

LITERATURE REVIEW OF FOOD SECURITY ISSUE

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1. Introduction

The issue of food security has received special attention from the world since the 1970s. The participants in the 1974 World Food Conference still believed that they could eradicate hunger within 10 years (IFPRI, 2002). Although various governments, non-governmental organizations and researchers have discussed, tried their utmost, and proposed new directions in order to reduce the current level of poverty, food security remains a difficult problem for many countries. According to the statistics from the FAO, 815 million people suffer from chronic hunger, and 24,000 people die every day from the consequences of hunger, three-quarters of whom are children under five (FAO, 2005, pp. 80). It is a fact that economic growth and globalization do not automatically guarantee food security throughout the world, particularly in developing and low-income countries.

Although Vietnam is the second largest rice exporter in the world, food shortage is relatively widespread in many mountainous areas of the country, especially in ethnic minority areas. A similar situation exists in ethnic communities of Lao PDR. Based on this fact, with the agreement of the leaders of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, the Institute of Anthropology has implemented a project on *Coping Mechanisms of the Ethnic Minorities in Upland Areas of Vietnam and*

the Lao-PDR as Responses to the Food Shortage: Strengthening Capacity and Collaboration in Studying between the Institute of Anthropology (Vietnam) and the Institute for Cultural Research (Lao-PDR). The project was carried out over a period of two years, from 2005 to 2007, and was funded by The Rockefeller Foundation. This report is the study results that the Vietnamese researchers conducted in two communities of the Thai, in Pieng Pho Village, Pha Danh Commune, and the Khmu in Binh Son 1 Village, Ta Ca Commune, Ky Son District, Nghe An Province.

2. Overview of Food Security Studies

2.1. Definition of Food Security

Food security is understood in different ways. According to Maxwell, there are about 200 definitions of food security (Maxwell, 1996, pp. 155), depending on individuals and organizations. In 1986, the World Bank defined food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.” The FAO and WHO (1992) define food security in its most basic form as the access of all people to the food needed for a healthy life at all times (cited in Von Braun, 1999, pp. 41). According to the Plan of Action of the World Food Summit held in Rome in November 1996, “food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet

their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

The opposite of food security is food insecurity. There are two types of food insecurity: chronic and transitory food insecurity. Chronic food insecurity is a long-term problem caused at the household level by lack of income or assets to produce or buy adequate food for the household. Meanwhile, transitory food insecurity is a short-term food security problem caused by a shock to the food production or economic system, where income or resources necessary to adjust to the shock are not available (Gladwin et al., 2001). Oxfam Hongkong/Vietnam counts seasonal food insecurity in addition to the two above types of food insecurity.

2.2. Approaches to Food Security

The definition of “food security” can be used at different levels: household, regional, national and global. Food security at the household level, according to CARE (1998), is understood as “...sustainable ability to supply nutritious food to all individuals of the household, regardless of female or male, adults or little ones, health or ill-health” (cited in ActionAid, 2000, pp. 21-22). Food security at the regional level means the ability to obtain sufficient food to meet the needs of all households in the region. Food security at the national level means the ability of a country to obtain sufficient food to meet the needs of all of the households in the country. Food security at the global level means a worldwide ability to obtain sufficient food to meet the needs of all households throughout the world (ActionAid, 2000, pp. 22).

Over the last four decades, according to Maxwell, the awareness of food security has shifted through three paradigms, including: The focus of people’s concern has changed (1) from the international and national levels to the household and individual levels; (2) from a focus on food to a focus on livelihood, or from food security to sustainable livelihood; and (3) from outsider’s indicators to insider’s conceptions (Maxwell, 1996, pp. 156). However, Lofgren and Richards focus on two levels of food security analysis: macro and micro. On the macro level, if food production in the region as a whole (and most of its countries) falls far short of food requirements, then it is necessary for most countries to turn to imports for a large share of domestic food consumption. On the micro level, food security depends on the ability of individual households to meet their food requirements (2003, pp. 1). In addition to national and household levels, Von Braun (1999) argues that food security is studied at three different levels: national, household, and socio-economic and demographic levels. Food security at the national level (the ability to obtain sufficient food to meet the needs of all citizens) can, to some extent, be monitored in terms of supply and demand indicators; that is, the quantities of available food versus needs. Food security at the household level may be measured by direct surveys of dietary intake (in comparison with appropriate nutritional norms). These data are costly due to the considerable time required for their collection and processing. If properly analyzed, the level of socio-economic and demographic variables such as real wage rates, employment, price ratios and

migration, and the changes in these variables can serve as proxies to indicate the status of and changes in, food security (Von Braun, 1999, pp. 47).

