

The common good for the few: Double-marginalisation in ethnic minorities in Vietnam

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1. Main thesis

- The paper substantiates that the benefits of development projects, in the name of the common good, are reaped by just a few powerful elites.
- Poorly designed and monitored development interventions that ignore power relations and are biased in their beneficiary selection vigorously back up and strengthen the local-level structural power inequity.
- This pushes ethnic minorities to the second layer of marginalisation.



Adoption of combine harvesters in the field of farmers from Rum Soc's agricultural club (source: www.travinh.gov.vn)



Discussion with underprivileged farmers in the neighbourhood of An Loi "model" village (source: authors 2011)



A female Pahian, like many in Khe Tran, is expressing the hope that 'development' will not lag her family behind further (source: authors 2010)

2. Rationale

- In Vietnam, since *doi moi* (renovation) in 1986, an array of policies, programmes and projects have been implemented to empower people, in particular ethnic minorities.
- Despite applause achievements, ethnic minorities continue to be poorer and more disadvantaged than the majority Kinh community, elucidated by their lack/lower return of endowments and/or community characteristics (Baulch et al. 2007).
- This paper focuses on the relation between internal community structure and power relations, and development outcomes on ethnic minority villagers.

3. Methods

- Ethnographic case studies:
 - July 2010: Pahy community in Khe Tran, Phong Dien District, Thua Thien Hue Province
 - March 2011: two Khmer communities in Rum Soc, Cau Ke District, Tra Vinh Province and An Loi, Tri Ton District, An Giang Province
- A total of 35 digitally-recorded approx. one-hour interviews carried out mostly in Vietnamese and in some cases with the assistance of local interpreters were used for this analysis.
- Data from interviews were triangulated with observations and group discussion outputs.

4. Findings

- Case 1: Rum Soc village's agricultural club
 - Rum Soc is one of the most disadvantaged Khmer villages. Established in 2002, the village's agricultural club comprises 71 farmers, with 32 Khmer households registered. No Khmer members have taken any positions in the management board.
 - The club's growth has consolidated the inherent leader positions of the Kinh and their premier role in making decisions related to collective issues of the club.
- Case 2: An Loi "model" village
 - An Loi, as a "model" village, received disproportionately large knowledge, technology and financial transfers. Ta On, a neighbouring "normal" village continues to confront harsh modern-day challenges with their backward farming techniques.
 - The clustering of development resources only in some "model" localities further drives the remaining large minorities into a largely obscured hollow development area.
- Case 3: Khe Tran village
 - Khe Tran is a poor remote mountainous minority community near the Vietnam-Laos border area. A multitude of development projects were implemented, shaping a new face for this Pahy's village.
 - The beneficiaries are just a few powerful Pahy-Kinh households with the majority lagging behind.

5. Implications

- Development projects should aim local empowerment and ownership and create dialogical and learning spaces for those who are involved.
- Further research needs to explore the dynamics of ethnic development practices that spans socio-economic, political, inter-cultural and inter-regional dimensions.

References:

Baulch, B., Truong Thi Kim Chuyen, D. Haughton and J. Haughton. 2007. 'Ethnic minority development in Viet Nam'. *Journal of Development Studies* 43(7): 1151-1176.

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