to sources of borrowing reserved exclusively for them at low-interest rates. This is an unfair regulation recognized by local staff.

Escaping from poverty is a big challenge for poor farmers and ethnic minorities living in the mountainous district like Tuong Duong whose education level is poor and the family are having a lot of children even if they have received grants and loans for poverty alleviation programs.

I'm disabled: one of my legs was cut off as a timber fell on and broke it. My first two daughters have married and my three sons are going to school. The family's total property is valued at 500,000VND and a three-compartment thatch-roofed house is also estimated at 500,000VND. Three years ago, our family received 1.5-million VND loan from the local Women's Union to raise cows and he failed to pay the debt in time because he had to sell the cow to cover the medical treatment for one of his sons. One month ago, I was given a 2-million VND loan from the Social Policy Bank to raise pigs; however I could take only 500,000VND because 1.5 million VND was deducted from the previous loan. Our family has 900m² of rice-growing land, 1 hectare of forest and 200 m² of subsidiary food crop. Every year our family lacks food for six months. Our family has a poor household's book but has not yet received any assistance, exemptions or reductions. I have a health insurance card but I haven't used it for medical treatment because the card carries my name while my son is the one who fell sick. I do not know how to use the card because no one has told me how to use it. The commune has organised a training course on a credit project which my wife attended because I was disabled. Those households with a decent living condition were often able to borrow more money than poor households because they had property to mortgage. But I know nothing about the policy for the poor, and seldom listen to the radio or watches TV. I practically only learn about State policies and other information through the head of the commune. (Male, poor peasant in Tam Dinh commune, aged 43, of Thai ethnicity, finished secondary school, with five children)

Husbandless families

Among the poor households in the two villages of Nghi Thai commune, there are many families without husbands: they are either widowed, divorced, or have been left by husbands who have gone away never to return. A family is classified as the poor because her husband died a long time ago, her child was disabled and she alone has to bring him up.

Women's situation

Although living conditions are improved in general, livelihood of poor females in the commune has not been improved much, compared with that of males.

Women still lead a difficult life because they must do all of the work in livestock raising and farming although their lives also improves. (Focus group discussion, female, aged 45, Nghi Thai commune)

Men have enjoyed more benefits from development over the past three years. In contrast, Women have to work harder because they have to bring up children and have more work to do. In normal months, people still have rice and sweet potato for meals. But in January and February, most of women in the commune have to catch crabs and shellfish, which is very hard and miserable. (Focus group discussion, female, aged 40, Thai Binh)

Pessimistic perception and Resignation of the poor

While explaining the causes of poverty and hunger, local people and officials often mention the poor's perception of "resignation." In fact, the poor are affected by an inferiority complex which makes them resigned to their fate. Life requires them to be resourceful, to know how to manage and to calculate the means to escape from poverty.

As a deputy chairman of the Nghi Loc district's Farmers' Union has said:

They have to ponder their condition and find measures [to escape from poverty]. No other person can help you but yourself and other measures are but additional impacts. A group of the poor has cropped up who are resigned to their fate and lazy-lazy in work and in thinking.

Others

Many people who responded to the interview said that the harsh natural environment has had an impact on all people in the area, and especially restricts poor households' ability to escape from poverty. Households with an average living standard coped better than poor households because they have some funds to do small business in the market in order to supplement daily income, chiefly when there are droughts and floods. Some households that have members who have moved to do business outside of the province are thought to have a more stable income although they feel its support is insignificant.

Classification of living standard at commune level

In two research sites of this PPA, there are two ways of criteria for classifying the poor and the hunger at central and local level, especially district and commune level. The objectives of its classification is different at central and local level, thus

its criteria and the poverty rate calculated based on them are also different. For example, according to the VHLSS 2002/03, the general poverty rate of the North Central is 43.9%, and that of Nghe An Province is 43%. The food poverty rate is accordingly 17.5% for the region and 16% for Nghe An.

As for the poverty rate in 2000 calculated by the Nghe An PSO, 19.7%, and that of the DOLISA by June 30, 2003 in Nghe An was 14.7%. In Nghi Loc and Tuong Duong districts, two survey sites of this study, the poverty incidence in 2000 was as follows: (source: Nghe An PSO)

Nghi Loc District	17.4%
Nghi Thai Commune	25.0%
Tuong Duong District	61.2%
Tam Dinh Commune	68/2%

Local criteria of classification of the poor: Income-based

In contrast with statistical analysis at central level, the selection of poor households at village and commune levels has taken place with specific purposes in mind and has been conducted in a different way.

In Nghi Thai commune, the classification of the living standard of commune's people does not follow the national criteria. However, it is fixed by the commune People's Committee, which is calculated according to the average income of each household per month. The following table 1.1 shows this "commune level" criteria over the various periods as follow:

Table 1.1: Criteria for ranking households: Case of Nghi Thai commune

Period	Households with decent living standard	Households with average living standard	Poor households	Hungry households
1999	120,000VND	100,000VND	70,000VND	40,000VND
2000 & 2001	140,000VND	110,000VND	80,000VND	60,000VND
2002	150,000VND	120,000VND	80,000VND	65,000VND

In each village, the criteria of poor households depend on the average income of each village. In the two surveyed villages of Thai Binh and Thai Cat, the poverty rates of households are 8.3% and 8.8% respectively. These poor households are selected by families in the commune, using criteria based on the average income, for instance, of 35,000 VND a month in Thai Cat. A citizen in Nghi Thai had the following comment in the group discussion.

We have 12 households with an income of 35,000 VND downward a month. This 35,000 VND threshold is worked out among these households themselves. Because truly speaking, our locality is building a cultural village, if there are many poor people, we'll be rated low, so we have to bring down that poverty line. The reduction is made by people in the village and not stipulated by the commune (People's Committee). The commune has fixed 75,000VND as the criteria for poor households. (Male, aged 37, in Thai Cat village)

The village has 136 households; if calculated by national standard, there are about 100 poor households. 68-70% of households have an income of less than 100,000 VND per month. The classification of poor households is conducted by the commune People's Committee. When it comes to the village level, the Fatherland Front Committee is in charge of this classification. Poor households will then be selected by the Party cell and the People's Council, basing on family circumstances and income level. It is stipulated that households with income below 100,000VND per month will be classified as poor households but in fact those who have income of 30,000-40,000VND per month in the village is considered as the poor. Also, poor households should have no property and their members should be struck by diseases and constant illness. As such, the suggested poor households are by nature in hunger situation. (Focus group meeting, in Thai Cat village, Nghi Thai commune)

Local criteria of classification of the poor: Poverty ranking

Aside from income criteria in classification at local level, **the research team conducted "self-assessment" to grasp people's perception on who is the poor. Local people consider the followings as a number of other criteria** (which are also the causes of poverty and hunger) to judge household poverty. These include the followings:

- ✓ Households that have elderly and single persons
- ✓ Households that have a great number of children going to school and only few who engage in productive labor
- ✓ Households whose members are constantly struck by diseases or illnesses
- ✓ Households that have neither property nor capital
- ✓ Households that know only farming and have no other sources of income

As poor households have no labour strength, experience in conducting business, nor capital for conducting business – we can see that there are many causes to poverty. As they are poor, they get poorer. Those well-off households have capital and experience in doing business, that's why they get rich. (Female, aged 39, Focus group discussion of the poor, Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune).

As such, the people's perception of poverty criteria is obviously not merely based on income in food or in cash. Along side these norms, there are many other norms which people use to select poor households, such as housing quality, household appliances and means of production, disease and illness. This also indicates the diversity in the manifestation of poverty in various localities.

Another poor female who is young, Thai ethnicity living in Tam Dinh commune, Tuong Duong referred to criteria to recognize poor households in the commune:

Houses are on stilts and have a thatch roof. Family's income is not stable. There is neither poultry nor domestic animals but only some chickens and ducks. There is neither furniture nor utensil in the house and we lack even pots and saucepans. If there is a lean harvest, then the whole family will be hungry. Money is very difficult to earn here. When there is no food in the family, they will have to go to the forest to cut neohouzeaua and sell it to buy rice. Life is in a very difficult condition, if they are poor, they do not have enough rice to eat and clothing to wear. These are criteria to classify poor households.

If measuring poverty situation in the two villages of Thai Binh and Thai Cat (in Nghi Thai commune) based on this perception-based classification, the results are as follows:

Better-off households	8.5%
Average households	37.5%
Poor households	43.5%
Hungry households	8.5%

According to this assessment, in total 52% of households in the two villages are categorized as the poor (on the other hands, the results of a survey conducted by Nghe An province's Statistics Office in 2000 show that this proportion in Nghi Thai was only 25%).

In the two villages of Tam Dinh commune (Tuong Duong district), the percentage of the poor (poor and hungry households) rises to 70.8% (on the other hands, the total poverty rate is 61.2% according to the commune's classification and its rate is 68.2% according to Nghe An PSO in 2000).

Table 1.2: Ranking households made by people in 2 village of Tam Dinh Commune

Village	Total number of households	Rich and well-off Households	Average Households	Poor Households	Very Poor Households
Quang Yen	100	5	31	56	8
	100%	5%	31%	56%	8%
Dinh Huong	85	0	18	25	42
	100%	0	21.2%	29.4%	49.4%
Total	185	5	49	81	50
	100%	2.7%	26.5%	43.8%	27.0%

We have also conducted interviews of representatives from 160 household (including all people invited to take part in focus group discussions and case interviews during the time of making PPA a number of other people). The results of the self-assessment of household living standards show the following:

We can see below that the people’s self-assessment of poverty in these two areas is moderately consistent and differs greatly from the average figures for the whole of the province. According to the people’s self-assessment (using their “rather poor” standard noted above), the average percentage of poor households in the areas is nearly 50%.

Table 1.3: Self-ranking of the living standard of 160 households in the two communes

Living standard	Total	Gender of participants	
		Male	Female
Very poor	5.6%	2.2 %	10.1%
Poor	41.0%	34.8%	49.3%
Average	50.9%	58.7%	40.6%
Rather rich	2.5%	4.3%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Actual process of identifying poor households

In both research areas, although the level of poverty and ethnic compositions are quite different, the process of assessing poor households is basically same. Generally speaking, democratic and equal processes are ensured. This is because people know that appropriate assessment should be conducted in order to select the right people entitled to preferences and assistance provided by the government later on. However, it still has some variation. In Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune, Tuong Duong district, the five mass organisations of the village (including Fatherland Front organization, Women’s Union, Youth Union, Farmers’ Union, War Veteran Union) introduced a list of 40 households (each organisation recommended eight persons) in 2002. As for Dinh Huong Commune, the commune managerial board, which comprises representatives from the administration and mass organizations, put forth a list for consideration, and then held a meeting with local people for endorsement.

The assessment was even stricter in Nghi Thai commune (Nghi Loc district). First, commune officials worked out a list of poor households based on families’ income which was then endorsed by the Party cell and the Fatherland Front. Later, the list was put forth for the people’s selection. People appreciated this process as being equal and open.

A male farmer in Nghi Thai cited that:

The Party cell made the specific assessment, after that the list was subject to endorsement by the Fatherland Front and mass organisations in the village. Such assessment was made by these organisations, but people have to see if the selection of poor households was right or wrong; the inclusion in and exclusion from the list were actually decided upon by the people. Generally speaking, the assessment was democratic with open voting. (Male, aged 37, Thai Binh village)

Although the assessment was strict, people were not always meticulous in comparing households' circumstances. In some cases, they gave priority to those households that have members who were frequently affected by illness so that they are entitled to free medical consultations and treatment.

Some people consider that the number of poor households had been determined from the district and commune levels, based on whether the commune is rich or poor. The number of poor should reduce each year so as to show achievements in the movement to eradicate hunger and reduce poverty:

They make an allocation of the number of poor households in this village and that village, based on whether this village is poorer or richer than that village and the assessment is temporarily judged on that basis. (Male, aged 47, in Thai Binh village)

A male farmer has further explanation:

When we classify our village by ourselves in order to compare with other localities, the number of poor households must be up to 130 poor households. However, according to the direction of commune administration and the policy board, people need to select the poorest households among the poor families. As a result, the number of the poor households limits to only 12 households. According to previous judgments, they were hungry households. However, now with the new hunger eradicating policy, they are classified into "poor", not "hunger"... (Male, aged 37, Thai Cat village).

Due to the tendency to "care for achievements only" and "formalistic competition", the provincial, district and commune levels all try to restrict and impose the percentage of poor households in localities. To this end, they some times allocate some quotas to the lower level.

A communal staff confirmed that:

At present, all poor households in the commune have been issued poor households' books, but its possible number of poor households is restricted by higher level. In one case, the commune was allocated 350 poor households, but the number selected by the people is larger than that. The solution is poor households must take turn to be listed onto poor households books. (Chairman of Tam Dinh commune's Fatherland Front)

A village head in Tam Dinh commune discussed with us during the interview on

the “assigned target for poverty reduction” in his village:

The commune assigned Quang Yen village with the target of reducing the number of poor household by 15 households. But when the reduction was assessed by the people, they judged that it had not taken place. The number of households escaping from poverty could not exceed more than seven because their actual figure showed that they still remained poor.

Question: *Therefore, did the commune reduce the target for poverty reduction?*

Answer: *According to the commune’s target, these poor households should be excluded from the list. But in fact, this could not happen. Thus one more criterion has been added: officials and Party members should not be allowed to be classified in the category of poor households, though in reality their families were really poor. Such is the criteria, and everybody is equal, but one should base oneself on real situation at grassroots level. (Head of Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune)*

A poor female, Thai ethnicity living in Tam Dinh commune made following comments on causes of poverty reduction in the commune.

Last year they granted poor household books to 60 families. But this year, 15 households are excluded from that list. Seven out of excluded 15 households are Party members. Although their conditions are not better, they must be excluded from the list of poor households. I see this as unequal because even though they are Party members, their economic situation is still difficult. Why did they have to be excluded from the list of poor households? That is the reason for the reduction in the number of poor households here. (Interview, a poor household, Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune)

In fact, selection of poor households, which is done at the village and commune levels, shows a number of shortcomings: who calculates income and how is it calculated? While doing this selection, people also do it influenced by their daily observation and perception although it is often very authentic. Sympathy is also taken into consideration, especially with regard to difficult conditions such as chronic illness and disability.

The assessment of poor households at the grassroots level is also often associated with an understanding that there will be preferences and allowances for those who are assessed as poor households. Therefore, this selection is made in a manner that is public, democratic and accurate concerning the poorest households in villages and communes.

Regarding local participation in the selection of poor households, the majority of people interviewed perceive they had participated in this process. The average percentage of those who had participated in the selection was 81% and there were no considerable differences between men and woman, between the poor and the

non-poor, and between the majority *Kinh* and other ethnic minority groups. As for the question if such assessment of poor households was done in an equal and democratic way, over 90 % of people asked responded in the positive. It indicates uniform application of poor household selection criteria in the locality and in the community.

Of course, there are possibilities in-appropriate households who don't conform to criteria are selected as poor households. But this is very seldom the case.

Preferential treatment for the poor

In Nghi Loc district, those households selected as being the poorest were issued a blue-covered book valid for two years and were entitled to a number of benefits. Poor households understand that these comprise four benefits:

- ✓ To have school fees exempted or reduced when their children attend junior and senior secondary schools
- ✓ To be issued a health insurance card
- ✓ To be exempt from agricultural tax
- ✓ To be granted loans at low interest rates

In Tuong Duong which is located in highland and majority of people is poor households and ethnic minorities, they are entitled to the government support policy benefits such as the provision of iodine salt, health insurance, pupil's notebooks free of charge and low-interest loans from banks. If the poor do not benefit from these programs, they relate the situation directly to village heads or commune chairmen. Many families have even reported this to the district level. But still cannot have these benefits. The poor learn about their benefits through village and communes meetings which are chaired by commune officials, to disseminate support from the government as well as from its projects.

However, the implementation of these policies is still unsatisfactory. For example, transparency and equality for poor households is not fully ensured. Banks and local organisations still fear the situation that the poor will fail to pay loans even if banks and local organisations lend money to them. For the poor, they put much stress on the differentiation of the rich and the poor in their localities. The following complaints made by two female farmers, Thai ethnicity (one is young and one is old) with regard to applying policies for the poor in Tam Dinh commune would further emphasize the above-mentioned situations.

The Social Policy Bank drew a list of poor households. But the bank offered more funds to rich households and in contrast poor households were granted small loans or even nothing. (Female, aged 30, Thai ethnic people, mixed Focus group discussion in Tam Dinh commune).

The policy was worked out. However, poor houses could borrow only little money while big loans went to the rich. (Female, aged 68, of Thai ethnic people, mixed Focus group discussion in Tam Dinh commune).