If in the 1960s and 1970s much attention was paid to international level and national level food security. Recently, many claim it is important to look at household and individual level food security (Rigg, 2001) because there is a paradox that some countries, such as Brazil, export a great amount of food, but still have many people suffering from food shortages (Hollist and Tullis, 1987, pp. 1). If a country has sufficient food to meet the demands of all households, but the food distribution is unequal and irregular, then it leads to a situation in which one person has a surplus of food, while another lacks food. In terms of each household, this phenomenon may also occur. If there is sufficient food for all household members, but the food distribution is irregular, some members of the household will be food insecure. Therefore, it is important not only to obtain sufficient food for the family, but also to know how to distribute the food equally among family members.

Food security and poverty are closely related. Poverty is a condition of absolute or relative deprivation of material and cultural resources. In the developed world, poverty is more likely to be relative (the lack of resources in comparison with other members of a given society) than absolute (the condition in which the basic resources necessary to sustain life are lacking), in that basic needs are met even for the poor. In less developed countries, poverty is also likely to

be absolute. Lack of adequate nutrition, housing, and health care are primary concerns, especially lack of food. Adequate food, health, and basic education have all been consistently demonstrated to be important foundations for economic development (Calhoun, 2002, pp. 376-377).

Many researchers link food security to nutrition and health. In this case, household income is once again considered as an important precondition for people to access to food. According to Cowell and his colleagues (2002), people may be malnourished because they are so poor that they cannot afford adequate food. On the other hand, hunger leads to poverty because it makes the people lose their capacity for active work (2002, pp. 1). Increasing household income, according to Von Braun (1999), is a way to improve the labor force. He writes, “increasing the incomes of households that have malnourished members can improve their access to food. Increases in income are strongly related to non-staple food consumption, particularly of meats” (1999, pp. 42). Thus, food security, poverty and nutrition have an important relationship.

As mentioned before, food shortage and malnutrition can be caused by poverty. However, there are other reasons for lack of food. According to Young, there are two main reasons for seasonal food scarcity. They are: 1) war, insecurity and armed conflict, and 2) drought, floods, pests or crop disease (1992, pp. 3). The first reason is completely accurate for the problem of food security in many African countries. Wars and armed conflicts, both domestic and international, lead to serious consequences,

including famine. Food shortage caused by natural calamity is a current concern in many countries in the world, particularly in some Asian countries in recent years.

Due to the difference and diversity of food security factors, food security and poverty reduction policies are different from country to country. In Africa, food security depends on entitlement and access to food through a variety of means: on-farm production, market exchange and donations. Therefore, the potential strategies for enhancing food security are differentiated by the realm of food entitlement and the role of each household's coping strategy within their budget (Young, 1992, pp. 3-4). In Bangladesh, food security tends to be involved in sustainable multi-livelihoods (Akhter, 2001).

The FAO's and World Bank's literature on poverty and food security points out that agricultural growth is essential to income growth in most developing and under-developed countries, because agricultural output constitutes such a large percentage of total output (24 percent of total output for all low-income countries comes from agriculture). Similarly, according to Shiva (2002), farming systems play a dominant role in the food security and nutrition of the people. Moreover, she points out that food security lies in ecologically resilient and economically efficient farming systems, which provide a livelihood for farmers and sufficient food for the household, community, region and nation, and which provide safe and nutritious food for consumers (2002, pp. 24). Similar to this view, some researchers refer to food chains

(Rigg, 2001), or food systems (Shafi et al., 1989). Following such an approach, Pottier suggests that when considering food security, it is important to know "what they eat, what crops they grow and how they sell and buy, and for whom," and this needs to be seen in the context of integrated relations (Pottier, 1996, pp. 26).

