

The Role of Social Capital to Ca Dong people's Livelihood Development in Resettlement Area of Song Tranh Hydropower Project 2 (A Case Study at Hamlet 6, Tra Bui Commune, Bac Tra My District, Quang Nam Province)¹

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Abstract: *Both Vietnamese government and international organizations, with the aim of restoring the livelihood of vulnerable communities affected by the development projects, have mainly directed their supports to the improvement of natural, physical, and financial capitals. Meanwhile, social capital as an intangible (also infinite) resource in sustainable development has not been paid proper attention. The paper clarifies the role of 'social capital' in relation to 'livelihood development' and how the decline of social capital has affected the improvement of the livelihoods of Ca Dong people in their resettlement area. The research outcome could be used in policy making towards livelihood restoration and stabilization for the communities affected by development projects in Vietnam.*

Keywords: Social Capital, Livelihoods, Resettlement, Ca Dong People, Song Tranh 2 Hydropower, Quang Nam province

1. Introduction

Social capital since late 1990s has received growing interest and academic debate both on a global scale and in Vietnam. Pierre Boudier defined social capital as “the

sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (cited from Nguyen Quy Thanh, 2016: 22). In Vietnam, although debates over the issue remain, a common understanding of social capital has been agreed as an inclusion of institutions, relationships, trust values and behavior principles that regulate people's interactions in order to contribute to

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economic development thereby. Thus, the role of this 'soft' resource should increase when there are underprivileged people with low income (Nguyen Van Phuc et al., 2014).

Social capital has become familiar in the literature of social science. Studies on the issue have proven the relation of social capital to livelihood development of ethnic communities (see Nguyen Duy Thang, 2007; Nguyen Van Phuc et al., 2014; Nguyen Quy Thanh, 2016).

Literature shows different approaches to the elements of social capital. Nguyen Quy Thanh (2016: 99), based on his research review and Vietnam's context, perceived social capital as a composition of social relationships and trust and the interaction between these two elements means social participation. Thus, it requires an assessment of these elements in order to determine the level of social capital, which is also the standpoint that the authors adopted while examining the role of social capital to Ca Dong people's livelihood development in the study area. The article aims to answer the question of how social capital changed and affected the restoration and stabilization of Ca Dong communities after their relocation.

2. Methods and study area

The study employs anthropological approach with data collection methods including key informant interviews (KIIs) and focused group discussions (FGDs) among stakeholders in the study area (in August, 2019 and February, 2020). The KIIs involved 18 people varied by age, gender, education level, economic background, and so forth. The reconstruction of Ca Dong people's livelihood activities before and after the resettlement was based

on a combination of prospective and retrospective interviews. Five FGDs were carried out with seven local government officials and 29 Ca Dong people regarding the status quo of people's livelihoods, advantages and difficulties during the transition of their livelihoods and the role of social capital in this process.

Regarding the study area, many hydropower plants have been set up in central Vietnam over the last decades. Located in the region, Quang Nam province is home to most of them, including 10 large hydropower plants and 37 small and medium ones, while its size in terms of area and population is just one million hectares (ha) and more than 1.5 million people respectively (Tri Tin, 2012).

The relocation of local people in the areas of hydropower projects in the Central and in Quang Nam province raises many questions. In several locations, consequences of moving people out of the project areas still remain, including the stabilization of lives of ethnic minorities who are vulnerable and have limited access to development resources like Ca Dong people¹ in the area of Song Tranh Hydropower Project 2 (hereinafter Song Tranh 2).

The Song Tranh 2 started in 2006 in Tra Bui commune, Bac Tra My district, Quang Nam province. The previous area for farming was now flooded for the construction of this hydropower plant, resulting in the

¹ The Ca Dong is one among five groups of the Sedang community in Vietnam. According to Quang Nam's Committee for Ethnic Minorities, its estimated population in 2019 was above 32,000 people, mainly distributed in the province's mountainous areas (Bac Tra My and Nam Tra My districts). The remaining Ca Dong population resides in the northern areas of Kon Tum province.

moving of a majority of households to the resettlement area¹.

After three phases of relocation (since 2006 until 2009), Tra Bui commune consisted of nine hamlets numbered from 1 to 9. On April 1, 2019, Hamlet 6 was formed to include hamlets 1, 2, and 3. Its current population is 1,240 people living in 266 households, among which there are 204 Ca Dong households, 54 Mnong households, and 8 Kinh households. As informed by the commune's 2019 poverty report, 60.8% of households in Hamlet 6 was poor. The natural area of Hamlet 6 is 4,718.794 ha, of which 10.79 ha (0.23%) is for residential area, 692.84 ha (14.68%) for agricultural production, 3,245.15 ha (68.77%) for forest, and 770.02 ha (16.32%) for other types of land (People's Committee of Tra Bui Commune, 2019).