Trends of poverty dynamics

Creating non-agricultural employments for the poor

With the aim of reducing poverty and further developing local economy, one of the important directions is to generate more non-agricultural employments for the local people, particularly for the poor. According to the results of qualitative studies conducted in Nghi Loc and Tuong Duong districts, we found that *the poor did not have good access to other occupations rather than agricultural ones*. The key reason was that small enterprises were not substantially developed in this area. Other production sector in Nghi Thai district are primarily composed of carpentry workshops; some households engaging in rice thrashing on a small scale which use family labour, not hire outside labourers. In recent years, labourers from the commune have begun to go to other provinces for work. More than 300 workers in the commune have gone to Ho Chi Minh City to work in garment and footwear works. The majority of them are female. The financial assistance from those who went away to work, although it's small, has helped their families have a stable income. However, only children from families having average living conditions upward can go to work elsewhere because poor households cannot afford to cover initial spending for sending family members to work far from home.

It costs more than 1 million VND to clear the procedures for working in a company. If one enters another company, one should pay from 500,000 VND to 1 million VND plus travel and meal expenses. Moreover one has to learn the trade, and then poor families cannot afford to send their children... (Male, aged 48, in Thai Cat village).

Tam Dinh, a mountainous commune in Tuong Duong district is also recruiting 80 labourers to work at footwear factory in Hai Phong City with an intermediary cost (commission) of 550,000VND per head, which is very expensive for the poor. Recently, Nghi Thai commune has been restoring its traditional bamboo and rattan wickerwork. Its business *has drawn a number of workers from poor families* but the craft promises no development as raw material is in short supply and because of the difficulties in finding outlet for products.

Wickerwork has developed. In our village, there are between 14 and 15 labourers who engage in the craft. It yields a decent income - one family can earn between 50,000-70,000VND each week. The poor in the village also do this work. However, they are running short of raw material at present. Moreover, the output depends on companies with limited liabilities, and then they change models very often. So it's also difficult. (Male, aged 37, in Thai Cat village).

Aquaculture is also a new opportunity to improve the commune economy and has begun to bring about good results. However, this trade is reserved only for those households with an average living condition upward. Poor households are

unable to engage in aquaculture because they have neither funds, technical knowledge, nor labour.

The commune land has been allocated on a contract basis for raising shrimp. The poor cannot undertake this because they do not have initial funds and therefore dare not venture. Secondly, it does not yield immediate benefits. Thirdly, the poor do not have manpower, and have no grasp of scientific and technical knowledge. (Male, aged 46, in Thai Cat village).

The following is an example of a successful farmer in raising shrimp in Nghi Thai commune. He also had some comments on opportunities for the poor to be as successful as himself.

I have raised shrimp for two seasons; and now is the third season. At the beginning, I got technical information by the provincial agricultural extension office. The land was un-used when I won the bidding. Then, I hired labourers to dig up into ponds to raise aquatic products. Generally speaking, it is better than farming although it's not very efficient. The main problem is shrimp prices on market are fluctuating although selling it is easy. If there is more support for capital, shrimp raising can be developed on a larger scale. I have borrowed money from a bank at an interest rate of 1.15% per month for the first year. For the last season, I borrowed 40 million VND, of which 20 million was invested in building infrastructure, the remaining 20 million was spent on breeds and feed. Many households wanted to make an investment like us. But they were not able because they did not win the bidding. Only a man can take part in such bidding and women cannot. In my opinion, it's difficult for poor households to have access to this activity because of the following reasons: In order to raise aquatic products, one should have first manpower; secondly one must grasp and know how to apply science and technology; thirdly one should have capital by borrowing from available sources. If one relies on the State, one won't get money in time for the business. There are a lot of requirements, which is why it is difficult for poor households to follow suit. (Male, aged 37, education level: completed seventh grade, raising aquatic products, in Thai Binh village)

In an example, borrowing money, a household conduct non-agricultural activities.

In my opinion, the living condition of people in this village has improved a little since 2000, compared with the previous years because of the following reasons: Firstly, poor households were offered loans from the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Fund for livestock breeding. Previously my family was poor because my family has elder people. There are 7-8 persons in my family including my brothers and sisters. Thus, the labour force was abundant. But land was few and there were no sideline activities for income, and my family was originally poor. Our whole life depended on farming. And farming depends entirely on nature; the natural conditions are very harsh here: there is no irrigation and drainage system to and from the fields. We had to look forward to rainy and sunny days. Now my family is no longer classified in the poor household category. It's due to the division of succession: my brothers, sisters and myself have grown up, married and strive to do their own business. I wanted to

run small business at market, but we didn't have the funds. Secondly, I have a chance of borrowing money from mass organizations and funds for livestock raising. I was granted 2-3 million VND at a preferential interest rate for raising pigs, chicken and cattle. Thirdly, it's thanks to our industriousness and hard working. It took five years for my family to go from categories of poor to average and decent household. At present, I'm raising aquatic products. Some capital is from my family and some is borrowed from my brothers. For the first season, I earned a profit of 15 million VND; it's a rather large sum in the countryside. In order to further develop my family's aquaculture, I need more capital. Besides, one also needs scientific and technical knowledge. (Male, education level: completed sixth grade, head of a household that has escaped from poverty)

No enterprises have registered in mountainous district of Tuong Duong over the past three to four years. Only a small number of households have opened small counters trading in miscellaneous goods for daily use. Most of them are majority *Kinh* people because they have a greater understanding of and are more sensitive to the market. These small trading households could not generate jobs for people in the village because members of their families or their relatives are those engaged in trading. The situation further explained why the poverty incidence in Tam Dinh commune and Tuong Duong district is very high and these two areas are experiencing a slow progress in poverty reduction in comparison with other plain communes/districts for example, Nghi Loc district.

Experiences of escaping from poverty

In the two research communes, people and officials have some experiences in escaping from poverty. According to Chairman of Tam Dinh commune, it is necessary for the poor households to take the following principles if they want to escape from poverty.

- ✓ Members of the family must be solid, and have a sense of improvement
- ✓ They must have enough knowledge and know how to do business
- ✓ They must be able to get loans and use them effectively
- ✓ They must not be lazy, which is the most important factor

As for people, they stressed that the importance of a sense of self-reliance and thriftiness. Some experiences in poverty alleviation in the locality have been shared by the chairperson of Tam Dinh commune.

First, members of the family should be solid and be of the same will so as to improve, which people often call thorough grasping. Secondly, one should estimate the financial requirements for a year. One should make accounting and work out business plans in afforestation, livestock breeding, agriculture and sideline work in order to raise income. Thirdly, after getting loans from mass organisations or higher levels, one must use them satisfactorily and effectively. Another important thing is that one should not be lazy and members of the family should be unanimous in doing business. These are

lessons we have learned from households that have successfully eradicated successfully hunger.

Typical is the case of a male from Thai ethnicity who has escaped from poverty. Because of his and his family's effort and will, he has overcome difficulties in terms of educational level, health and having a great number of children going to school. He knew how to calculate the ways of doing business, practice economy and get assistance from people in the village in difficult time and created capital.

My household escaped from poverty. As a result, we are classified as average by commune's people because we have enough to eat and to save. We draw the following experiences. Previously, my household was the poorest. In 1990 I was struck by an un-expected accident. While felling trees on the terraced fields, I had a fall and broke my two legs and was hospitalised for six months. It took me three years to walk again. Later on, thanks to the villagers' assistance, my wife followed them in digging and washing out gold and got three ounce of gold. As I lost my strength and could no longer do the farming, I traded in miscellaneous goods for daily use while my wife raised poultry and cattle and did the cultivation. In 2001, I sewed seeds for saplings and was paid 2 million VND by the State. Besides, I also raised seven cattle and two pigs a year, each year I sold 100 kg of pig. I have four children and one adopted child. One of them goes to the district's senior secondary school. I give him 100,000VND a month to pay for lodging. I finished sixth grade and my wife, the fourth grade.

Risks

In the two research areas, locals - the majority *Kinh* as well as ethnic minorities (Thai) share views on the risks which the poor often face.

A loss of harvest

The biggest risk for the poor is a loss of harvest. This is the common risk of the local people. But the poor have to shoulder heavier consequences because they pin their hopes on a single rice crop each year, while other households may conduct small business in the market to earning some money when a harvest is lost.

If it rains, the plants and the crops will be green; if there is drought, it will be death. Heaven will burn all the workday and energy spent on fields. The conditions here are really difficult. When rain has not fallen yet, the land is flooded and when the sun has not shined yet, the fields are stricken by drought. (Male, aged 53, in Thai Cat village).

Epidemics of domestic animals

Epidemics of domestic animals (buffalo, cows, pigs, chickens, etc) also make the poor miserable. The cause of this risk is that the poor have no knowledge of animal husbandry techniques and do not pay attention to the hygienic conditions of stables. In Nghi Thai commune, epidemics were caused mainly by the polluted

water sources used in agriculture. The river that took water along carried liquid waste (including waste from the municipal hospital) from Vinh City.

Diseases and illness

Another risk that menaces the poor is diseases and illness. The poor often contract diseases as they overwork themselves and must a lot for life.

Diseases are caused by overwork: the peasants go to the fields during the day and catch fish at night. That's why they are struck by diseases, and often serious ones. (Male, aged 53, in Thai Binh village).

Domestic animal epidemics are the most miserable thing. While I was feeding my pig, it fell dead as a result of certain diseases without allowing me time to cure it. My pigs and my cow are sick but I have no money to pay for medicine. They are often unlucky in their business, so the numbers of the poor that fall ill are more than other people. They lack funds for tending and fertilising crops and cultivating. As such, insects keep coming to destroy the crop, leading to lost harvests while illness lingers on. That is why common poverty leads to one's poverty and it cannot be overcome. (Male, aged 50, Focus group discussion in Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune)

Environmental pollution

A new form of risks which local people in Nghi Thai village explain is environmental pollution due to the waste water released by Vinh City, especially from hospitals. This leads to many kinds of domestic animal epidemics and diseases, chiefly during the flooding season, and caused various skin diseases among local people.

In Tam Dinh commune, people face another type of risk: house fires, which are primarily the case among the Thai's wooden houses on stilts. Poor households made of bamboo and thatch catches fire especially easily due to the custom of keeping a fire in the kitchen day and night. There was a year in which 34 houses in the commune were ablaze.

Through group discussions, one can see the poor counter risks in production and life in the following ways:

- ✓ Diversifying livelihoods sources
- ✓ Applying for long-term loans at low interest rates
- ✓ Engaging in business
- ✓ Attending training courses on technology transfer
- ✓ Self-reliance and mutual help within the community (sympathetic assistance, exchanging work days and other ways of doing business)
- ✓ Receiving State support through the effective implementation of the policy to eradicate hunger and reduce poverty

Chapter 2: Current Patterns of Participation in Local Decision-making

According to the results of the qualitative and quantitative survey, people know all commune officials, but do not see them frequently. It's only when they come to the commune administration and mass organizations for administrative procedure.

Regarding the stipulation that “people have the right to know” in Decree 29, 60-70% of people know about it. Among them, its well-known issues are as follows: (1) the policy to grant loans for hunger eradication and poverty reduction; (2) items for contribution; and (2) plans for the construction of public works. As for other issues, only 30-40% of people asked said they “know.” Regarding the recognition gap in this issue among the poor, the very poor, and the non-poor is quite obvious. The percentage of the poor, who know this, varies between 11% and 55%. In contrast, its percentage of the average and the non-poor is 70-100% (see the table below). Its gap between the majority Kinh and the Thai minority is similar with the one between men and women. The proportion of Kinh and males who know about the contents of democracy at grassroots level is much higher than that of Thai and female.

Table 2.1: People's knowledge of commune officials

People Know about....	Total	Gender		Ethnic group		Living standard			
		Male	Female	Kinh	Thai	Very poor	Poor	Average	Well-being
Commune officials									
All (officials)	47.8	61.5	29.4	58.0	37.2	11.1	26.6	65.9	100.0
Some	50.9	36.3	70.6	42.0	60.3	88.9	70.3	34.1	
Nobody	1.3	2.2	-	-	2.6	-	3.1	-	-
Activities									
Plans for building public works	61.5	70.7	49.2	89.1	39.2	28.6	42.4	78.1	100.0
Resolutions of the latest meeting of the commune's people council	39.6	48.4	27.9	56.3	22.8	11.1	21.2	55.0	100.0
Settlement of commune's income and expenditure	29.1	33.3	23.5	40.5	17.7	11.1	18.2	38.0	75.0
Contributions to construction	66.9	73.9	57.4	75.3	58.2	44.4	57.6	76.5	75.0
Programmes and projects invested by the State and organisations	47.1	54.9	36.4	53.8	40.5	33.3	38.5	53.2	100.0
Policy to grant	69.8	76.1	61.2	85.0	54.4	55.6	59.1	78.8	100.0

loans for hunger eradication and poverty reduction									
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A study conducted on this subject by the Institute of Sociology two years ago also shows the similar situation. This indicated there were considerable gaps between the poor and the non-poor, between Kinh ethnicity and ethnic minorities, and between male and female regarding the execution of democracy at the grassroots level.

Table 2.2: The frequency of meeting with local administration officials

Contents	General	Gender		Ethnic group		Living standard			
		Male	Female	Kinh	Thai	Very poor	Poor	Average	Well-being
Frequently	20.6	29.3	8.8	19.5	21.8		12.3	25.6	100.0
When in need	74.4	67.4	83.8	75.6	73.1	100	81.5	69.5	
Never	5.0	3.3	7.4	4.9	5.1	5.1	6.2	4.9	

Women and the poor seldom attended village meetings, and men still play the role of social communication on behalf of the family. Women are only present at meetings when men are absent. A male farmer in Nghi Thai had the following comment.

The poor rarely attend village meetings. While other people feel that their presence at a meeting is normal, poor households feel somewhat timid; this is why they seldom go to meetings and if they do, they rarely take the floor. Women are also seldom seen at village meetings. Take an example of my village. Women only go to meetings if their husband has died. Village meetings are attended primarily by men. There are women who gave their opinions at meetings, but only some. (Male, aged 37, in Thai Cat village)

Chairwoman of Nghi Loc district Women’s Union has addressed the following at the interview with research team.

When executing the democracy regulations, we urged women to attend meetings so that they were informed and able to discuss and have their voice in issues related to their interests. But due to living conditions in the countryside, it is very seldom that both the husband and the wife are present at a meeting because meeting halls are not spacious and women are busy with farming and house-keeping. That is why men are present at meetings more often than women. There is a large turnout of women at meetings that deal only with women’s issue. However, in the case of general meetings, women rarely attend them. Inequality between men and women still remains; family members usually have to follow men’s decisions; therefore men speak at meetings from their own points of view which might not represent women’s

viewpoints and might not bring about practical advantages to them. (Female Chairperson of Nghi Loc's Women's Union)

All people have heard of the words "democracy at grassroots level" and they know the phrase: the people know, the people discuss, the people do, and the people inspect." As for the first two parts (the people know and the people discuss), people said that they had heard information through the public address system and discussed it at village meetings. As for the latter two parts, households participate to some degree. This was also confirmed in interviews carried out in both of the research areas (see the table below).

An old man living in Nghi Thai has exposed the following ideas in a focus group discussion:

In practice, implementation of grassroots democracy is as follows: people did listen to information and performed the work. As for inspection, people have not been able to inspect work. For example, people do not know if works have been completed ahead of schedule or not; neither they knew if works had been damaged, but they have to shoulder the burden of repairing. People listened to reports on revenues and expenditure or new policies through the public address system. As for democratic discussions, there was democratic representation. For example, the village sent a man to a meeting and listen about an issue discuss it at the meeting and come back and tell it to the people. But people have no opportunity to discuss it. (Focus group discussion, a man, aged 70, in Thai Cat village)

Table 2.3: People's comments on the degree of executing four contents of democracy at grassroots level

Assessment of execution	People's knowing	People's discussion	People's performance	People's inspection
Satisfactory	42.5%	38.4%	35.2%	17.0%
Average	41.9%	40.9%	42.8%	38.4%
Unsatisfactory	6.9%	11.3%	11.3%	25.8%
Not applicable	8.8%	9.4%	10.7%	18.9%

Source: Questionnaire distributed to 160 households in two communes under the participatory poverty assessment survey

Results of the group discussion show local people are very interested in applying grassroots democracy. However, this application is neither practical nor efficient.