In relation to sustainable food security, a sustainable ecosystem and sustainable agriculture are closely related. In addition, forestry and food security are related (FAO, 1994). Similarly, sustainable resource management, particularly with respect to land, is very important to ensure sustainable livelihoods. This is still a difficult problem in many countries around the world, and it is necessary to adapt to the current changing environment (Marten and Saltman, 1986; Maxwell and Wiebe, 1998; Pound et al., 2003; Tyler, 2006; Smajgl and Larson, 2006).

Therefore, we can see that food security is a rather large and complicated matter; it is concerned with many aspects of society and life. Although the food security of each nation may be safeguarded, this does not mean that each household in the country is guaranteed food security. To ensure food security in each household, there must be sufficient food quantities; all must have access to those foods; those foods must be in conformity with people's cultural traditions; the households can not be too vulnerable to shocks; the means of access to food must be sustainable; and food security must be comprised of both contain sustainability and fairness.

2.3. Poverty Reduction and Food Security in Vietnam

In Vietnam, the concept of food security and its indicators are closely related to the concept and indicators of poverty. There are two different poverty lines: one from the Program on Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction of the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the other from the results of the Vietnam Household Living Standard Surveys jointly conducted by the Vietnam General Statistics Office and the World Bank.

The poverty indicator set by the National Program for the 1996-2000 period was a household whose average per capita income is less than 13 kgs of rice per month, and this indicator is applied for to regions of Vietnam. For mountainous areas and islands, the indicator for poverty is a household whose average income is less than 15 kgs of rice per capita per month (equal to 55,000 VND). The indicator utilized during the 2001-2005 period was 80,000 VND per household per month for mountainous areas and islands; and 100,000 VND for rural areas in the plains. The indicator used from the year 2005 and thereafter is 200,000 VND per household per month for mountainous areas and islands, and 260,000 VND for rural areas in the plains. Meanwhile, the Vietnam General Statistics Office's definition of "poverty" is households having an income lower than the minimum income needed to cover essential needs of food, clothing, housing, healthcare, and education. This income bracket is defined as "hunger" (or food shortage) to differentiate between the "poor" and "very poor" populations.

Since 1992, many activities aimed at eradicating hunger and reducing poverty, have been intensely implemented, in accordance with the national program goal. From 2001 to the present, this program has been combined with a job creation support program to become the national program on poverty reduction and job creation.

Regarding policies and poverty reduction strategies in Vietnam, it is also important that two programmes were launched recently with targeted assistance for poor communes. The first programme was the national target programme on hunger eradication and poverty reduction for the period of 1998-2000, which was under the authority of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, but also involved other Ministries, and targeted the poorest segments of the population in rural and urban areas. The second programme, in place since 1999 and serving 2,374 of the most difficult communes in the country, is the socio-economic development programme for especially difficult mountainous and remote communes, which is under the authority of the Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountain Areas (CEMMA), and calls for orchestrated efforts and targeted resource provision in disadvantaged communes (also known as Programme 135). From 1999 on, Programme 135 has helped those areas to escape poverty and slow development, and has helped these communes integrate with the country's development. The program concentrates on building infrastructure such as electricity, countryside traffic ways, schools, clinics and irrigation works, and markets for poor communes and poor areas. In addition, the

program also supports forestry and agricultural extension activities, instructing people in how to earn a living, and sharing experiences and production techniques. In order to integrally resolve all matters concerning sustainable development and poverty reduction, the government has also created guidelines to integrate the poverty reduction goals with other socio-economic development programs, such as the 10 year strategy on socio-economic development (2000-2010), the strategy on economic growth and poverty reduction, and the five year socio-economic development plan along with other annual programs and plans.

We can say that, with thorough concepts on the social, economic, political and human significance of poverty reduction, our government always gives priority to increasing the effectiveness of economic development, aiming to the support the poor and push back poverty. Therefore, poverty reduction has become one of the biggest successes of the country's social development process from the early 1990s to the present. The process of economic development and reform in Vietnam has continuously increased in recent years.