3. Status quo of Ca Dong people's livelihoods in the resettlement area

The Ca Dong perform various activities to generate incomes, from cultivation, animal husbandry, petty trade, exploitation of natural resources, to waged employment, either near or distant from home. Their main livelihood, however, is cultivation, which

bears the greatest impacts of the relocation with major changes in the structure and yield of crops as well as in farming techniques and cultivation areas. People with land acquired preferred compensation by cash. Their current cultivation areas are obtained partly through the land clearance by themselves and partly from purchases of the local Mnong's land with the cash they received.

FGDs with the local leadership revealed the structure of agricultural activities in Hamlet 6: 80% of the households cultivating rice in dry fields; 100% for growing acacia, 20% for cinnamon, and 19% for experimental cultivation of agarwood on hilly lands. Fruits like orange, mango, rambutan, and pomelo are primarily produced in small home gardens (with an average size of 400 square meters per household), resulting in low economic benefits. The yields of food and cash crops on the upland fields are much lower than before due to the steep terrain and arid land in the new locations. Acacia therefore has been an alternative for the locals since early 2000. It has grown quickly in area to become the major crop thanks to its high adaptability to exhausted land conditions and low investment costs. However, as we calculated, people's earnings from acacia are comparatively modest given their hard labor for field clearance and crop care despite an income of VND 15-20 million/ha every five to seven years (with costs of harvest and transport shouldered by traders).

The survey results show that although the animal husbandry in Hamlet 6 helps improve the household income, the number of animals in fact decreases. Apart from several households with the herd size of

¹ There are currently 1,385 households with 6,360 people living in Tra Bui commune, Bac Tra My district, Quang Nam province. Among those, the majority is the Ca Dong with 1,128 households and 5,223 people (82.1%), followed by the Mnong with 195 households and 869 people (14.09%), and the others includes the groups of Kinh, Co, Katu, Thai, and so forth. The number of the commune's poor households was 879 in 2019, equivalent to 63.5%. Apart from farming and wage labor as the main livelihoods, the exploitation of natural and forest resources is another important income source for some households. Trade and services only account for 2.09% of the commune's total income (People's Committee of Tra Bui Commune, 2019).

around 20 heads, a majority of households still breeding in small scale with limited care and technical investment, lack of feed and yards, leading to high incidence of disease and low production efficiency.

As also observed in other resettlement areas, the issue of unproductive land limits the diversification of people's agricultural livelihoods. As a result, there is a tendency of people abandoning agriculture and leaving their hometown in the search for employment in big cities (like Tam Ky, Danang, Binh Duong). There are around 40-50 people as such and mostly from newly established households. They often seek construction work (men) and employment in industrial parks (women). Many locals also get paid by the Kinh or others to help with land clearing, acacia cultivation, harvest and transport at a daily rate of VND 150-200 thousand. Several households run small businesses, like convenient stores, to provide the locals with their daily essentials. People still rely on the exploitation of natural resources though this source of income is not regular and partly to support their daily food needs. Some of them, however, have significant earnings from selling rattan and firewood trees to Kinh traders.

4. The role of social capital to Ca Dong people's livelihoods in the resettlement area
Social capital is crucial for sustainable development in general and the livelihoods of every household in Ca Dong community. Indeed, Ca Dong people in Hamlet 6 have taken well the advantage of this source of capital either before the relocation or currently. Not just sustaining traditional relationships, they are also expanding their networks to the outside world. This source of social capital helps provide them with

both mental and financial support as well as employment information and opportunities. It is, however, experiencing changes under the influences of the market economy and resettlement policies, which in turn affects directly the livelihood development of the households.

a) Cohesion of traditional social network

The laws of the market economy and changes brought about by the relocation have shaken up the traditional social relationships. The increasing pressure in searching employment and income sources after the relocation has reduced the social cohesion since people practice less socializing.

The awareness of individual rights and responsibilities towards their families, lineages, and communities also declines gradually. Migration of laborers results in less family events and weaker interactions between family members for mutual assistance in livelihood activities.

Labor exchange as a traditional practice has been disrupted by relocation disturbances and the market-oriented thinking. Ensuring community characteristics is one among five principles promoted by the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) regarding the policy for establishment of resettlement areas. Yet, the lottery mechanism for relocation under Song Tranh Hydropower Project 2, which was enabled without consent of the local people, has broken the generation-built neighborhood relation networks. It takes time for households in the new resettlement areas to form new neighborly relationships. Results of the survey in Hamlet 6 affirmed the loss of inherent assistance in livelihoods among settlers when their old neighborhood community was dispersed.

Waged employment has become more popular than labor exchange. It poses challenges to households with elderly and sick people, who now feel isolated and receive less physical and mental support, even from their relatives.