As for the budget revenue collection, we heard of it in a perfunctory way. In fact, if we grasped the sense of the first sentence, we could not follow the next one. Because we could not have the chance to look at the figures carefully, we only heard the reading of them. Moreover, the inspection is a rather difficult, who can work it out? In (the

execution of) democracy, the people want it to be involved indeed; as for whether officials can do it or not, we do not know clearly. For example, if they are reviewing power, road, school, health station projects; they should make public their plans, for example, how long is the road, how many villages electricity will be supplied to, how large are the school and the health clinics and let the people discuss them. After subjecting the projects to peoples' discussions, they may take part in this work but may not in others; but when public works are completed, people must be able to inspect them carefully. This is the way that things should be done and reported to the people. Here, we only know the work through the public address system and when the broadcasting is over, it's all finished. (Focus group discussion, at Thai Cat village, Nghi Thai commune)

People are conscious of and also want to participate in executing the regulation of "knowing, discussing, performing and inspection". But actual execution doesn't seem to meet their expectation. The following is an instance of a person in Tam Dinh commune who directly participated in the commune's construction works.

I have attended village and commune meetings that disseminated the government policies and guidelines and discussed the village and commune's way of carrying out business. In the recent years, the commune has had projects such as irrigation works, a foreign country-financed project and project 327. I knew about these works as they were made public to the people but I had not the chance to discuss and inspect them because I'm a common person. Officials would announce the volume of raw materials required, and then distribute the contribution from each family and the rest would be contributed by the State (because the State and the people join hands in the construction). I myself took part in building the works under contract and my contribution was deducted from my remuneration for the work. I only did the work of transporting sand and cobble. The remuneration was equivalent to one full workday in the commune. The payment for transporting one bloc of cobble was 40,000VND and for one bloc of sand, 60,000VND. Project management boards and commune officials inspected the quality of construction projects. The commune administration announced publicly and in a democratic way to people about the total cost of construction (about 100 million VND), the sum invested by the State and the money contributed by the people. In my opinion, the work was built solidly except for some sections which are not up to the requirements due to lack of raw materials. (Male, aged 53, Thai ethnicity, Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune, has five children)

According to questionnaires from two communes, majority of local people (88.5%) have opportunities to participate into public activities in their communities. More vulnerable groups i.e. women, the poor, ethnic minorities also have participated into public activities. However, the participatory rate of this group is smaller than that of male, the better-off and Kinh groups (see tables below). Therefore, it is necessary to promote the participation of the vulnerable groups, the poor group into public activities to ensure sustainable development and ensure equity among

various groups in the community.

Table 2.4: Participation of the local people into public activities

Contents		Yes	No	Do not know
Total		88.5	9.6	1.9
Sex	Male	94.5	2.2	3.3
	Female	80.0	20.0	-
Ethnicity	Kinh	88.9	9.9	1.2
	Thai	88.0	9.3	2.7
Living standard	Very poor	77.8	22.2	-
	Poor	79.0	16.1	4.8
	Average	96.3	3.7	-
	Better-off	100.0	-	-

Table 2.5: The role of community's idea

	Total	Sex		Ethnicity		Living standard			
		Male	Female	Kinh	Thai	Very poor	Poor	Average	Better-off
Making decision	26.8	30.8	21.2	34.1	18.7	12.5	20.3	33.3	25.0
For reference	56.7	57.1	56.1	51.2	62.7	75.0	48.4	60.5	75.0
Formal only	1.3	2.2		1.2	1.3		3.1		
Do not know	14.6	8.8	22.7	12.2	17.3	12.5	28.1	4.9	

(NOTE) taking only significant percentage

Different groups also present various ideas with regard to how important community's ideas are in public activities (see the above table). The number of only 26.8% supposed that their ideas can make contribution in decision making of which percentage of 30.8 % male's responses agreed with this whilst that among female was 21.2%. The voice of Kinh is stronger the Thai's one (34.1% vs.18.7%), ideas made by average and better-off households are more important and decisive than that of poor households.

Local people do not participate much in monitoring and evaluation activities. The number of 37.8 % of the local people did participate in these activities with higher percentage of male than female, 48.9% comparing to 22.7 percent. Thai people participate less than Kinh people with 35.1% and 40.2% respectively. Only 18.8%

of poor households and 25% of very poor households participated in monitoring and evaluation in comparison with 54.3% of average households and 33.3% of better-off households.

Local traditions and customs are one of the reasons preventing local people from participating in monitoring and evaluation activities. Poor access to information is another reason that can have impact to the participation of the local people. Out of 31.7 % of the respondents who supposed that they had adequate information for the past two years. Male accounts for 38%, and female accounts for 23.2%. Kinh people account for 50 percent whilst Thai ethnicity account for only 12.7%.

People know little about and cannot know specifically and exactly who work and what they do in the commune administrative apparatus because people only see them when they are in need. People said commune and district officials practically never come to the villages. When officials have to make contacts with voters, they only worked with village officials or representatives of local people. People have no way to transmit their queries or discontent to higher levels; they do not believe that higher levels will listen to them. They said that, previously, inhabitants' representatives put forth their urgent requirements in a meeting between officials and voters. The official promised them a lot but people never saw the promises realised. That is why they do not go to see officials. Few women and the poor attended village meetings because they are busy and see no benefit in them.

Some people (village, mass organization officials and those who are close relatives of commune officials) knew about local development plans and budgets. Generally, normal people did not know it. Likewise, people were not aware of other activities or only knew them in general terms, and could have a voice in discussion of these activities. People participated in works such as repairing dykes and cleaning villages, but there was no inspection and supervision because they could not participate in the supervision board and were not capable of supervising. The general assessment is that execution of the democracy regulations at the grassroots level is poor. Chairperson of Nghi Thai commune shares the common idea that democratic execution in the commune is in a poor status.

Complaints made by local people to higher level reflect the actual execution of grassroots democracy in the locality. While all complaints were settled thoroughly in Nghi Thai village and none of them was passed on to higher levels. In Tam Dinh where more than 90% of the population is of Thai ethnicity, complaints were lodged to the district level on the distribution of breeding pigs to the poor under Program 135, and the case was inspected. Many criticisms on the process of policies implementation in this commune, which are made by people living in Tam Dinh, reflect the emergent issues in execution of grassroots democracy in the

mountainous areas where the ethnic minorities lived.

Generally speaking, awareness of grassroots level officials toward grassroots democracy is relatively sufficient because documents were handed directly to them. But their execution is poor. While doing their work, they often take shortcuts and ignore people's views and comments, thinking that people won't have any queries and instead carry out the work immediately.

In the near future, commune officials become civil servants. People believe that this will not lead to any significant changes in relations between official and people. Some new requirements may be asked of officials. Changes which commune officials appreciate is that they will be entitled to social insurance and health insurance cards and may be dispatched to another locality whenever that locality has a need for personnel or when they are not elected to commune people's councils and party committees or are disciplined.

Close and family relations may have an impact on relations between commune officials (administration) and people, but the latter seldom spoke about it.

Chapter 3: Basic Public Service Delivery Mechanism to the Poor

Education

1. Socialization of education is stepped up in localities

In Nghe An Province, people have attached importance to education. People's contributions to their children's schooling are significant. Apart from school fees, which are charged to lower secondary school students, many other expenditures and contributions have been mobilised from people, such as money to buy books, notebooks and study equipment, school uniforms, funds for building school infrastructure, bonuses to teachers' income (teaching support), Youth Union funds, students' parent's association funds and contributions to health insurance and life insurance.

Table 3.1: Some average annual contributions by students in two communes

Nghi Thai commune (Nghi Loc district)	The sum (VND)	Tam Dinh commune (Tam Duong district)	Sum (VND)
<i>Primary school:</i> Building infrastructure	70,000	<i>Primary school:</i> Building infrastructure	20,000
Teaching support	30,000	Teaching support	20,000
Books, notebooks, study equipment	100,000	Students' parent's association funds	5,000
<i>Junior secondary schools:</i>		<i>Junior secondary schools*</i>	
Building infrastructure	80,000	Building infrastructure	40,000
School fees	70,000	Students' parent's association fund	8,000
Health insurance	30,000	Youth Union fund	4,000
<i>Senior secondary schools:</i>			
Building infrastructure	120,000		
School fees (public schools)	100,000		

**Contributions to building schools are reduced 50%; to Youth Union fund and association fund, 80% for poor students is guaranteed by commune people's committee. For other funds, the poor make normal contributions as others.*

Parents associations are an organization founded long time ago to bridge the school with students' families. This is a forum for families and locals in general to participate in the development of education and activities to promote study. It is also a forum for mobilising various types of contributions and convincing poor families to allow their children to resume schooling (if they have been absent from

or dropped out of school). Parents associations also join schools and commune administration in endorsing students' contributions. The associations also perform the function of inspecting and monitoring students' study as well as teachers' lecturing.

Parents associations are also listened to at meetings (even though for reference only), which indicates people's partial participation in educational activities in locality. Rector of Nghi Thai lower secondary school cited that:

The views of parents associations assume reference significance in all schools' decisions. They also participate in the formulation of plans and inspect the schools' execution of plans. (57, principal of Nghi Thai junior secondary school)

The percentage of households attending parents meetings is rather high (71.0%) in all groups. Poor households even go to such meetings more than non-poor households.

Table 3.2: Percentage of households attending meetings of students' parents

(Unit: percentage)

Contents		Frequently	Sometimes	Never
General		71.0	18.1	11.0
Gender	Man	71.9	14.6	13.5
	Woman	69.7	22.7	7.6
Nationality	Kinh	73.1	15.4	11.5
	Thai	68.8	20.8	10.4
Living standard	Very poor	88.9	11.1	
	Poor	65.1	20,6	14.3
	Average	73.4	17.7	8.9
	Well-being	75.0		25.0

2. Barriers to the process of educational socialisation and to the poor's participation

Burdens of contributions are still heavy for the poor

As mentioned above, the average level of people's contribution is heavy to poor households in localities although contributions at that level are still not sufficient for building infrastructure to meet requirements and significantly increasing income for teachers. Consequently, poor students at lower and upper secondary schools often drop out of school. Even when they are convinced to resume school, they easily relapse into dropping school again. This pressure may also cause poor students to become dispirited with study and drop out of school when they are reminded in front of the class of the late payment of school fees or other contributions.

A pupil's father who is Thai ethnicity living in Tam Dinh comments as follows:

Children from poor families often drop out of school. They drop school for two reasons. First, their families are in difficult circumstances and cannot afford to make contributions for them to go to school and to buy books and notebooks. Secondly, poor students, who don't have money to pay school fees, when they are reminded by teachers of payments and contributions to be made, feel embarrassed, disgusted and shy with their friends and just drop school. (Aged 47, Thai ethnicity, Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune)

We can see another example in a Thai family living in Tam Dinh. They have four children. They have to pay a great number of contributions for education. This example also reflects unfair support policies for poor households with many children.

I have four children, all whom are going to school. Their schooling costs me a lot. I have to pay contributions to school building, association funds, school funds, festival organisation and must purchase textbooks. In one year, which includes two school terms, textbooks cost me 600,000 -700,000 VND for four children. School fees for the four of them come to 700,000-800,000 VND in total. These costs and contributions are too much for my family's income. Contributions are reduced 50% for children of war invalids and war martyrs. Contributions are exempt for a family that has three children studying at the same level (i.e. primary, lower secondary or upper secondary). My four children go to school, but only two of them study at the same level, so I'm not entitled to the exemption. Children's schooling is useful for the family. For example, we recently made an application for borrowing money from the bank. My husband mistakenly wrote the figure 2 million as 2,000. One of my children saw the mistake and corrected it. When I sold a pig and I don't know how to calculate the price, my son (or daughter) can make the calculation. We want our children to finish upper secondary school; as we - their parents have failed to do so, we want them to complete general education. I don't take part in the parents' board in my children's classes and in school because the poor are not elected to these positions; they only elect the rich and those who have prestige as head of the students' parents association.

Children's going to school creates many difficulties. At the beginning of a school year, we must pay all of the contributions. If a family does not have something to sell, then one has to buy things on credit at stalls. One notebook costs 1,000VND if paid in cash and 1,200VND if bought on credit. If one cannot manage, his or her children must leave school. Another difficulty is the issue of children's seats. I must pay 30,000-40,000VND as contributions to the school building but I don't know what the school uses the funds for. When I go to the school for a meeting I see four children sharing a bench. When there is heavy rain and students have to pack themselves in places where the rain does not fall, the school's roof leaks. My advantage is that my house is near schools, the commune and village's headquarters and I don't have to buy bikes for children, which lessens the financial burden for me. In treatment, teachers are more concerned with the children of the rich than those of the poor. Teachers pay more attention to other teachers or officials' children. (Male, aged 35, Thai ethnicity, education level: completed 9th grade, farms in Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune, Tuong Duong district)

Semi-public schools and class systems have higher fees and contributions

Of the two communes, the situation in Nghi Thai commune is better, as there were no students dropping school in the middle of a level. But they often gave up study when finishing an education level without having grades required to enter a public school. This is due to the school fees charged by semi-public schools which are heavy not only for students of poor families but also for those from households with an average income.

Apart from school fees, people still complain of other kinds of contributions. A pupil's parent cites that:

There is no problem if my child passes the entrance exam to a public school. If he fails and attends a semi-public school, it will be quite a problem for us. The school fee in a public school is 25,000VND/month and that of a semi-public one is 65,000VND/month. With such an expense, how can I earn money to cover it? That does not include clothing, books, notebooks and a bike for him to go to school. (Male, aged 53, in Thai Cat village)

The situation is worse in that poor students often acquire an average level in their study results, which is inferior to those from non-poor families. This is why poor students often pass the entrance exams to semi-public schools and have to pay higher school fees. As a result, the percentage of poor students breaking off their study is higher.

The poor seldom participate in parents boards

Parents boards often comprise representatives of families with decent economic conditions (not poor) and higher educational attainment, who are often "commune heads or deputy heads or women's association heads". Parents of poor students rarely join parents boards, therefore the voice of poor students' parents is somewhat restricted.

Assistance policies are not still little efficiency, especially in mountainous regions

Educational policies for the rural and mountainous areas and for poor households seem not “strong” enough to ensure that poor students will not give up their study at lower and upper secondary schools and eradicate illiteracy effectively in mountainous and ethnic minority-inhabited areas.

Children of poor households attending lower and upper secondary schools will have their school fees reduced by 50%. In fact, 12 poor households in Thai Cat village and 13 poor households in Thai Binh village (Nghì Thai commune) have a few children going to lower secondary schools and no children attending upper secondary school. Therefore this policy does not offer much assistance to those selected as the poor.

Moreover, as in the case mentioned above, such a stipulation on school fee exemption and reduction (i.e. exemption and reduction can only be applied when three children are learning at the same level – primary, junior secondary or upper secondary) is contrary to the norm of the family planning policy (not having many births and the births should not be too close to each other). Such a preferential policy is but formalistic and gives practically no support to poor families who have many children going to school.

3. Illiteracy and the eradication of illiteracy for women and the poor

In a focus group discussion on this subject in Tam Dinh commune, many youth said there is a rather large number of a person in villages and communes who are illiterate or relapse into illiteracy in all ages including those who are both under or over 20 years. The majority of this number had once been literate, now become illiterate again because they haven’t read or written for a long time and forget all (the last literary class was conducted in 1997). And there is even a formalistic eradication (Female who is Thai) of illiteracy as follows:

*To tell the truth, the truly illiterate people did not go to class, they did not know how to hold pens. When inspection was made, those who finished 2nd or 3rd grade attend class. As for the really illiterate people, there are deaf people who do not know how to hold pens. They went to class for some days, then felt disgusted and broke off study. Illiteracy must be eradicated for these people; but they refused to attend class.
(Female, aged 35, Thai ethnicity, in Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune)*

People who took part in this group discussion said that it is necessary to create conditions for people to attend literacy classes, i.e. encouraging them to attend class. “Buying kerosene for them (for lighting kerosene lamps) because there is no electricity supply here, giving them pens, books, notebooks and arranging literacy classes at the time they are off farm work or do not engage in production. “There must even be presents to encourage them to attend classes like coaxing 5-6 years old children. (Group discussion at Quang Yen village Tam Dinh commune)

Health

1. Disease status and health care of population

Common diseases in PPA sites

Some aspects should be noted when analyzing diseases of population at two locations surveyed. For one recent year, people who got cold, influenza account for the highest proportion (88.8%) and this proportion is much higher than other diseases. This is followed by proportions of who got enteropathy, gastric diseases (70.8%), rheumatism (55.3%), toothache (48.4%), and malaria (44.7%). Malnutrition takes rather high share (39.8%) followed by goitre (36.6%). It can be noted that diseases people got in the last year at two locations surveyed mainly are related to weather conditions (cold, influenza, rheumatism, malaria); nutrition, living patterns (malnutrition, goitre, toothache, malaria); environmental sanitation (enteropathy, gastric diseases). These diseases much are linked to knowledge, economic conditions, environmental sanitation of rural and mountainous population.