Within 15 years, from 1990 to 2004, gross domestic product (GDP) in Vietnam has nearly tripled, with GDP averages reaching 7.5% per year (Statistical publishing house, 2005). In more detail, from 1996 to 2000, economic growth reached an average 6.4% per year. The financial crisis in the region during 1998 and 1999 affected Vietnam's economy, reducing the growth rate to 4.8% in 1998. However,

right after that, economic growth recovered and increased to 6.8% in 2000 (Department of Planning and Masterplan, 2001, pp. 1-2) and then to 8.43% in 2005. Vietnam now ranks second in economic growth in Asia, after China. The economic composition continues to move towards industrialization and modernization. After 20 years of renovation, agricultural proportion has increased from 25.9% to 40.1%, and respective proportion in service increased from 33% to 38.2%.

This growth has helped improve the lives of people. Average GDP per capita increased from 3.7 million VND in 1996 to 5.7 million VND in 2000 (less than 400 USD) (Department of Planning and Masterplan, 2001, pp. 2), and reached 560USD in 2004 (Statistical publishing house, 2005). Total food production increased 19% during the period 1996-2000. Average rice productivity per capita increased from 361 kgs in 1996 to 419 kgs in 2000. In mountainous areas, rice productivity was even higher than in the plains areas, achieving a 32% increase during the period 1996-2000. Cultivation areas of vegetables and fruit trees are bigger. The meat consumption during this period also increased remarkably due to a 36% increase in meat productivity. Fish productivity increased from 1.7 million tons in 1996 to 2.1 million tons in 2000. This resulted in a decrease in the number of household members who have eating portions under the minimum nutritional level, from 25% in 1992 to 15% in 2000. Therefore, the rate of malnutrition among children decreased remarkably in recent years. The rate of underweight

children under five decreased from 45% in 1994, to 34% in 2000 (Department of Planning and Masterplan, 2001, pp. 1-2). According to international poverty standards (including lack of food, foodstuff, non-food

and foodstuffs), the rate of poor household in Vietnam has dramatically decreased, from 51.8 % in 1993 to 24.1% in 2004. Therefore, we have reduced the number of poor households by nearly 60% (Table 1).

Table 1: Rate of poverty in Vietnam 1993 - 2004 (%)

	1993	1998	2002	2004
General poverty rate	58.1	37.4	28.9	24.1
City	25.1	9.2	6.6	10.8
Countryside	66.4	45.5	35.6	27.5
Food poverty	24.9	13.3	9.9	7.8
City	7.9	4.6	3.9	3.5
Countryside	29,1	15,9	11,9	8.9

Source: Report of Development in Vietnam, 2003 and General Statistics Department, 2005.

The poverty level in Vietnam differs with respect to each region and ethnicity. The rate of poor households decreased most dramatically in the northeast region, from 86.1% in 1993 to 31.7% in 2004, and decreased most slowly in the northwest region, from 86.1% in 1993 to 54.4% in 2004 (Statistical publishing house, 2005, pp. 4). Most of the poor live in the countryside and mountainous areas. This coincides with a report of the FAO, stating that, almost all of the poor and food-insufficient people are living in the countryside, and depend on agriculture as their sole means of survival and earning a living (FAO, 2005). In 1998, 94% of the poor lived in the countryside, more than in 1993. Also in 1998, 45% of people in the countryside were living below poverty level, whereas, only 9% of people in the city were below the poverty line. 18% of the people in the countryside lived below the food poverty line, compared with 2% of city

people (Department of Planning and Masterplan, 2001, pp. 3).

Although, the state has implemented many policies to support the poor, especially the ethnic minorities, the poverty rate among these groups is still quite high and the poverty reduction process is taking longer than the with the Kinh majority people. With the exception of the ethnically Chinese Vietnamese, the poverty rate among ethnic minorities in Vietnam is very high: 84.6% of the ethnic minorities were below the poverty line in 1992/1993 and 75.2% were below this line in 1997/1998 (Statistical publishing house, 2004, pp. 208). From 1993 to 2002, the poverty rate among the ethnic minorities decreased only 17.1%, while the poverty rate among Kinh decreased 30.8%. In 2002, the poverty rate among ethnic minorities was three times higher than the Kinh, whereas, in 1993 this figure was only 1.6 times (see Table 2).