Restricted production land in resettlement areas is one of the reasons for less mutual assistance and more conflicts of interest. Free-grazing cattle of several households destroying cash crops of others is an example for the tension that affects community relations. Land disputes are also common among land owners and land borrowers. There are six cases as such in the hamlet that have not been completely resolved.

Currently, both public and civil systems of community governance exist. However, when the role of norms, values and customary laws decreases and reputable people retreats to serve the preservation and handover of traditional culture, public servants who are often young and inexperienced have not been able to undertake the management of communities yet. Disruption and shortfall in community management is accordingly undeniable despite the transference and coordination among generations in governing common affairs. This has affected negatively the propaganda and provision of directions and guidance to the people in order to realize the Party's and the government's policies, including models of livelihood development in resettlement areas.

b) Social trust

Social trust has a key role to play in the formation of social capital. It indicates the level of trust of individuals in individuals, families, relatives, and social groups. When studying the role of trust in livelihood development, Fukuyama argues that

high level of trust in social relationships would reduce the costs of transaction and information provision while creating a more effective supervision process. Each individual is the center of a circle with a radius of trust in those around them. The larger the radius, the more positive impacts on people's livelihood (cited from Nguyen Quy Thanh, 2016: 51).

On compensation information: A society with information transparency raises its members' confidence and thereby increases social capital for livelihood development. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) tend to perform their activities in transparency, so the people would know and respond. Thus, the poor and disadvantaged groups have opportunities to access resources that could help them escape poverty. Information transparency also allows the government to promote trust and support from its civilians for their cooperation in implementation of common tasks (Khuc Thi Thanh Van, 2013).

Information transparency becomes even more crucial to the communities with limited access to media coverage and market economy, particularly when development projects are available. FGDs revealed a group of Kinh people in 2005 had acquired nearly 100 ha of dry fields and forest land from half of Ca Dong households in Hamlet 1 and 2 (parts of today's Hamlet 6) by taking advantage of the locals' low awareness of the Song Tranh 2. In the case, the locals would have protected better their benefits if the local authorities and the project management board had promptly informed them of the project and consulted them about the compensation and resettlement process. The incidence not only affected directly and greatly natural and financial

capital sources for the locals' restoration of livelihoods in the resettlement area, but also reduced the confidence of Ca Dong people in the Kinh and the government and its apparatus.

On the 'dead' river: Two big rivers, the Tranh and the Bui, run across Tra Bui commune. As reported by a village leader (male, aged 79), the clean and gentle flow of the Bui was the main supply of aquatic products for the residents of Hamlet 6. Since around 2008-2009 until present, a company has been conducting large-capacity gold mining in the name of "mineral exploration" here. Mining waste, including soil and ore, has been dumped directly into the river, causing serious pollution and severe consequences to the health and production of thousands of people. There is no more fish and shrimp in the Bui river, which now turns opaque white or ash color, sometimes black with strong chemical smells, especially in the summer, due to its burden of waste. Existing aftereffects, like the loss of fisheries, narrower grazing space, polluted air and water sources, with serious damages to the people's health and livelihoods is now the great concern and the cause of frustration of residents in Hamlet 6.

Justification for such incidences of the local authorities and relevant agencies during meetings with voters failed to relieve the public fury. As recorded through FGDs, six out of eight opinions believed local officials were abetting and covering for illegal exploitation of minerals and forest products. The weaker compliance with the Party's and the central and local government's policies of a part of the population has evidenced the decline in their confidence in the authority

apparatus. Losing trust means the decrease in the people's participation in the local socioeconomic development process and in social capital for their livelihoods. The survey results show feeble reception and responses from the locals despite the application of a large number of models for crop conversion in order to alleviate poverty in Hamlet 6. In the absence of trust, a part of the population, including Ca Dong people, local officials and the Party members, have pursued activities against the government's policies and regulations, such as returning to their previous living areas to cultivate crops, deforest, and exploit timber illegally.

5. Conclusion

Social capital is not completely positive, but could become an important driver for livelihood development, especially in underdeveloped communities, if utilized correctly. Its role in sustainable development has been proven despite its intangible and infinite nature. The higher social trust and the level of participation in social organizations, the greater the social capital, and vice versa. This "soft resource" must be strengthened for the underprivileged and low-income people.

The analysis in the article indicates the decline in some values, norms and trust has, to some extent, led to unstable social relations and lowered the resilience of livelihood activities against the economic shocks from the relocation and market principles. Thus, for the residents of Hamlet 6, it is important to fortify the cohesion of the social networks and the people's trust in the local authorities as well as in the policies and regulations of the state. It is noteworthy also that, in Vietnam, not just disadvantaged communities but administrators and policy

makers for development in general and for hydropower projects in particular are not fully aware of the role and advantages of social capital yet □

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