Table 3.3: Diseases in PPA sites

Diseases	Percent age %	District		Living standard			
		Nghi Loc	Tuong Duong	Very poor	Poor	Ave age	Well-being
Cold, influenza	88.8	49	51	5.6	39.2	53.1	2.1
Malaria	44.7	9.7	90.3	8.3	52.8	37.5	1.4
Enteropathy, gastric	70.8	45.6	54.4	6.1	43.0	48.2	2.6
Traffic accident	6.8	54.5	45.5	9.1	36.4	45.5	9.1
Malnutrition	39.8	23.4	76.6	12.5	51.6	32.8	3.1
Sexually transmitted diseases	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tuberculosis of the lungs	31.1	56.0	44.0	8.0	40.0	52.0	
Toothache	48.4	32.1	67.9	10.3	46.2	39.7	3.8
Rheumatism	55.3	33.7	66.3	9.0	47.2	39.3	4.5
Goitre	36.6	13.6	86.4	10.2	54.2	32.2	3.4
Cancer	29.2	53.2	46.8	8.5	44.7	42.6	4.3
Heart disease	28.0	35.6	64.4	4.4	53.3	40.0	2.2
Liver	27.3	36.4	63.6	9.1	47.7	40.9	2.3

It can be noted that living standard, customs, traditions, capacity of service supply, knowledge have quite remarkable influence on disease model of people at the two locations shown clearly in data comparison between Tuong Duong district (mountainous) and Nghi Loc (plain). In Tuong Duong proportion of who got malaria (90.3%), rheumatism (66.3%), goitre (86.4%), malnutrition (76.6%) is much higher than Nghi Loc district, a highland district with almost 100% of Thai

population.

Analyzing living standard, diseases that have been considered “poor people’s diseases” fall mainly into poor and very poor households. For example, 74.1% of poor and very poor people are of malnutrition compared to 3.1% of non-poor. Or proportions of who have rheumatism and goitre among very poor and poor people are 56.2% and 64.4% respectively, whereas these proportions among average and richer people are much lower.

When people got sick, where did they go for disease treatment?

At the two locations, people mainly choose system of public health care for treatment, especially commune health stations and hospitals at different levels. Most respondents (60.9%) went to commune health station when they got sick, followed by district hospitals (30.4%) and provincial hospitals (23.6%). This, to certain extent, shows role of system of public health care in the two districts in health care for population.

Comparing two districts Tuong Duong and Nghi Loc shows difference in how people choose location for treatment. 52% went to commune health station in Nghi Loc, whereas the proportion is 48% in Tuong Duong. In-depth interviews shed light on reason of that which is more readiness (including capacity of staff, device, and locations) of plain area compared to mountainous. Among who chose district hospitals, majority come from Tuong Duong (75.5% vs. 24.5%). Proportion of who chose provincial hospital in Nghi Loc is higher (76.3% vs. 33.7%). Clearly, transportation and distance between living place and treatment place are of significance. Tuong Duong’s people chose district hospitals due to shorter distance. Nghi Loc’s people who live near both district and provincial hospitals chose provincial hospital because they consider proficiency of provincial hospital higher than district ones.

Table 3.4: Treatment places

Treatment place	Percent age	District		Ethnicity		Living standard			
		<i>Nghi Loc</i>	<i>Tuong Duong</i>	<i>Kinh</i>	<i>Thai</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Well-being</i>
Village health	21.7	34.3	65.7	100	28.2	2.9	54.3	42.9	-
Commune health station	60.9	52.0	48.0	96.2	60.3	5.1	44.9	48.0	2.0
Area polyclinic	5.6	33.3	66.7	75.0	7.7	0.0	44.4	55.6	.0
District hospital	30.4	24.5	75.5	92.3	47.4	6.1	38.8	53.1	2.0
Provincial hospital	23.6	76.3	23.7	96.7	11.5	0.0	31.6	63.2	5.3
Central hospital	3.1	80.0	20.0	80.0	1.3	0.0	20.0	80.0	-
Pharmacy	3.7	66.7	33.3	66.7	1.3	33.3	0.0	66.7	-
Employers	2.5	100.0		66.7	-	-	-	100.0	-
Private clinic	13.7	100.0		95.7	-	9.1	31.8	59.1	-

Private house	13.3	91.7	8.3	91.7	1.3	16.7	33.3	50.0	-
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Village health care is a new model that is considered effective in early health care for people. At the two locations surveyed, this model was chosen by 21.7% of population. This proportion is still not high that does not entirely manifest important role of this model in health care for people. More Tuong Duong's people chose this model (65.7%) and majority of them from poor and very poor due to convenience, low cost. This model should be given more support in both quantity and quality for mountainous districts such as Tuong Duong.

Although only 13.3% of respondents have ever bought medicine for self-treatment at home, it is noted that very high proportion of Nghi Loc's people (91.7%) did this way. This figure reflects not only convenience, diversity of pharmaceutical market, but also activeness of people in solving sickness problem (not always wise way) in plain, suburb areas compared to mountainous areas. Nonetheless, seen from other aspect, there is also reason that has compulsory characteristics because system of public health care does not fully meet the needs of people in health care. Qualitative studies show that many have to buy medicine for self-treatment at home due to weak capacity of commune health station and complexity of procedures at hospitals.

Beside development of system of public health care, private sector also makes contribution to health care for people. System of private health care is chosen by people due to some reasons. For instance, services offered by this system are less time-consuming, have better serving manner and quality. Moreover, when living standard of people increases, their needs in health care and quality of health treatment also enhance. People have the right to choose desirable health care form. Instead of going to hospital with complex, time-consuming procedures, people might go to nearby health units or buy medicine for self-treatment at home. For rural population, the main reasons why private health care is chosen are nearness and easily-treated diseases. The fact that not high proportion of who chose this model (13.7%) but 100% of those people concentrate in Nghi Loc district and 59.1% in households with average and higher living standard assert link between economic development and formation and development of private health care at locations surveyed.

Regarding reasons why people chose treatment places, the most common is nearby home (73.8%), and next is low costs. Good quality of treatment ranks third with 26.5% of respondents choosing (see the table 3.5).

In the survey sample 13.7% of interviewed people although got sick, they were not treated. They mainly came from poor and very poor households (59.1%). No one from wealthy households falls into this group. The reasons that the poor referred are first of all too high cost (72%), then unawareness of where to go for treatment (8%), long distance (24%), and perception that diseases could go away without any treatment (18%). Therefore, economic factor, information, and

transportation are the main factors affecting decision of self-treatment of people (see the table 3.6).

Table 3.5: Reasons why people chose treatment places

Reasons to choose treatment places	Percentage
Nearby home	73.8
Low costs	41.9
Good treatment quality	26.6
Have personal connections	5.5
Others	6.2

Table 3.6: Proportion of those who are sick but not treated

(Unit: percentage)

Issues	District		Living standard			
	<i>Nghi Loc</i>	<i>Tuong Duong</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Well-being</i>
Be sick but not treated	59.1	40.9	18.2	40.9	40.9	0
Granting health insurance card /exemption-discount of treatment costs helps the poor treat their diseases effectively	62.9	37.1	1.0	34.0	63.9	1.0

2. Health services at the commune level have been improved. However, provided services do not meet the needs of local people sufficiently.

Villagers in Nghi Thai remarked that for two years, there has been no change in the healthcare for people. The commune has a health station but when people fall sick, they often go to private doctors; even the poor do so, because private doctors have better qualifications and payment can be made later on.

Many poor people prefer to go to private doctors because they allow payment later on. When the harvest comes farmers will sell groundnuts, sweet potatoes or rice to pay the debts. If one goes to the clinic, one has to pay immediately following the consultation. (Male, aged 53, in Thai Binh village)

3. It is necessary to upgrade commune health stations, especially strengthening health workers and raising commune health workers' specialized qualifications and medical ethics

In the health services, commune clinics are the weakest one. Previously, officials attended urgent three-month courses to fight and control malaria, after which they officially become commune health workers. Now they are heads of commune health station. As their level of education is limited, they at times give the wrong medicine. One case has lead to mortality. From that point, people have lost confidence in commune health workers. (Chairwoman of Tuong Duong district's Women's Union)

Medical ethics also poses a problem to commune health workers.

The commune health centre disdains people and disregard human life. Holders of health insurance cards are also slighted. They (health workers) have no professional ethics! (Female, aged 35, of Thai ethnicity, Focus group discussion in Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune).

4. Health insurance cards

Issuing of health insurance cards to the poor still as limitations

One right of poor households is to have free health insurance. This constitutes support which entitles the poor to medical treatment when they fall ill. However, in Nghi Thai, not all poor households have been issued health insurance cards.

First, household should be selected as the poor in accordance with the process set forth in Chapter 1. Following the selection, they will prepare an application for a free health insurance card according to Decision No. 139.

A person said two years ago, her family was among the poor households in Thai Binh village to be issued with green covered (health insurance) cards but she never received the card and she doesn't know why.

This is caused by the loose execution of Decision No. 139 in localities. In many cases, poor household voluntarily gave this to households that are not poor but affected by disease or illness, or village executives readjusted the issue of health insurance cards to those families that had permanent sick people but do not lie in the category of poor households. These cases have been confirmed by a farmer in Nghi Thai. Vietnamese have many good traditions and one of them is "the poor often offer advantages for the poorer".

There were some cases in which households were not so poor but were issued health insurance cards. The reason is that there were poor households who determined themselves that all members were in physical fitness that year and their poverty was caused by lack of capital. Therefore they gave this entitlement to their fathers, grandfathers, uncles or families afflicted by chronic illness. (Male, aged 46, Thai Binh village).

Each health insurance card is valid for giving medical treatment to one person in a family. If a household has two ailing members, only one of them will not be entitled to using the card.

A health insurance card is valid for one year and it takes a long time to clear procedures for obtaining the card (seven months). Consequently the practical use duration is very short (five months). If a poor household's member needs to have

medical treatment early in the year, he or she cannot have access to this service. On the contrary, in many cases, people do not use health insurance cards because

The drug store is in the market and people reckon that if they can save some thousand of VND worth of medicine by using the card, they may have to spend half a day or a whole day (to go to a hospital). That's why they bought medicine at the market for the purpose of convenience. (Male, aged 46, in Nghi Thai)

Using health insurance card

Among interviewed people, proportion of who ever used health insurance card for treatment is 54.8%. Among those who were granted card, in Nghi Loc 42.1% ever used this card, whereas in Tuong Duong as many as 75% ever used this card. These figures are not representative enough to confirm proportion of the poor who were granted this card at the two locations. However, it might be noted that demand for being granted health insurance card and using this card of Tuong Duong district is much higher than Nghi Loc plain district.

Health insurance cards have not yet brought about practical and marked benefits to the poor

People using health insurance cards cannot bypass levels but must go in the stipulated order from the commune to district and then to province. If a health insurance card holder does not go in the right order, the card will not be of any help. Especially for Nghi Thai commune, whose distance to the provincial hospital is shorter than to the district hospital, when falling sick, villagers often go straight to the provincial hospital, bypassing the district, and the card is of no help.

The (health) insurance card is useful but its effect is not high. Its use duration is short and its validity is not so great. Yet its holder should always follow the stipulated order: from village to commune clinics, district, then to provincial hospital. Here, the provincial hospital is nearer than the district hospital. If people go to the district hospital to get a recommendation letter, they must go by "xe om" (motorbike taxi) and pay the charge, then come back to the province. If one is seriously ill, one cannot go that way. (Male, aged 46, Thai Cat village).

There are a great number of disadvantages in using health insurance cards for the poor. The following ideas are exposed by a poor farmer in Tam Dinh, (Thai ethnicity):

I have a health insurance card. But I don't use it for medical check-ups and treatments. The card bears my name and cannot be used for my children. When I was sick, I went to the village clinic and was given medicine worth about some five thousand VND for treating cold, flu and diarrhoea. No one told me what benefits a card holder is entitled to and the card is used for what cases. (Interview with Male, of Thai ethnicity - a poor farmer in Tam Dinh commune).

The case of female living in Nghi Thai is an example to illustrate problems encountered by the card holder. Furthermore, adequate instruction is not

provided to card holders resulting in inefficient use for health insurance cards of the poor when they are sick.

Last year, I was sick: a pain in my body made my breathing difficult. I used the health insurance card to cure it. First, I went to the village clinic for a check-up and was given ten tonic tablets and 20 stomach-ache tablets but they did not relieve my pain. The clinic recommended me to the district hospital. There, doctors diagnosed me and concluded that I had a heart condition and dispensed some tens tonic medicine tablets, ten tablets of rheumatism medicine and some cardiotonic tablets to me. They gave this medicine and did not tell me to buy additional medicine. After taking all of this medicine, my condition did not mitigate. After that, I didn't go for medical consultation any more because my illness did not ease off. I don't know health insurance cards may be used for checking and curing what diseases, neither do I know its use in terms of money. I know some people affected by goitre were given a lot of medicine and their ailment was relieved. It takes seven months to receive a card, calculating from the time to make a tentative list of card holders to the moment that it is issued. The order of steps is as follows: submitting the list (to higher levels) in February, taking photographs of the would-be card holders in March and issuing cards in August, which will expire in December. I heard that a health insurance card is used once only; therefore I do will not go for another medical consultation for fear that I would not get it. When I am issued with a new card, then I will go again. Now I want to have a medical check-up at the provincial hospital to see how my condition has developed but they (the physicians) said that was impossible because I was only allowed to have medical consultations at the district hospital only. I want them to tell me how many medical check-ups I may have and where; what diseases can be cured by the card and what cannot be. (Female, aged 43, poor household, divorced, with three children, in Nghi Thai commune)

In remote and isolated areas like Tuong Duong district, people live far from the commune and district centres; it takes many hours of walking or costs people some ten of thousands of VND to go to the commune health centre for medical consultation. Therefore, going for medical check-up and use of health insurance cards are not efficient and not attractive to the poor.

Health insurance cards prove effective in the case of having treatment at hospitals for serious illness or chronic diseases, but the card holders must go in the right line. Some people have spoken of the effectiveness of health insurance cards concerning serious illness (as the case of a female who was affected by goitre, cited below). Nevertheless, these cases few compared with the cases in which health insurance cards cannot be used or used without effect.

Last year I used my health insurance card to cure my ailment. I went to the village clinic, they said I had a goitre and gave me a recommendation letter (to be produced with the health insurance card) to go to the goitre station in Vinh City. After I submitted the recommendation letter and health insurance card, they checked my neck and gave some oral medicine. I did not spend much time waiting for the consultation: I handed my papers, then went out to the courtyard to wait - it took me about one

hour in all. There were a great number of patients, but they gave priority to card holders. They conducted a medical check-up, cardiogram and ultrasound and I only paid 3,000VND for purchasing a (health record) book. Last year I went for a medical consultation and received medicine many times - all the year round. I learned that a health insurance card is of great value because, if one does not have it, one must pay 200,000VND (as in my case) and must sit waiting. Priority is given to card holders and one will get a medical check-up quick. I believe that physicians were very zealous and thoughtful in their diagnosis, and, they caused me no trouble. This year, my illness is not yet over, so I received the card five days ago. I have no complaints; I only hope next year I'll be issued a card again because I am sick. (Female, aged 43, poor household, having six children, in Nghi Thai village)

Generally speaking, however, the effect and efficiency of health insurance cards have not yet been brought into play as a social service supporting the poor. Local people recommend extending the duration of the card into 2 years. Value of the card should be increased and complicated procedures should be simplified so that the poor can utilize the advantages of health insurance card. Health insurance cards should be used by every family member rather than the card holder only otherwise women and children of the poor households will suffer from disadvantages when they are not entitled to preferential support programs.

Quality of disease treatment for health insurance card holders

With respect to attitude of health staff toward those who have health insurance card, 18.8% of those card-holders who ever used this card assert effective, enthusiastic services of health staff. Majority (68.8%) considers services to be provided in normal manner and 12.4% realized difficult and annoying attitude of health staff toward them.

Comparative evaluations made by people on quality of disease treatment for those who had card and for those who did not have card show that 11.8% of respondents assert that treatment by using health card was better; 43% consider that there was no considerable difference and 21.5% consider that quality of disease treatment by using health card was worse.

Table 3.7: Comparative evaluations on quality of disease treatment

Quality	Overall proportion	Nghi Loc	Tuong Duong
Better	11.8%	7.7%	33.3%
The same	43.0%	46.2%	26.7%
Worse	21.5%	20.5%	26.7%
Do not know	23.7%	25.6%	13.3%

System of public health care has some problems. There are some limitations of using health insurance card that makes people not fully satisfied. They usually were given

common medicine (usually medicine produced domestically) with limited quantity and value. Regulations on treatment by using this card also create lot of annoyance to patients (location, treatment schedule appear time-consuming for the poor).