Table 2: Poverty rate among groups of peoples, period 1993 - 2002 (%)

	1993	1998	2002
General poverty rate	58.1	37.4	28.9
The Kinh	53.8	31.1	23.1
Ethnic minorities	86.4	75.2	69.3
Rate of food poverty	24.9	15.0	9.9
The Kinh	20.8	10.6	6.5
Ethnic minorities	52.0	41.8	41.5
Poverty gap	18.5	9.5	6.9
The Kinh	16.0	7.1	4.7
Ethnic minorities	34.7	24.2	22.1

Source: Report on Development in Vietnam, 2003 and General Statistics Department, 2004/2005.

Although they account for only 14% of the total population in the countryside, the ethnic minorities account for 29% of the total number of poor people. The northern mountainous areas and central highlands, where many ethnic minorities are living, are two of the three poorest areas in the country. In the northern mountainous area the ethnic minority groups account for 28% of the poor. Some ethnic groups like the Hmong and the Dao exist more than 90% of the poors (Glewwe, 2000). In many ethnic areas, lack of food is seasonal. The food shortage time falls during the pre-growing seasons, lasting from May to the end of September. However, the shortage level is different in each region. In some upland areas where the Hmong people live, local people are in shortage of food for between 3 and 6 months per year (Vuong Xuan Tinh, 2002). In Da Krong mountainous district of Quang Tri Province,

half of the district population suffers from food shortage between 3 and 6 months in a year (Oxfam Hong Kong/Vietnam, 1998). In some special cases, people lack food for between 6 and 8 months per year (Bui Quang Toan, 1996, pp. 34).

The program, which aims to gradually eradicate malnutrition, is attached to strategies on poverty reduction in Vietnam, in order to position human factors as the central focus of national macro policies (Nguyen Cong Tan, 1994). Vietnam rather successfully conducted the National Action Plan on nutrition during the period 1996-2000, and is implementing the National Strategy on nutrition during the years 2001-2010. Food security is socializing in many provinces and cities. Some big cities have begun to care about food quality and security. However, the malnutrition rate of people in the

countryside is higher than in the city. In 2000, 37% of children under 5 in the countryside and 44% in the highlands had low weight, whereas the rate in the city was 27%. The infant mortality rate in the countryside was twice the rate of that in the city (Department of Planning and Masterplan, 2001, pp. 1)

In conclusion, although Vietnam has obtained remarkable achievements in recent years, especially in the socio-economic development and poverty reduction processes, the country is still facing many difficulties and challenges. The achievements in poverty reduction are still not sustainable. The differences in income between regions and groups of society are likely to rise, the poverty rate in the country, in the mountains and in the plains areas are rather high. The difference in poverty rates among ethnic groups is big. The quality in development and effectiveness in using capital, including financial capital from the State, is not effective, and gender inequality still exists. Environmental pollution is growing, as a result of industrialization and urbanization, and the exploitation of natural resources is growing quickly without tight surveillance.

2.4. Food Security of Ethnic Groups in Laos

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a multi-ethnic nation. In this country, there are 49 ethnic groups with 160 local groups living together. These groups belong to Thai - Lao, Sino - Tibetan, Mon - Khmer and Hmong - Yao language families. These ethnic groups are also divided into three groups based on three eco-regions: Lowland

Lao (*Lao Loum* - accounting for two-thirds of the population), highland Lao (*Lao Sum*) and middle-land Lao (*Lao Theung*) (Government of Lao PDR, 2006).

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a poor country, with a per caput GDP ranking at 16 out of 206 according to the World Bank Development Indicators, and 140 out of 176 in the UNDP Human Development Index. Ruled after 1975 by a socialist government, the government implemented more liberal policies from the mid-1980s onwards. It is now following development policies supported and agreed with the World Bank and the IMF (Lao PDR: Bokeo food security project, http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public_html/eksyst/doc/prj/region/pi/laos/r3511a.htm).