However, to some extent, granting health insurance card to the poor is very helpful for them in disease treatment easing their treatment costs, especially in case of serious diseases that require long, continuous treatment. Among respondents, 60.2% said that this card actually helped them in treatment, 23% said that they did not know, 12.4% said that this card was useless for them.

5. Participation in activities

Health care for the poor and poor areas is priority of government and international organizations in the cause of hunger eradication and poverty reduction and equality in health care. These priority policies have been supporting and encouraging rural people to get access to and participate more in activities and services of health care.

Table 3.8: Activities of people in health

Activities	Percentage %
Free treatment	47.8
Epidemic preventive injection	49.7
Health care for mothers and infants.	45.9
Environmental sanitation	63.3
Implementation of measures of family planning	55.9

Activities of people in health care are very diverse. The main activity is disease treatment for them and their family with nearly a half of people was ever treated freely at locality. The same proportion, 49.7% of people took part in epidemic preventive injection campaign. 45.9% took part in health care for mothers and infants. 55.9% took part in implementation of measures of family planning. It is worthwhile to note that the highest proportion 63.3% of people took part in environmental sanitation.

It is noted that competent organizations have paid due attention to health care for community and capacity of provision of health care services in localities. Programs of upgrading medical devices, tuberculosis, leprosy, rheumatism, malaria, goitre, HIV/AIDS, preventive injection, prevention of malnutrition, blindness, diarrhea, respiratory infection, etc. for recent years have contributed to curbing the spread of diseases, health care for mothers and infants not only in urban areas but also in remote rural areas that has remarkably improved health of population. However, in poor, remote areas (such as Tuong Duong) this task should be given continuous and regular attention taking into account characteristics of social, economic and cultural development in each locality.

Agricultural extension

Agricultural extension services have offered great support to the development of local production

The agricultural extension program of Nghi Thai commune has worked at the village level for more than one year. People notes some impacts already brought about by the program. Local people have recognized achievements gained by agricultural extension program. A male farmer in Nghi Thai cited.

After attending four training courses of agricultural extension programme, the people known how to apply the technique of planting of rice (first), and ground nut (second) and Soya bean (third). Training in livestock raising has yielded results in the development of breeding cows and sows. (Male, aged 46, in Thai Cat village)“

A staff of agricultural extension in Tam Dinh commune (Thai ethnicity) has made some recommendations to promote agricultural extension services so that it will be more useful for the local people.

The agricultural extension programme is better than before. However, in order to further improve it, especially for the poor, the State should upgrade infrastructure, introduce these services to villages and commune, enhance training and improve agricultural extension workers by organising tours for sight visits and study of good models, then applying them to their localities. (Male, agricultural extension worker of Quang Yen commune)

Agricultural extension board of Nghi Thai commune has organized many training courses in seedlings, livestock breeding and aquaculture technology. Farming households participated in these courses very enthusiastically because they have always been hungry for information and hoped for a change for the better on the field. The commune has organised two exclusive training courses in milk cow raising and crop tending for the poor (each attendant was given 5,000VND for a session)

The poor's receiving of and applying agricultural extension knowledge are still very restricted

Due to too low educational attainment, information dissemination does not conform to the economic situation of the poor. In reality, the poor have few opportunities to apply the knowledge they learnt to production. A female farmer in Nghi Thai has following comment.

I see that the programs prepared exclusively for the poor are not close to practice. Recently the poor attended a training course on raising milk cows and growing new varieties of rice. I learned that the prices of these things are very high. How can they

afford milk cows? So what's the use of holding such course? (Female, aged 44, in Thai Cat village)

Also because of poverty, the poor are wary to approach agricultural extension workers. Comparisons between the poor households and non-poor households with regards to access to agricultural extension:

Some farming households who pay attention to tending fields and some responsible officials often exchanged views on farming production such as plant insects and diseases so that the commune agricultural extension board may work out measures to help them. As for poor households, they often posed fewer questions; perhaps they are still concerned about agricultural extension but due to shyness or some other reason, did not want or dared not put questions to us (Head of Nghi Thai commune agricultural extension board)

In order to help the poor to catch up with other households in applying scientific and technical knowledge to practice, there must be an exclusive way applied for the poor. That is one (agricultural extension worker) should be “hand-on training”, familiarize them with work develop their skill:

For example, I borrowed five million VND for raising pigs. I need, first of all, to be told how to make the sty and tend the animals. Agricultural extension workers should call at my house now and then to make me familiar with the job and help me to understand livestock breeding. This will help me make some profit in raising pigs and pay my debts. (Female, aged 55, in Thai Cat commune)

Agricultural extension services also provide some commodities such as rice, maize, sesame and vegetable seedlings, fertilizer and insecticide; some of which were sold on credit to the people and consequently give some support to the poor.

Most of our services cater generally for all households. As for poor households, we let them buy more on credit so that they still have funds. (Male, aged 46, in Thai Cat commune).

However, Thai Cat commune's provision of agricultural extension services has not met all the people's demand; therefore they still have to seek private services.

In order to make science and technology accessible more to people in general and to the poor in particular, and with higher quality; there must be a formally trained contingent of scientific, technical and livestock breeding workers who come from each village so that they may join people in the field every day and give them guidance on specific knowledge.

Women have taken an active part in agricultural extension services

Women have taken part actively in training courses/classes organised by communes or districts on agricultural and fishing extension with practical themes.

Women participated in greater number in training courses about growing rice because, previously, men took charge of this job; now, women take the lead in applying new strains of rice to cultivation.” (Male, agricultural extension worker of Quang Yen village)

Usually, women in better developed families often took part more actively than that of poorer families. Poor families or families in difficult conditions had poorer attendance to the course. But they were conscious of the course. Previously, the state of “men learning and women practicing” was more widespread. Recently, in economic program activities in general and agricultural extension in particular, Women’s Union were very concerned about the gender issue. The participation in agricultural extension was not equal between men and women. Although women attend training program to some degree in general, poor women, are not often able to write down what was explained to them due to their low educational level. In many cases, the husband could explain things to his wife after attending a training course. But if the wife took part in a course, it is unsure that she may explain what she had learnt to her husband. “For concrete courses, women’s attending (of training courses) may not be as beneficial as men’s.” (Female, Nghi Loc district Women’s Union)

Training courses have drawn on lessons from the dissemination of science and technology. They must be based on the actual educational attainment of the participants, the level of labour organization and production techniques. They must be adjusted to be appropriate for remote and isolated areas where the educational level is low. Sometimes, agricultural extension workers should “take trainees’ hands to show the work” in order to facilitate the poor’s having more access to science and technology. When preparing training on technical transfer in the highlands, all of the training contents, programme and methods must be compiled again.

Agricultural extension services should satisfy the poor’s requirements as follows

- Helping to raise income against poverty. Agricultural extension equips people with knowledge and capital for raising cattle, pigs, etc. It also assists farming households, especially the poor ones, in coping with frequent risks such as drought, insects, plant diseases and animal epidemics. It helps facilitate the transfer of new, drought and insect-resistant seedlings and provides vaccines, preventive and curative medicines for animals, etc. It also supplies timely and on-the-spot agricultural extension services such as saplings, animal breeds, fertiliser, insecticide, plant protection chemicals, epidemic vaccination and veterinary medicine.

- Diversifying income sources to cope with risks. The poor should not be encouraged to take part - from the outset or on an experimental basis - in programs for restructuring saplings and animal breeds because the poor's degree of risk is higher than that of the non-poor.
- Providing information on market, supporting the marketing of products such as neohouzeaua and non-wood products taken from forests in Tam Dinh commune); sea products and rattan, bamboo wickerwork in Nghi Thai commune.
- Providing agricultural extension services with instalment payments as a form to lend funds.

Some other services, such as insecticide and herbicide, etc. have also been provided satisfactorily to people. The latter would register what they need and the commune's agricultural extension board would make the purchase (according to the quantity registered) and supply the commodities to the people. The selling prices were practically the same as the purchase prices at the district, with very insignificant differences. The commune's agricultural extension board would fully satisfy the villagers' demand, irrespective of whether they are poor or not poor. Some seedlings were sold on credit while some others required payment in advance - when making registration. The district decided this. Generally speaking, we do not make a difference between poor or non-poor buyers; we satisfy whoever has a demanded. "(Male, agricultural extension worker, in Thai Cat village)

Problems that may arise from these requirements

- Commune and village agricultural extension workers have not gone through any training, therefore their qualifications are restricted. Agricultural extension workers' access to information is not adequate and timely. One agricultural extension staff has made following comments with regard to capacity of agricultural extension staff.

As for the contingent of agricultural extension workers that are capable of grasping science and technology, our qualification in agricultural extension is still poor. First, models and samples are written in Latin scripts, which make it difficult to read and to write. Secondly, grasping science and technique requires higher level, good health and youth. As for myself, my health is poor; moreover science and technique have changed and are difficult to grasp. Therefore in the present conditions and for subsequent years, one should look for people with high educational attainment to engage in agricultural extension. I myself have proposed that I must get training but I haven't yet gone for training. I suggest to the commune people's committee that they should strive to train the young generation. (Male, agricultural extension worker of Thai Cat village)

Another agricultural extension staff living in Tam Dinh mountainous commune who is Thai ethnicity agreed that their capacity is not competent enough. She also referred to difficulties in their works for example, learned information concerning science and technology, cropping, harvest, new strains, saplings, animal breeds and market prices from the commune agricultural extension board, through

project supporting boards, radio and TV. However that information she received were insufficient and not timely. Usually when she wants additional information, she goes to see the commune agricultural extension boards, or the project management board and once she went to the district to ask questions.

I also participated in technical training courses and performance models in the commune. When getting back, I disseminated information to cooperative members. As I have restricted ability, lack specialised knowledge and do not know teaching methods, I have difficulties in disseminating what I learnt in the course to cooperative members. Therefore I could present only some technology to them. (Female, agricultural extension worker of Quang Yen village)

Investment in agricultural extension is not up to the level required to bring about efficiency. Agricultural extension was carried out in planting a hybrid rice variety, but the poor could not afford fertiliser, insecticide in time with the cropping pattern, or there was not enough water in the fields to irrigate this rice strain. Agricultural extension was conducted on raising cows, but the poor did not have knowledge about diseases and epidemic prevention and control; neither did they have money to buy veterinary medicine when in need. Agricultural extension activities have not met immediate requirements and do not suit the poor. A farmer in Nghi Thai has following comments with regard to efficiency of agricultural extension services in the community:

What matters is the actual performance of what has been explained in agricultural extension. If the people are not successful, the agricultural extension is superficial. Secondly, when the agricultural extension programme suggested some plants to grow, it also provided people with fertiliser and seedlings. But growing sesame, vegetable and maize proved ineffective. (Male, aged 37, of average household, Focus group discussion in Thai Binh village)

- No coordination is made for integrating development projects with agricultural extension activities. The poor and the community should take part in agricultural extension activities.
- The issue of studying markets and organising product consumption in agricultural extension projects is still very poor.

Chapter 4: Coverage by Social Assistance Program

The formal social relief system

The formal social relief system has had a partial impact, especially on households in the category of beneficiaries of social welfare policies. As for poor households that do not fall into this category, the impact of social support remains limited.

Many poor households that belong to the category of beneficiaries of social welfare policies such as war invalids and war martyr's families, the aged and single persons receive benefits regularly. Thanks to these benefits, they have a rather stable though low income. The relief also helps to reduce risks caused by natural calamities and diseases, as well as other difficulties. These households also often receive support in health insurance and are entitled to reduction of and exemption from education contributions and other fees to be paid in the localities. Regular support and accompanied policies have exerted an impact on small number of poor households in this category. Chairperson of District Women's Union cited that:

Unexpected allowances for poor households on the occasion of Tet (lunar New Year festival) and national holidays depend on the size of the budget. If the budget is abundant, the scope of beneficiaries will be expanded. If the budget allocation is restricted, there must be a selection. Priorities will be given to poor families who benefit from social welfare policies, then come families that have sick people. No selection is made for the latter, but consideration is made to see which families will receive the allowance first and which will be granted later on. (Female, Nghi Loc District Women's Union chairwoman).

Other woman Nghi Thai confirmed that:

Granting regular benefits, does not help to stabilise people's livelihood, but somewhat lessens their difficulties. This assistance cannot help people overcome poverty. (Focus group discussion, Female, aged 35, of Kinh, in Thai Binh village, Nghi Thai commune).

Within the group that receives regular allowances, war invalids and war martyr's households receive larger allowances than households in other categories. "The disabled households are granted an allowance of about 30,000-40,000 VND per month" (a man, aged 64, of Kinh majority people, in Thai Binh village, Nghi Thai commune), while households, who has war invalids and war bereaved, receive allowances several times higher. However, these types of households often have no breadwinners and are frequently affected by illness and diseases. Other hunger elimination and poverty alleviation programs also give priorities to households of beneficiaries of social welfare policies.

The results of interviews with 160 households of two communes selected for surveying social support services also reveal that only more than half of the number of people asked said that they were given assistance when in difficult conditions. This proportion differs a bit in poor and ethnic minorities' groups and between men and women (see table below). The number of male confirming to receive assistance is higher than that of female. Thai ethnicity living in Tuong Duong receives support more regularly than Kinh people living in Nghi Loc. It is very strange to know that 100 % of better-off families confirmed to receive supports whilst only 50 % of poor and very poor households have received supports. Social assistance might likely reached wrong targets.

Table 4.1: Are people given assistance when they are in difficult conditions?

Contents		Yes
General		56.8 %
Gender	Male	63.8%
	Female	50.0%
Nationality	Kinh	50.0%
	Thai	58.2%
Living standard	Very poor	66.7%
	Poor	51.8%
	Average	62.1%
	Decent upward	100.0%

In a case, some poor households have performed very well thanks to the social assistance.

Last year I used my health insurance card for medical treatment. Besides health insurance entitlements, my children's school fees are reduced. At times, the commune granted my families some money: since last year, I have received 200,000VND three times, each according to the commune's entitlement. I borrowed five million VND at the interest rate of 0.5% and bought cows for raising my children. The loan is just enough to purchase two cows, a mother and its young and the raising is effective. All of my children are exempt from school fees, but have to pay contributions to school building. All poor households are given allowances, large or small, when they are in difficulty. (Female, aged 43, of poor household, has six children, in Nghi Thai commune)

Poor households that do not belong to the category of beneficiaries of social welfare policies meet with more difficulties and risks due to lost harvests, domestic animal diseases and epidemics, illness, etc. and received little formal assistance. One female in Nghi Thai commented that:

In recent years, the commune was hit by cattle epidemics. But no one was given support for such a risk. Poor households, sometimes households with average and decent living conditions were also stricken by risks. When one was afflicted by such risks, one has to bear it oneself and no one was given assistance including the poor. (Female, aged 37, Kinh ethnicity, in Thai Binh village, Nghi Thai district)

It is true that in such cases, when social assistance is not available or does not reach the people, the latter have to shoulder all of the consequences. They must rely on their own strength and on the help of people in the village and community. As such, the traditional/informal social assistance network in the countryside still proves effective and plays a significant role in the present situation.

A male farmer in Nghi Thai has made following comments regarding this situation:

For families that have fallen victims to risks, the commune administration as well as higher-levelled administration didn't give any help. For example, last year, one woman bought a cow at the price of 2 million VND. When it died, people in my village were called upon to help her. Each gave her a little money, totalling some hundred thousands of VND to lessen her loss. (Male, aged 37, in Thai Cat village)

Unexpected support often comes late, is small and not very effective

Those who receive regular support are families benefiting from social welfare policies, the aged and single people. The support is rendered periodically, one or two times a year and taken from the commune budget. However, due to constraint amount of budget, these supports are not sufficient. Comment made by female who is Thai is as follows:

When there is severe hunger, after consideration, each person is given 600g of rice. A three-member family is granted 3kg which feeds them only one day. It's too little. (Female, aged 42, Thai ethnicity, in Dinh Huong village, Tam Dinh commune)

Besides, there are still other forms of social support for poor households which are not in cash or in kind, but exemption or reduction of payment or contributions such as exemption of agricultural tax and public utility labour, reduction of contributions to school building. For ethnic minority-inhabited areas, there are still additional and exclusive support forms or programmes such as exemption or reduction of school fees, free provision of primary education textbooks, the Program 135 and fixed farming and settlement programme.

Social support, if any, may not avoid a lack of transparency in the use of fund, or brings about poor efficiency. As an example, one can look at the implementation of the free provision of pigs to communes in so difficult circumstances through Program 135 in Tam Dinh commune. There was a lack of transparency in the

support that triggered the lodging of complaints to a higher level as the people wanted to be granted cash directly so that they would buy the pigs themselves.

However, the community's consideration and selection of households who deserved to receive assistance have been done in a rather satisfactory manner. People often gave priority to those households that were in the most difficult condition and the execution was rather fair. Chairperson of Tam Dinh Women's Union has made the following comments:

There are three kinds of households to be classified in our commune: average, poor and hungry. The district allocated assistance in three groups, the commune granted it to the hungriest households in the first group, poor households in the second groups and average households in the third groups. If the State shows more concern and continues the support, the considerations and grants will go on like that. People's conditions here must be judged fairly. (Head of the Women's Union of Dinh Huong village, Tam Dinh commune)

Some localities established reserve fund with contributions made by local people or from higher levels. However, people do not know about this fund sufficiently, nor do they know how it operates. Even a commune chairman admitted that the support from this fund was not considerable and people do not know about it because they did not go to meetings, or village officials failed to inform them about the fund and explanation it to them.

We did help the poor by using funds contributed by the people, amounting to about 5 million VND each year. The district also poured money in the fund; this year it informed us that it would grant (a total of) 2 million VND to very poor families. However, its support is not significant because there is a household given 100,000VND only and it's not enough. We conduct a survey of the people's conditions every six months. Villages will make a list of those who are in difficulties or distress and forward it to the commune and the mobilisation board will go to villages to distribute money to people according to the list, but not all villages are given this assistance. The fund for support to the poor is very small, because we cannot raise much money as people are too poor (Male, chairman of Nghi Thai Commune People's Committee).

Both the people and local officials assess social support programs as "only partly helping people overcome initial difficulties" (a statistics-planning official of Tam Dinh commune). Social support programs like those in the mountainous areas seem to be creating and keeping a psychology among part of the poor - called by people the 'lazy part' (estimated accounting for 10-20% of the poor) of reliance on and waiting for assistance from higher levels or from social organisations). A woman who is Thai ethnicity said:

There are two forms of the poverty. One is fond of eating but lazy in work, the other is really poor. One family who lives next to this meeting hall and has four children is

really fond of eating but lazy in work. However, when the community made the consideration and selection of poor households, the family was classified as poor and granted even a health insurance card. People complained about their laziness only. The members of that family don't want to work and keep wandering about. (Female, aged 35, of Thai ethnicity, in Tam Dinh village)

In the recent past, the commune granted my family a 14 kg-pig worth about 200,000VND. When I brought it home, it refused to eat bran and died immediately. The Women's Union chapter also granted me a loan for livestock breeding. There are six people in my family, earning an income of 50,000VND each (per month). I was given a poor household's book last year as a result of the selection by the people and approval by the commune but since then I have not been exempt from anything including agricultural tax. Nor I was issued with the poor's medical consultation and treatment book. I see that poor household's books are of much help to my family and me. There are a lot of poor households in the village. When there is a drought or a lost harvest, they are also granted some rice. The disabled, the aged and the chronically sick are given allowances in cash, sometimes in rice. If it is in rice, they must go the commune people's committee to receive it because the commune will not bring it to village. As for natural disaster prevention and control, the commune only made oral dissemination and mobilised and helped families to overcome difficulties. Assistance also somewhat helps to overcome difficulties but cannot stabilise life as when the allowance is used up, difficulties come again. When my family met with difficulties, I had to seek help from officials in the village for relief. In my opinion, the State should be concerned with very poor households. It must grant allowance to them for gardening, planting trees, digging ponds to raise fish, and raising pigs and chicken. Only through this way can the villagers' living conditions improved. If people are hungry, the State should grant them rice, clothes, books and notebooks for school. (Female, aged 25, of Thai ethnicity, a poor household, in Dinh Huong village, Tam Dinh commune, Tuong Duong district)

Generally speaking, people acknowledge the comparative equity in executing social support programs. However, this equity is rated low by poor households. Just more than half of "very poor household" said that it was equitable.

Table 4.2: Assessment of whether or not support programs are equitable to all poor households

Contents		Yes
General		71.2%
Gender	Man	71.0%
	Woman	71.4%
Nationality	Kinh	84.6%
	Thai	67.4%
Living standard	Very poor	57.1%

	Poor	71.9%
	Average	73.7%
	Decent upward	100.0%

Chapter 5: Delivery of Public Administration Services

At present, the commune still carries out 'multi-door' public service delivery. When people come to the commune people's committee asking for certification of their official documents, they know what divisions and desks they should go according to the instruction posted on the doors; after that they enter for signatures and then go to another division for a seal. An explanation by a legal official in Nghi Thai commune is as follows:

The commune has not been able to carry out the one-door service. For each kind of document, people have to go at least to three places. For example, if one makes a birth certificate, one has to go to the judiciary division, then to an executive for signature and to the commune committee's secretariat for sealing. When people go to the commune committee to clear paper procedures, they know what divisions they should go to because the formalities have been announced to the villages. However I still want a direction table for the people's convenience. It takes 30 minutes at the quickest and 2.30 hours at the slowest to go through formalities for certifying a document. There is one day every week for settling citizens' complaints. I suggest that in the direction table, it should be indicated those days which people can come for clearing public administrative procedures. In my opinion, there must be stipulations about some specific days in the week to settle people's clearing of formalities. At present, we do not have sufficient working rooms; some rooms must house two divisions, thus creating difficulties for people. There is specific guidance as to fees to be paid for each kind of certification in the judiciary division. However, people are not concerned about that. Only will only ask when they have some documents to be certified. (Interview with male, aged 46, judiciary official and public security official of Nghi Thai commune)

A female farmer explained the procedures in completing some simple documents at the commune level:

When I made a birth certificate and asked to extend the valid duration of my children's working documents, I must go to the public security division first, when I had the written certification, I went to the (commune's committee) chairman for signature, then I went to have it sealed. (Female, aged 52, in Thai Cat village)

Through the views of the majority of people with different living conditions and occupations, one sees that no one complained about commune officials' attitude and behaviour and the fees for procedures. When talking of the one-door administrative service, people showed great concern and supported it.

This (the one-door administrative service) is an interesting idea because it lessens the formalities and troubles for people; however it has not been implemented here. (Many people said the same things in a group interview in Thai Binh village)

Regarding the coming changes, people have set forth a number of new requirements for when commune officials are turned into civil servants. First, this contingent must be qualified in terms of speciality and management; if someone has not acquired this level, he/she must be sent for training. Secondly, it must be ensured that officials work according to office hours and they must pay much attention to people's reputation. Comments by a male farmer in Nghi Thai over this issue are as follows:

In my opinion, in order to become the State employees, commune officials must be holders of authentic diplomas and degrees. The State must work out stipulations, for example, commune chairmen and commune Party committee secretaries must acquire the level of college graduates upward. The head of a division should also attain such a level. Besides, the question of enjoying people's prestige is also very important. (Male, aged 47, in Thai Binh village)

Generally speaking, people see administrative procedures at the commune level as being convenient. As the volume of work of a commune People's Committee is not high, commune officials and people have closely attached community ties. Sometimes, people come to a commune executive's home to ask for a signature. And people are fully satisfied with the service of commune executives, i.e. when people need them, they are present immediately.

Not only ordinary people but entrepreneurs of local enterprises must also have administrative procedures facilitated for conducting their business. Comments made by an owner of a small enterprise in Thai Binh village, Nghi Thai over this issue are as follows:

Last year, I didn't have any major procedures to clear, only minor administrative formalities. If I have documents to be certified, the commune chairman will do this for me, some work will require the deputy chairman or the public security man in charge of civil household registration. It's in accordance with the specialised sector. For example, the public security division makes the certification of civil household registration and civil status. As for administrative work, if the chairman is absent, his deputy will act on his behalf. A project may require going to one or many door(s); if a project needs a lot of papers and certification, one must clear it at all the doors, otherwise one only has to go to the commune committee and that's all. It's quick to obtain certification at the commune committee office; when one sees officials, they will do the work immediately and do not create any trouble because we only need their certification. Their attitude is cheerful and I'm satisfied with their service whenever I come to them. (Male, owner of a carpentry workshop in Thai Binh village)

One of the difficulties in remote and isolated areas (as in Tuong Duong district) is that the commune people's committee headquarters is very far from inhabitants' homes and the People's Committee only works five days a week (they are closed on Saturday and Sunday). It takes people a lot of time to go to the headquarters and sometimes they could not see the competent official in charge (it is a waste of travelling and waiting time). The following information is extracted from an interview with a local person in Tam Dinh with regard to public administrative services at the communal level.

Question: Do you often go to the commune headquarters to certify documents?

Answer: Yes, according to law, when children go to school or work in some places, we must have ID cards made and prepare copies of their birth certificates and diplomas with notary's certification.

Question: Do you often have to wait long for commune officials?

Answer: We just wait in order. *If they are absent, we go to their home.*

Question: *Do the poor dare to go to the chairman's house?*

Answer: Yes, they do go. They don't have any scruples.

Question: Each time you clear such document procedures. Did you go to the village administration first or go directly to the commune's committee?

Answer: When one wants to clear documentation procedures, some require the village head's signature such as registration for one's temporary residence or absence in order to work as guest workers overseas or in other places in Vietnam. Such procedures require the village head's signature first, then to the commune's judiciary division and the commune's committee chairman. They will make certification so that one may go to work legally out of the locality. There are no difficulties in clearing the procedures. *When one needs village and commune officials' assistance, they are very helpful and you can consider them like members of the family. The village head is like a father of the community; if he sees that your intention of letting your children go to work outside is legal, he will certify and sign in the application.* (Male, aged 50).

Chapter 6: Migration and Environment

Migration

1. Migration in Nghe An Province

There are two forms of migration in Nghe An, i.e. immigration and migration out of the province. However, the number of immigrants is not large and there is a higher percentage of out-migration. There are few labourers who come from other places to work in the province. If they do, they only come according to the agricultural year and few stay permanently. Labourers who come to work in Tuong Duong and Nghi Loc district are mainly men, aged between 25 and 40. The annual population fluctuation by the proportion of those coming - going is 6:11.

There are two different type's forms of migration. The one is seasonal migration: people go to the surrounding or other provinces and cities during the off-season to do extra work. The other is migration to other cities or localities for a long term: the migrant may work in enterprises, companies or production or business establishments. According to assessments by people participating in this PPA, the number of migrants who work for less than 12 months is 6.8%, the remaining 93.2% work outside the province for more than 12 months. Comments made by an official working in Department of Science, Technology and Environment are as follows:

Many brick workers come here from Thanh Hoa province. Nghe An is abundant in wood. All the fine wooden furniture here is made by carpenters from Ha Nam province. My young brother also hires a carpenter from Ha Nam. Nghe An has few workers who have good skills; there are only manual workers and their number is also few and they go to work out of the province; for example many labourers have come from Nghe An to work in (the southern province of) Binh Duong. (Head of the Business Registration Division, the provincial Department of Planning and Investment)

Apart from national and regional migration, international migration, i.e. working abroad as foreign workers- is a new type. The people as well as the local administration are concerned with this form of work and have invested in it. Thanks to the State's open-door interchange and integration policy, exporting labour is one of the measures to quickly develop the economy and raise the qualification of domestic labours. Because Nghe An is not bestowed with good natural conditions, working for a living in other areas or foreign countries is supported by the administration and people here see that it is more economically beneficial than working in the area. The same official also cited that:

The commune borrowed funds for villagers to have money to work abroad. Labourers in the village went abroad and remitted money home, which their families used to build houses. Now the village looks like a town. At present, the province is encouraging development in this direction. Little and often fill a purse. (Head of the Business Registration Division, Nghe An Department of Planning and Investment).

According to assessment by people participating in this study, the majority of migrants are men (61.7%) and women only accounted for 38.3%. The following is the age ranges of the migrants: youth: 70%, elderly people: 1.7% and children: 28.3%. 6.8% of the out-migrants to go to communes in the surrounding areas; 18.6% go to towns; the remaining majority of 71.2% go to other provinces and 3.4% go to work abroad as foreign labourers. Those people who migrate out of the province went to do business live in far-off places for a long period of time.

Comments made by a communal leader in Tuong Duong are as follows:

Local people comprise mostly of youths that graduated from the general education or some who finish ninth grade. They work in textiles and garment and factories and for-export leather- footwear factory in southern Vietnam. Recently the province has developed a policy of creating jobs for the youth in one company in Hai Phong that makes leather footwear. In the past 3-4 years, many youth in the commune have gone away - about 150, including both boys and girls, but the number of girls is more than that of boys. (Chairman of Tam Dinh commune)

According to reports made by Nghi Thai commune with a total population of 8,235, The total 1,765 households has more than 300 family members who went to Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong province to work in garment and footwear factories and about 15 people who work abroad as foreign workers.

Some people went to work out of the province thanks to an introduction from their acquaintances or relatives in other provinces; the rest - this is the majority - went at the commune's recommendation. Families who have children working overseas have decent living standard while the majority of labourers working in the country come from families with average living standard upward. The number of poor families that have members leaving to work outside of the province is limited because initial expenses exceed their financial capacity. It is interesting that people have noted that girls often remit more money than boys do to their families although the number of boys working away from home is higher than that of girls. A person in Nghi Thai, Nghi Loc said that:

Many labourers in my village have gone to work in Ho Chi Minh City. Only a few of them come from poor households because working in production establishments requires good health and meeting a designated working age, while poor households often have small or ailing children who cannot go. Labourers must pay 1 million or 700,000VND for the recruitment. Those who went away give partial support their families. Girls working in the city bring money when they come home at the end of the year and their families use the earnings to repair houses or purchase some cheap

conveniences. Girls support families more than boys because they know how to economize and do not spend money themselves. (Male, aged 37, in Thai Cat village)

Those families with average living conditions often have laborers working in footwear and garment factories in southern provinces such as Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong province. All families said that they received remittances from their children but that the sums are insignificant. Working in the surrounding areas are children from poor families who sell bread, collect scraps or junk, etc, to earn a living because they don't have the initial funds to work far away from home. Due to poor quality of labour, less workers of Tuong Duong have migrated out of the village to earn a living in comparison with Nghi Loc District. Comments made by Vice-chairperson of Tam Dinh are as follows:

People in the commune have also gone away to seek jobs. I don't know the exact number. At present, about 80 people have filed their dossiers and are waiting for consideration and approval. These people work as hired labourers in enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong and Nam Dinh through the recruitment and selection of the Nghe An Job Service Company. Some go at the recommendation of their relatives. (Vice chairman of Tam Dinh commune)

2. Causes of migration

The most important causes of immigration are marriage and working in production and business establishments in the area. Other people coming from other places primarily work as carpenters, blacksmiths or TV repairer people and register for temporary residence with a fixed duration. They often make a residence registration once a year and do business in the area for about one year upward.

The most crucial cause of out-migration is economic reason. In group discussions and interviews, economic reasons were mentioned so many times. Other reasons, such as marriage, schooling and "out of station duty" were also referred to.

These assessments are also reflected in the results of a quantitative survey. 22.0% of respondents said that migrated because they were sent on 'out-of-station duty'; 59.3% said that they wanted to have better economic conditions; 8.5% said that they had to go to school; 6.8 %, migrated because of marriage and 3.4%, due to other reasons. Therefore, aside from migrating for the purpose of doing business, earning a living and schooling, marriage is also an important reason. Those who left the province are often aged 18 upward and mainly girls, accounting for about 80% of all migrants. They are graduates of general secondary education but failed at entrance exams to intermediate schools, universities or colleges.

3. Impacts of migration on the local situation

Positive impacts

a) The most obvious and important impact of migration is in economic development.

Those who go to work in other provinces not only find employment for themselves but also help to raise income for their families and localities. From a general point of view, people who work in far-away places obviously assist their families and localities to improve their living conditions and step by step eradicate hunger and alleviate poverty thanks to their higher income compared with farming.

Assessing the influence of those who go away from their localities to do business or earn a living, 29.5% of the people asked held that these laborers exert no influence; 67.6% said the migrants help to raise their families' income and the rest 2.9% were of other opinions (these are the cases of people with children attending schools, colleges or universities, as they have to cover school fees, lodging, meal and other schooling expenses, which decrease family's income). Comments made by an official working in Department of Science, Technology and Environment are as follows:

As I know, many people who go far away to work have a very high income compared with the local conditions. Their salaries may come up to 1 million VND, after deducting all expenses, they can keep 500,000 VND. That's good for their families and helps to ensure the maintenance of social order and security, reduce unemployment and contributes to the localities. A great number of children from Nghe An have left the province for work. When they come home and give their parents 500,000 VND, the sum is equal to their parents' income for the whole year. This is also a major contribution to eliminating hunger and reducing poverty. (An official working in Department of Science, Technology and Environment)

However, when looking at each family and each specific case, one sees that the income and contributions of migrants depends on their qualifications, capacity and the characteristics of their jobs. And these factors are linked to the conditions of the migrants' families. If they come from families with an average living standard upward, they are financially capable of applying for jobs in State-owned establishments or foreign joint venture enterprises, or working as foreign workers abroad; consequently their income is quite high. Poor families that do not have much money can only find simple jobs with low salaries for their children; therefore their financial assistance to their families is low.