Food security of ethnic groups in Laos is a burning issue closely associated with poverty and hunger. In the 1990s, poverty in the country dropped from 58% of the population in 1992-93 to 52% in 1997-98. Poverty is concentrated in the mountainous regions and in the ethnic minority communities, which largely overlap each other (Lao PDR: Bokeo food security project, http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public_html/eksyst/doc/prj/region/pi/laos/r3511a.htm). By 2003, the number of households living in poverty in Laos still accounted for 31%, defined as households in shortage of food for daily consumption, equal to 2,100 calories/person/day. However, the poverty rate still varied among localities, and the poverty was more serious in mountainous provinces. Poverty surveys in five mountainous provinces of Laos in 2005 provided results as follows: In Houaphanh

Province, the number of households living in poverty accounted for 74.6%, while the rate in Luang Namtha was 55.7%, Luang Prabang 49.4%, Bokeo 37.4%, and Xiang Khouang 34.9%. Among these provinces, the poverty rate also varied among districts. For example, among investigated districts in Houphanh Province, the poverty rate reached its bottom at 55% and the peak at 92% (Government of Lao PDR, 2006).

In recent years, some studies have recorded the rate of food shortage among ethnic groups in Laos. According to a study by John B. Raintree (2003), households of peasants in Nam Mo District, Oudomsay Province could self-satisfy only 69% of the average annual food demands. Surveys on some villages showed that the period of food shortage among households reached the bottom at 3 - 4 months/year and the peak at 5 - 6 months/year. Meanwhile, in Phonsay District, Luang Prabang Province, studied villages were short of food for 6.4 months/year on the average. Another research in the Golden Triangle in 2005 also showed that the rate of households in shortage of food there was 57%, while that in Wa region was 90% (Opium poppy cultivation in the Golden Triangle, 2006, <http://russia.shaps.hawaii.edu/drugs/golden/intro.html>).

Nutrition safety is an important indicator of food security. Jutta Krahn (2006), through his case study on the Katu in Laos, has shown that the changes in living conditions, especially the prohibition of slash-and-burn cultivation and hunting, has altered the food chain and negatively influenced their nutrition conditions. Using bio-cultural approach, he discovered that

the nutrition consumption of the Katu living on slash-and-burn cultivation, hunting and gathering was better than that of people in a village adjacent to an urban area whose incomes derived from only agricultural cultivation.

The causes of food shortage, according to John B. Raintree (2003), were the shortage of land for production, especially for rice growing, population pressure, and environmental degradation. Shoemaker and Baird (2005) held the view that strict regulations on slash-and-burn agriculture led to chronic food shortage; the increase in over-exploitation of forest and aquatic resources; land quality degradation; biological diversity decline; and poverty and hunger. According to a study by the end of 1990s, there were 280,000 households or 45% of villages in Laos living on slash-and-burn cultivation (Government of Lao PRD, 2006).

It is reckoned that food shortage is also associated with opium growing - a situation very common among ethnic groups living in high lands of Laos. In 1999, in 7 northern mountainous provinces of Laos, there were 63,000 drug users, accounting for 2.26% of adults in these provinces. In 2005, in Laos, there were about 20,000 drug-addicted and 6,200 households growing opium in 7 high-land provinces. However, the cash income of opium-growing households was lower than that of non-growing ones: 139 USD/year in comparison with 231 USD/year (Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision, 2005). Food shortage is also closely associated with education. According to a research, in Houaphanh Province with a high poverty rate, 75% of the population was illiterate (Government of Lao PDR, 2006).