Comments made by a poor woman with average educational level with regard to works and income of her son are as follows:

My family engages in farming and has child. After finishing general secondary education, he failed to enter any other schools and we have to send him away working at a low salary. He worked hard without any rewards, which is like breeding livestock and spends very little money on food and other expenses, yet these expenses cost him 300,000VND (a month) while he is paid only 450,000-500,000VND a month;

besides, there are still travelling expenses. Therefore, after deducting all of the spending, my child can only give the family 5,000VND each day. So, together with my income, I can buy a small buffalo, a bike or repair the house. (Female farmer aged 52).

A labourer working in a production unit is paid 800-900VND a month but his spending comes to 600,000-700,000VND. A hired labourer may still keep some money for himself if he doesn't have to spend much. If he has to pay for lodging, electricity and water, he may save at the most some hundreds of thousands VND a month and may remit to his parents one million or 8- 900,000 VND a year only. (Male, aged 67, poor farmer)

Chairperson of Tam Dinh commune has made the following comments with regard to contributions made by migrating-out citizens:

Some of the labourers had to come home because their families were caught up in mishaps, but very few. Others keep working satisfactorily. Most of the labourers remitted money to their parents. Their families cannot earn as much as the remittance sent because the income at home is lower. The largest sum ever remitted home by one labourer is 10 million VND in three years - averaging 3 million VND/one labourers a year, sent via the post. (Chairman of Tam Dinh commune)

b) Another indirect positive impact of migrating to other places and/or other countries to live and work is the fact that the level of knowledge and understanding of the migrants is much improved. Changes are found in their modern lifestyles, in their ways of thinking, ways of doing things, and in their perception of life. Migration requires them to be more self-confident and dynamic. Those changes will gradually influence their siblings, relatives and friends from their places of origin; lifestyle changes will gradually occur among the farmers who live in the rural areas. This is one of the vital elements to ensure sustainable hunger eradication and poverty alleviation.

c) The migrants have ordinary relationships with the local people at their destination homes. They have integrated into community life at the destination and they strictly follow local customs and local regulations.

Comments made by a farmer in Nghi Thai commune with regard to in-migrants to his commune are as follows:

Local workers are not used in bricking making in particular. The majority of brick makers employed are from Thanh Hoa Province, because they have good skills. Family workers are working in carpentry and milling workshops. Those who come here are seasonal workers and they do not trouble our lives here (Male, 37 years old, Thai Cat).

Ideas exposed by one migrant to Tam Dinh, Tuong Duong with regard to the relation between her family and the community at the destination are as follows:

Good relations among family, society and the community are ensured. The family often makes contributions for social welfare fund and pays all the fees charged by the commune authority (Female, 49, Thai ethnicity, has 3 children, migrated to the area in 1999)

d) The migrants create opportunities for cultural exchange and foster local economic development. 2.5 % of respondents said that the migrants brought a new way of life. 6.8 % of the respondents said that the migrants increased the labor force in their community. 1.9 % believed that migrants brought technical advances with them and 5.6 % said that the local socio-economic situation has been further developed by the migrants. However, the number of migrants in the research sites is not enough to assess these impacts.

Negative impact (risks of migration)

a) Apart from positive impacts on socio-economic development, migration may create negative impacts. In particular cases, migrants might encounter unlucky situations and they might not be able to make any contributions to the community. Due to a lack of information and understanding, migrants may be cheated and lose their money. The following case occurred to a son of a farmer family in Tam Dinh commune (Thai ethnicity) when he left his country side to earn a living.

My son went for 15 days. He went to Saigon but he could not get a job. He spent one million VND and 1.8 million VND for the ticket to travel to Saigon and 1.8 million VND for the return ticket. (Male, 46 years old, from Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh)

The migrants may also encounter a stigma from the local people when they first come due to differences in regard to language, ethnicity, life-style etc.

A migrant to Tam Duong has described her difficulties in integrating into the local community (Thai ethnicity) when she first came.

We encountered many difficulties when we first came. We could not integrate into the community. We could not speak their language when we attended meetings because they spoke Thai language. If I had chance to speak, they did not listen to me because I am Kinh. They said "Con Keo" was not allowed to speak" ("con Keo" implied Kinh group) (Female, migrated to the area in 1977, opened a carpentry workshop in Tam Dinh commune)

b) Many migrants do not integrate into the life of the community and they might even badly influence the local social security. On being asked about the potential impact of migration, 13 % of the respondents said that migrants caused social disorder, 5 % of respondents said that they occupied land illegally anywhere they liked and 9.9 % of the respondents supposed that migrants increased social evils. Ideas exposed by a communal official are as follows:

The migrants do not often participate in the community activities i.e. meetings,

training workshops etc. because they spend their entire time earning their living. They only participate in elections and make their contributions to the local funds such as the fund for the poor, fund for education promotion and the fund for national defence and security. In addition they make payments for services such as sanitary services. Those who migrate to other provinces to work have to pay 60,000 VND per year and their families have to report their absence to the local authority once a year. (Male, legal and police official in Nghi Thai commune)

Comments made by a migrant doing small business in Tuong Duong with regard to difficulties at the first arrival is as follows.

We do have migrants coming from other provinces in our area. However, they may from time to time create troubles for the local public administration. I have registered for my friend to open a restaurant. It is in the regulations that the restaurant has to close by 11 pm; however the migrants want to stay up to the next morning and it might create a bad social order and bad security for the village and commune. (Male, 46 years old, Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh)

The in-migrants to the area are often better-off people who came to open new businesses or set up new production establishment. On the contrary, out-migrants leaving Tuong Duong and Nghi Loc districts are poor people. They have to migrate to other destinations to earn a living because they are not able to support their families at the place of origin. They often want to have a better life. Both types of migration should be supported by the communities at both the place of origin and destination. Supports from the local authority will be particularly important.

4. Policy implication for migration in Nghe An province

Local authorities in Tuong Duong and Nghi Loc districts have issued a number of policies and regulations to support the migrants with regard to capital. Poor households are special targets for the support. The local authority ensures security for the migrants and make sure that the migrants are entitled to employment rights. The local authority creates favorable conditions for the migrants to have temporary resident registration. Comments made by a legal official concurrent police in Nghi Thai commune with regard to management over the in-migrants are as follows.

We often try to get comprehensive information of those who migrate to our areas. If they have unhealthy behavior they can not have temporary resident registration; therefore, migration does not affect our local development. We conduct careful examination of those who come to our area to do business and those who apply for the temporary resident registration. If they are not good enough, they can not have themselves registered. When they are living here they have to seriously follow our regulations in terms of social security, sanitation etc. (Male, 46, legal and police official in Nghi Thai commune)

The government has adopted a number of migration policies. However, those

policies can not catch up with the current situation. In addition, the policies and regulations have not been well implemented, resulting in losses and disadvantages for the migrants and their households. Immigration procedures are very complicated for those households applying for permanent residency, hence they are not included in local activities and they hardly receive any support from the government. Comments made by a female farmer who is Thai ethnicity who has migrated to Tuong Duong for 3 years with regard to difficulties encountered by the family when they first came are as follows.

We are not entitled to support from the government because we are new migrants. For the time being, we cannot participate in Program 135 although we have a certificate to prove that we are poor. Better-off families meanwhile receive government support. We will very much appreciate it if the local authority can further support us so that my family can settle down. We want to be allocated more land and have a larger area of forest to develop husbandry. We came to discuss with the local authority but no responses have been received so far. To ensure equity, the local authority should allocate land from their land fund for those families that are not allocated land yet. (Female, born in 1944, Thai ethnicity, has 3 children and migrated to the area in 1999)

One sensitive issue encountered by the migrants is stigma. In general, the government policies aim to ensure equity for the population as a whole. However, there are particular cases when the local people show discrimination to the migrants resulting in difficulties.

When I first came here, I had difficulties in integrating into the community due to language differences. They do not like outsiders in their local community. I applied for loan via the Commune Women's Union but did not get it. When this carpentry workshop opened, I had to apply for a license and for annual temporary residence registration for my workers at the district. I have to pay 30,000 VND of income tax per month. At first, I had many difficulties because many commune staff came and created troubles for me. They asked where I bought timber and prohibited me from buying big block of timber. I could only buy small slabs. (Male, migrated to Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune in 1977, possess a carpentry workshop employing 5 workers from Nam Dinh Province)

One potential risk not yet considered by the local authority is the administration of the out-migrants who migrate to live in other areas. The local authority and families are able to manage the remittance sent by its migrants back to the family to develop the household economy. Other issues such as cooperation between authorities of the place of origin and destination, and management of the migrants have not been addressed.

5. Migration trends in Tuong Duong and Nghi Loc

At present, internal migration to the neighboring rural areas, to urban areas and other provinces are the key migration trends in Vietnam. However, labor export to other countries is also considered to be an effective migration trend to develop the

local economy. Comments made by a Personnel official at the Department level are as follows:

Exporting labors to other countries enables the poor to escape from poverty very rapidly. If you go, you can remit to your family from the third or the fourth month and the family can escape poverty very rapidly. The average income sharply increased.
(Head of Personnel Department in Nghe An Province)

The chairperson of Nghi Thai commune has made the following recommendation with regard to promoting labor export as a means for poverty reduction.

It is necessary to organize migration to Ho Chi Minh City, to industrial zones, garment factories, shoes and leather factories. Young laborers will register and they will go to the South under the organized migration programme. In addition, it is necessary to recommend to the local authority to export labors to mobilize resources as well as to re-divide the labor force. (Chairperson of People's committee in Nghi Thai commune)

With the aim of promoting labor export for sustainable development of the household and the community economy, it is vital for the workers to improve their skills and communication skills. Comments made by an official of Farmers' Union in Nghe An are as follows.

Special policies should be applied for the poor households; they cannot struggle by themselves. Specific policies should be adopted i.e. jobs should be arranged to them after they get training. Exporting labor is one of the important directions. If one member of the family can go abroad, other members might have chance to go and the family can be better-off. Poor households should be encouraged to participate in to the labor export programs as much as possible. (Head of Statistics Unit, Farmer's Union of Nghe An province).

Due to the fact that local people are too poor to afford their children to get higher education or to get a good job, they have to migrate to various places to earn their livings. They must work very hard for a very small income. The migrants often expect that their children can be supported to get a permanent job in the local community. Labor export or migrating to other places to earn a living is only a temporary solution when the community is not able to generate enough jobs in the locality. A woman farmer with average living standard in Nghi Loc has made the following simple recommendation.

I just want to recommend that whether those children who have completed grade 7 or grade 10, they can join a technical/husbandry team so that they can have a job
(Female, farmer, aged 52)

Environment

1. Current status of the environment in Tam Duong and Nghi Loc districts

We can see various environment issues perceived by the poor in their daily lifestyle, sanitation and their surrounding natural environment. Three key environmental issues seen in Tam Duong and Nghi Loc are: water pollution, land pollution and severe weather. In addition, local people do not have a good understanding of safety and health.

Safe water and waste water pollution

55 % of the respondents are using water from drilling wells and 45 % of them are using water from the stream. The majority of Tuong Duong residents are using stream water. Tuong Duong is a poor area with a complicated geographical condition. People often follow their old traditions of getting water from the stream or river. These water sources are not safe and they may poorly influence the health of the population.

The population in Tuong Duong addresses the issue of using the natural water without any processing; meanwhile, Nghi Loc has to address much more complicated issues. Located close to Vinh City, Nghi Loc possesses good conditions for socio-economic development and Nghi Loc has good access to social services. On the other hand, this District is encountering serious environmental issues. Water sources in Nghi Loc (including both water for living and water for production) are seriously polluted. Waste water without processing or semi-processing from Vinh City is poured to the river that runs through Nghi Loc. The district has to suffer from the toxic flows from the river. These toxins pollute the air, particularly on hot and sunny days and penetrate into the ground and pollute the underground water. They also pollute the living water in the drilling wells that the population is using.

A 70 year-old man in Nghi Loc shares views with the research team of this PPA in term of issue of environmental pollution, and recommends some solutions to compensate the local people.

Water pollution is common in this area. This village is like the filtering bag of a pump. Water from Vinh City goes through this area and waste water from Highway No. 1 also goes through here. Water from all over comes to this place and we have to suffer (Thai Cat). We have recommended the following things to the government: at first, waste water should be taken to other places (non residential areas); and secondly, population living here should be entitle to a relief programme to compensate for the environmental risks. (Male, 70 years old, Thai Cat, Nghi Loc)

Water resources in Nghi Loc are also polluted by waster water from hospitals and manufacturing industries in the cities. This endangers the environment and health of the community population. Polluted water will seriously damage people's health and other activities such as animal husbandry. Some diseases have already

appeared in the community. Many skin diseases and gynecological diseases have already been seen. Other diseases incurred through respiration or food will take longer time to develop i.e. cancer, nervous breakdowns. Animal husbandry is also influenced, and many animals and poultry have died due to diseases from the polluted water. Complaints of a person in Nghi Thai on water pollution are as follows:

Water in Nghi Thai is seriously polluted due to the fact that the river running through our town carries much waste from the other 8 communes from the Southeast of Nghi Loc districts and from hospitals in Vinh City. The river is the main water source for our 2 villages. When the water is polluted, many animals and poultry die, and many diseases have appeared. Local people have made many comments to the local authority but no responses have been received so far. (Deputy Head of Thai Cat village, Nghi Thai)

Land Pollution

Places that are not directly influenced by waste water from hospitals and enterprises also face agricultural land pollution because they are located in river mouth and seaports. Farmers here cannot plant any crops because of the salty water. In the dry season, there is a shortage of water. Production activities are therefore seriously influenced.

Water here is purer. In the past we did not divide the sea border but opened it widely. We have to prevent salination from producing crops. The environment now is more polluted than it was. Fields are depressed so there's always. (Male, average, 45 years old, Thai Binh village, Nghi Thai commune)

Harsh nature

Nghe An is not an easy natural area. Natural disasters often occur, and cause difficulties and instability in farmers' lives and production.

Community sanitation

In community sanitation, people have good understanding and present by particular activities. They dispose of garbage in ways that conform to hygienic principle. 80.1% people interviewed dispose garbage by burning or burying. Another 1.2% uses it for fertilizer. There remain 18.2% people who dump garbage in the river, lake or pond and other 11.3% have no fixed place to dispose of their garbage.

At present, people have better knowledge of sanitation; however there are some cases in which people dispose of garbage rashly. People have to suffer from both urban waste and garbage. (Male, average household, farmer, 52 years old, Thai Cat village, Nghi Thai commune)

Toilet facilities are a vital indicator of the community's progress in sanitation knowledge and practice. 62.8% of people interviewed have their own toilet, of which 43.5% have a simple toilet/ pit latrine, another 16.8% have double vault

composting toilet and 2.5% have flush toilet with a septic tank. However, 28% of the interviewees have a buried toilet; other 3.1% use a toilet in the forest or sand-bank and the last 6.2% people have a fish pond toilet or canal toilet. Thus, community knowledge and practice have basically escaped from their backward lagging sanitation. They need more time to enhance their knowledge and to change backward customs as well as to meet standard conditions on sanitary and environment.

2. Local environment protection strategies

To protect environment from pollution

In general people's living standard is still poor, people's understanding of the environment is lacking, but they are willing to protect and fight for the environment. This means that people will react to authorities, and fight for and protect environment strongly only when their own lives, their own benefits and production are directly affected by the environment and natural disasters. These are people who directly suffer from polluted water from Vinh City as mentioned above. If people and their interests are not damaged by the environment, their will and their consciousness of sanitation grow dim and weak.

This is why people's methods of environment protection tend to be single or individual in nature and are not replicated on a large scale. Practical activities in the community to clean and protect the environment are not organized. There are some reasons for this. Firstly, local people are too busy with their difficulties and earning living to spend enough time to ensure environment protection. Secondly, local government has no specific environmental protection action plan. In some cases it must be said that they rely on superiors and wait passively for leaders to act. Thirdly, people do not have enough information and are lacking knowledge so they do not understand how to report to authorities about environmental situation. Finally, people themselves tend to wait for government support. They have no self-consciousness to protect the environment for themselves and for their communities.

Comments made by a farmer in Nghi Thai and Chairperson of Tam Dinh Farmers' Union with regard to environmental protection are as follows:

People can not do anything about environmental pollution. We need to have government support. I suggest that the government should quickly enlarge a canal from cities to avoid sharing by too many households, which creates garbage and pollutes the environment. (Male, 53 years old, Thai Cat village, Nghi Thai commune)

A clean water system in Quang Yen has been built since 2002 and it is in operation. There are 137 households in the village of which 117 are connected to the clean water supply system. Other households live on high land so water can not flow up. Though the village has developed a "Clean Water Utilization and Protection Agreement"

there remains some who willfully destroy the system (Head of The Farmer's Union, Tam Dinh commune)

Forest protection

Tuong Duong is a district with rather large forest area. In particular, this district is near the Pu Mat National Forest Reserve. There is a high danger of forest destruction here. A Vinh University research project on non-timber forest products in the Southwest of Nghe An (Tam Dinh is one of the selected commune in the study) shows that: income from exploiting non-timber forest products make up only 15-35% of the total family income for a better off family. It accounts for 70-100% of the total income of poor households particularly during times of drought and bad harvests. Poverty makes local people exploit forest resources without thinking of economic and environmental consequences later.

Hence forest protection is an activity of great concern. In general, people now have better understanding of forest protection needs. Local people divide primitive forest in small blocks and deliver them to households or groups of households. For plant forests, land and forest are allocated to people and they plant and protect trees with the help of the government. Compared with community land and forest allocation, this kind proves itself to be a more effective method. Forest protection with people participation is a new and effective method used in many regions including Nghe An. Comments made by a female and a male farmer in Tam Dinh (Thai ethnicity) on forest protection in the community are as follows:

People's forest protection activities have increased compared with those of last year. Last year there were a lot of households interminably chopping down trees in the forest. (Female, aged 30, Thai ethnicity, Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune)

For primitive forest, people are responsible to protect spontaneously and for planted forest, people are forest allocated to protect them. People have found 7 cases in which trees were illegally cut down. Local people often collect firewood while people in the other area often come here to cut down precious trees. People who live here never cut down trees. (Male, aged 43, Thai ethnicity, farmer, Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune)

However, the local people do not often see the long term benefits of forest protection due to the lack of self-consensus. They can only see the short-term benefits and they keep going with destroying the forest.

People's participation in forest planting and protection is an utterly spontaneous activity. So there sometimes remains a lack of concern and an irresponsible attitude towards forest destruction simply because people still do not clearly see the long-term benefits of forest protection. All that they see is their short term benefits to meet their current demands. Cutting down the forest take places as a

logical result.

People protect the forest by self-conscious activity. They are supported by no one. These limits the forest protection results, Sometimes people see other cut down trees in the forest out of bounds but they say nothing or do nothing to prevent it. (Male, aged 43, Thai ethnicity, farmer, Quang Yen village, Tam Dinh commune)

The forest protection section usually communicates with community about the need for forest protection. However, people's understanding is limited so they continue cutting down trees in the forest such as in Cha La. People who destroy the forest live in the commune and other areas. The government does not allow people to exploit the forest in the Pu Mat reserve but they do because of poverty. However they do not cut down wood. (Male, aged 42, Dinh Huong village, Tam Dinh commune)

Therefore, one important issue for the local government is the need to enhance people's knowledge and understanding through forest planting and protection education, as well as to organize a stronger forest protection movement. At the same time, one important solution to stop step-by-step forest destruction must be to develop the local economy and help poor households with capitals and training to increase their living standard.

3. Impact of social relations and social conflict on the environment in Tuong Duong and Nghi Loc

Environmental conflict among interest groups has some expression in the research areas. Local people and enterprises have different views on the influence of enterprises on the environment.

When asked if enterprise waste influences on the local living environment, 51.5% of the interviewed people answered that it does; 21.3% of people do not know if it influences the environment or not and other 27.2% believe that it has no influence. People hope that the government will deal with some urgent petitions to give them a fresh environment, as it used to be. They have expressed their ideas in different ways, such as in village meetings, writing petitions, reporting to the provincial government through voter meetings, etc. It is a pity that all their work *has no effect*. The majority of the community wants this issue to be *solved in a timely manner by the superiors*.

A farmer raising shrimp in Nghi Thai keeps insisting that he does not harm the environment with his shrimp raising:

I think that feeding shrimp does not influence the other households. My aquatic product activities have no influence and cause no pollution. Water is in shortage here for shrimp raising and I have to get water from the drainage. (Aquaculture farmer, Nghi Thai commune)

Aquatic product do not influence on the environment. Of course, in the project zone there are no environmental problems, but in this area there is a great influence on the people. For example, salty water flows through the open drain and causes land pollution, and farmers cannot grow any crops. Our local government is attempting to prevent salty water to the fields. Local people also complain to the village headman, and he complains to the commune leaders so the commune tells a guard to protect the community. (Male, agriculture extension officer, Thai Cat village)

On the other hand, enterprises owners who were interviewed affirmed that their business activities have almost no influence on the local people and that there is no environmental conflict or opposition to them to the local community. This enterprise owners' attitude of their business activity's influence on the community is strange. They think that if they do their business in working hours, then their activities are legal and cannot be complained about in case they influence people lives.

Opening a wood factory may influence on other households nearby but I only work in working hours. Moreover I often tell my workers to clean the surrounding area and restrain dust. I have not had conflicts with people and I think that our relation is rather good. (Male, wood factory owner, Thai Binh village)

The issue at hand is the role of local government in enterprise management and reconciling conflicts between the local community and enterprises. Clearly, the community affirms that they are influenced by waste, noise, and air pollution from the enterprises. On the other hand, more and more enterprises open in the region create costly opportunities of employment and enhance the speed of local development. Thus, reconciliation two interest groups is a sustainable solution.

There also exists a contradiction between forest planting and cattle development among different communities in the different villages and among households within a village (in Tam Dinh commune). This occurs because some households allow cattle to wander and lack of sense of communal responsibility though they understand that this can harm the forest and other households. This conflict adds to careless in caring for the forest and bad husbandry apply had diminished the impacts of Pu Mat nature protection project.

Utilization of non-timber forest products is an urgent solution to the poverty of the majority of poor households in Tam Dinh commune, Tuong Duong district. However, economic impacts of these products remains limited because poor households find it difficult to consume and they are very price dependent. Product processing and consumption markets for non-timber forest products that will enhance economic impacts for people in mountainous areas is an issue of great concern.

Chapter 7: People's Recommendations to Poverty Reduction Efforts

Actions to directly reduce poverty

The common priority order of recommendations often mentioned of by people through the surveys on this subject is as follows:

1. Provide capital for production and business;
2. Hold technical training course to raise knowledge; and
3. Build and upgrade infrastructure in service of production and life (electricity supply, roads, schools and health care centers)

However, order of the recommendations presented above may differ in each locality, especially given the specific details of suggestions. As reviewed above, a trend has arisen in recent years whereby the poor have become more rationally conscious of the importance of all these factors, particularly in their understanding of the role of capital and production and business knowledge and skills as well as the methods for management and accounting in a market-orientated economy.

The following is the people's suggestions in the two areas under survey, namely Nghi Loc and Tuong Duong districts.

1. Overcoming harsh natural conditions by building and upgrading agricultural infrastructure and reducing the risks of lost harvests and plant diseases

While farming constitutes the main source of income in Nghi Thai, it is very precarious occupation as it depends entirely on nature. If there is no improvement in agricultural infrastructure and water irrigation, then technical support or financial assistance will not help to minimize risks.

Investment to building infrastructure for agriculture production will encourage having more enterprises in the area, thus creating more non-farm jobs for local people. One should not only invest in providing seedlings and animal breeds but also ensure the consumption of products for farmers, only then they will rest assured while conducting business, as the risks in animal husbandry and farm production will be reduced. As for remote, isolated and ethnic minority-inhabited areas, there should be more preferential policies to create conditions for households to develop business in their localities. If the province and district develop satisfactory infrastructure and make appropriate investment, the non-farm employment will develop.

2. Enhancing scientific and technical knowledge and the capacity of agricultural technicians

This is a very important factor and must be carried out before providing people with capital. Recommendations made by an old man in Nghi Thai are as follows:

Poverty is caused by many factors, but a fundamental one is the lack of a contingent of agricultural, scientific and technical workers' who come to communes to help farmers there... We have to train intermediate-level agronomists and technicians in livestock breeding and aquaculture in order to introduce livestock breeding science and technology to the local life and provide more specific guidance to people. (Male, aged 70, in Thai Cat commune)

Noteworthy is on top of speaking about the role of knowledge and capital, many households and local officials also mentioned the specific types of knowledge that they felt is important. Agricultural, scientific and technical knowledge is very important. *Nevertheless it must be suitable and feasible so that the poor, after being taught, can apply it.* There must also be experimental models, processes and projects so that the poor may follow suit. Furthermore, there should be a supply of saplings, livestock breeds and technical material, etc. Also, *knowledge on business management, household economy and accounting play less important role.* Deputy Chairperson of the Farmer's Union in Nghi Loc District as made the following comments:

Knowledge on business management is very important and people only know it in a superficial sense. They can receive science and technology, for example they know to give how much fertilizer and how to make beds in for planting groundnuts. But they know practically nothing about the way to organise the ground nut business - from the conduct of an initial study to the marketing of products. They only know gardening, for example if they are given custard-apple seeds, they will grow the trees but they don't know how to develop the product to have high economic value. The district people's committee often defines orientations for production, but these orientations are often geared to agricultural households' production. As for the direction on how the household economy should develop, no organisation has undertaken to fix it. (Deputy Chairman of Nghi Loc Farmers' Association)

3. Enhancing access to credit for the poor and offering long-term loans

In my opinion, if we want to escape poverty, the government should lengthen the duration of loans for the poor so that they may have more time for raising livestock. In this way, [the poor] may be able to get rid of poverty. They cannot manage to repay the loans if the loan duration is too short. For instance, if they use the borrowed capital to raise a cow, when the debt is due, they have to sell it - sometimes at a loss - to pay the bank. In such case, it makes their life more difficult. (Male, aged 44, in Thai Binh village).

4. Developing non-agricultural trades, crafts and sideline businesses

The most effective lesson for eradicating hunger and reducing poverty lies in organising the development of sideline businesses and non-agricultural trades and crafts. Aside from offering people loans and enhancing their scientific and technical knowledge, *the exploitation of non-agricultural trades, crafts and sideline businesses* so that people may have additional income during times of limited agriculture production is an urgent need. Conditions should be created for the poor to encourage them to learn from each other to develop new trades and crafts for the purpose of reducing poverty.

Where communes have many craft villages, economic efficiency is good. For instance, people in a village practice the trade of making cakes; with the commune administration's assistance, they inquired into the trade in another locality where cakes are made by machine. Some households learnt the new method and passed it on to others. Now the whole village engages in the trade and their products are sold in many markets in the surrounding area. Previously, the village had households with decent, average and poor living conditions; now poor families become households with a decent living standard. In one village, there were previously only one or two households making fragrant incense; now the whole village practices the trade. There is no poor household in such villages. (Male, Deputy Chairman of Nghi Loc Farmers' Association)

5. Mobilising the poor's self-reliance and getting local support in terms of personnel, infrastructure, creating jobs...

In order to minimise hunger and eventually eradicate it for this commune and the whole area, one should take the subjective factor as the primary issue, i.e. one should manage oneself and take care of oneself. As for agriculture, the first requirement is assistance for constructing and upgrading infrastructure such as irrigation works, roads, schools and health clinics. Secondly, the provision of employment: redundant labourers should be sent to work elsewhere-within the country or abroad. (Focus group discussion in Thai Cat village, Male, aged 46, war invalid).

6. Organising the satisfactory implementation of policies and local development projects through of community participation and enhancing the transparency and public knowledge of the process of execution

Democracy, participation and empowerment

Chairperson of Nghi Thai commune emphasizes that in order to ensure the effective execution of the democracy regulations in the locality, it is necessary to change commune and village officials' perception in order to alter their present style of working. Further, it is also necessary to ensure that people understand that they have the right to know, discuss, do and inspect activities and programs in their localities. The method for enhancing democracy at the commune level is as follows: continuing to consolidate officials by retraining more capable and enthusiastic officials so that they will come closer to the people.

1. Strengthening ideological education for people. People often said: *"Let them stew in their juice, we do our own work to earn a bowl of soup."* Officials said the same.. This is a weak point of the locality.
2. Ensuring that information reaches the people by various ways: disseminating it at meetings or directly to people; using public address systems.
3. Overcoming shortcomings and weaknesses in the working style, meetings agendas and places where officials meet with people. If people are invited to a meeting but there is not enough space and the agenda is not well prepared, they will become bored.

Offering education support to the poor

People in the two research areas fully recognize the importance and the role of educational attainment for commune and village to overcoming poverty. They motioned:

1. The State should increase budgetary allocations for schools in order to reduce parents' contributions. Parents should not pay contributions to build schools in ethnic minority inhabited and poor areas;
2. Developing a study promotion fund for poor students, especially for poor students who have outstanding achievements in their studies;
3. Exemption from contributions to build schools *for poor students* in all areas;
4. Reducing school fees in semi-public schools;
5. Giving support in kind (giving textbooks in kind, books, notebooks, pens, accommodation, rice) to poor students in remote and isolated areas;
6. Putting an end to the formalities of poor students paying school fees first, and later the fees will be refunded to them after they were identified as the poor (this procedure is very troublesome for them).

Providing health care services and health insurance card to the poor

1. The using duration of the card is lengthened to two years and its value be increased.
2. The procedures for issuing cards should be eased so that the poor may make full use of healthcare benefits.
3. All members of a poor household should be entitled to using the card. Otherwise, women and children in poor households will suffer because they have no access to healthcare as stipulated in the preferential policy.

Providing agricultural extension services to the poor

1. Previously, agricultural extension often paid attention to issues of agricultural techniques, new saplings and animal breeds. Now its concern must be geared also to other issues such as market prices, product marketing and information on credit.

Recommendations made by an agricultural extension official emphasize that:

As for marketing farm produce, agricultural extension work should be concerned about market price and product consumption. Apart from scientific training and developing models, it must provide information on credit and find ways for people to do business and seek outlets for their products. (Female, agricultural extension worker of Nghi Loc district)

2. Gearing agricultural extension activities to serving the poor such as satisfying their immediate requirements in knowledge, capital, seedlings and animal breeds, and cultivation in the their localities, holding training courses for the poor with such suitable method as "taking trainees' hands to show the work", provision of services on the spot and with payments by instalment.
3. Integrate agricultural extension activities with granting loans to poor households.
4. Settle the contradiction between agricultural extension projects such as that seen in the development of cattle in Tam Dinh commune, with contradicts the afforestation project of the Pu Mat National Reserve (due to the practice of letting cattle range freely).
5. Support the sustainable use of forest resources. The use of forest resources such as cutting neohouzeaua to get bamboo shoots is mainly for the purpose of countering hunger. It is forecast that forests in Dinh Huong commune will run out of neohouzeaua.
6. Strengthen measures to fight risks caused by natural calamities, epidemics or market prices such as the mountainous areas' agricultural system,

saplings and animal breeds suitable to harsh or arid natural conditions, anti-epidemic system (including medical cure with payment by instalment), pursue diversification of farming in the area and control environmental pollution that causes domestic animal epidemics as in Nghi Thai commune.

7. Combine agricultural extension activities with the improvement of technical infrastructure such as irrigation works, rural roads, power supply, commune markets, especially with regard to remote, isolated and minority-inhabited areas. This will have an impact on reducing risks caused by natural disasters, minimise expenditure, increase the possibility of accessing markets and create a synthetic efficiency for agricultural extension projects.
8. Diversify poor households' income against risks (intercropping, finding off-farm jobs, combining cultivation with husbandry and farm product processing and increasing the value of farm and forest products).
9. Make use of various resources (forest land that has not yet been used, grow vegetable and Soya beans to increase food sources in minority-inhabited areas that do not have the practice of gardening and vegetable planting).
10. Increase the training of young grassroots agricultural extension officials with educational attainment and understanding of technology.

Providing social relief

Social relief is necessary for a number of the poor, chiefly those who are caught in unexpected risks or lose their ability to working. In order to enhance its effectiveness, attention should be paid to the following:

1. Support measures should be *clear, transparent and based on community's participation*, especially of the very poor households;
2. *Working out anti-risk measures on a long-term basis* through diversifying income sources, developing off-farm jobs, providing information on market and product marketing, processing products to raise their value, developing an anti- disease and epidemic system, forming risk managing mechanism such as insurance services, flexible revolving credit funds and developing production infrastructure such as irrigation works, power supply and road,...

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