In order to cope with the food shortage at the household level, John B. Raintree (2003) showed that the strategies of households in Oudomsay and Luang Prabang Provinces were: 1) Rice cultivation for self-consumption (wet or dry rice); 2) Earning money to purchase food (by gathering forest products, raising crops and livestock, handicrafts, exchanges, employment); 3) Borrowing rice (from relatives and neighbors, i.e. receiving rice “loans” that had to be paid back later); and 4) Replacing rice by other kinds of food (gathering wild foods, planting other food crops such as batata or cassava; purchasing other kinds of food). Meanwhile, regarding inhabitants in Naung Khit District (Wa) in the Golden Triangle, the coping solutions with food shortage were as follows:

Table 3: Coping solutions with food shortage

Coping mechanism employed over last year	% of households *
Engaged in casual labor	55
Borrowed rice	47
Mixed corn with rice	31
Advanced labor for food	28
Reduced number of meals per day	25
Increase consumption of forest food	25
Consumed rice gruel	14
Bought rice	12
Sold animals	10
Sold household goods or land	6
Migrated out for labor (temporary)	3
* n = 326 households	

Source: Opium poppy cultivation in the Golden Triangle, 2006, <http://russia.shaps.hawaii.edu/drugs/golden/intro.html>.

At the national level, the Lao government has implemented a number of policies to ensure food for people, focusing on agriculture policies. After 1986 with the transformation from the subsidy to the market economy, Laos has also transformed the model of agricultural cooperatives into household-based economy. By 1988, only 53% of agricultural laborers worked in cooperatives.

Land had been allocated to peasants who had the rights to inheritance, or used rights transference. This fostered the market economy in agriculture and foreign investment attraction (Lao agriculture policies, <http://countrystudies.us/laos/74.htm>).

In the 5 year 2001 - 2005 Development Plan, the Lao government specified major goals of poverty reduction

and hunger elimination for ethnic groups, namely ensuring food security; increasing commercial agricultural products and rural development; infrastructure improvement and foreign economy and service access development. In 2000, the government constructed a plan for decentralized development management, in which the provinces construct the strategies, districts built up plans and villages implemented them. In the national development strategy, *Lao Sum* and *Lao Theung* are given attention in food products and income. The government specified 72 poor districts (all of which were in mountainous provinces) for the Goal Plan of Poverty Reduction and Hunger Elimination (Government of Lao PDR, 2006).

One of the most important goals of the national development strategy was food security. In order to ensure food security, the Government specified that the key issues were cultivation and animal husbandry development (Lao PDR, 2004). The Lao government was fully aware of the importance of animal husbandry owing to its suitability to the national natural conditions and has set up the vision for animal husbandry development by 2020 (Government of Lao PDR, 2002).

Based on above strategies and plans, some projects on food security were implemented in Laos. The European Commission sponsored Laos with 5.6 million Euros for the Food Security Project implemented in 5 provinces: Oudomxay, Savannakhet, Sekong, Luang Prabang and Khammouane. The goal of this project was to reduce food insecurity at the household level. The project would help increase

agricultural produce by providing technical support to inhabitants and constructing or improving minor irrigation systems and roads. About 18,000 households in 150 villages benefited from this project (Food security in Laos, <http://www.dellao.ec.europa.eu/en/2003/foodsecurityinLaos.htm>). Japan also supported Laos with the Special Project on Food Security from 2001 to 2006. This project had three main goals:

- 1) Improving the communication system at central, provincial and district and rural community levels through their participation in planning and implementation, including supervision and estimation of agricultural and rural field development (supporting the decentralization management);

- 2) Increasing food output by controlling irrigation systems, crop development and product diversification; and

- 3) Improving income for households and their access to healthcare and nutrition through the warranty of products after harvest, processing, market access and natural resource management (http://www.fao.org/spfs/about_spfs/mission_spfs/en/).

In addition, there were many projects on food security or related to food security managed by the government and international organizations that were being implemented in Laos.

With above efforts, the food output in Laos from 1990 to 2004 increased from 1.5 to 2.5 million tons. By 2005, about 18 new rice varieties were applied in cultivation, with the lowland wet rice productivity of around 3.1 tons/hectare. At the current national level,

Laos has achieved self-sufficiency in food (The green revolution comes to Laos, http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2006-03/irri-tgr031506.php). However, at household and community levels, especially in high lands, food security is still facing many challenges.

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An ancestor worship held in the newly - weds' first visit to the bride's family (Ky Son District, Nghe An Province).

Photo: Tran Hong Hanh