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POVERTY AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

GENERAL ISSUES

The poverty situation and trends among ethnic minorities need to be viewed in the context of overall strategies for poverty reduction in Viet Nam and their implementation.

Viet Nam's record in reducing poverty has been impressive, in particular during the 1990s. Poverty incidence declined by more than 20% during 1993–1998, from 58% in 1992–93 to 37% in 1998, and the country has by now exceeded some of its international targets in such important areas of poverty reduction as primary school enrolment. Poverty reduction nevertheless remains a serious challenge: almost 40% of the population remain below the poverty line, and many are only marginally above it.

Poverty is now concentrated in rural areas of the country, where some 94% of the poor now live. The incidence of rural poverty has been registered at 45%, whereas in urban areas it is only 15%. The depth of poverty, measured by the poverty gap index,⁹ is also far more severe in rural areas. During the 1990s, the overall living standards of ethnic minority groups in mountainous areas also improved. The relative poverty rate nevertheless remained high, and the level of improvement was much lower than in other parts of the country. Indicators show that the gaps between ethnic minority and Kinh and Hoa groups increased rapidly. During 1993–1998, the national average expenditure per capita increased by 35%, but only by 20% for ethnic groups in the Northern Highlands and 7% in the Central Highlands. While the incidence of poverty in the country as a whole decreased from 55% to 36% during this period, it remained high in the Northern Highlands, decreasing from 84% to 73%. The poverty rate in the Central Highlands was hardly reduced at all, remaining at very high levels: 92% in 1993 and 91% in 1998.

Although there has been an improvement in the economic growth of ethnic minority communities, this growth remains much lower than in other parts of the country. In the 1990s, the GDP of ethnic minorities accounted for 15.4% of the national GDP; in 2000 it was only 11%.

A recent World Bank study¹⁰ used Viet Nam Living Standards Survey data and the 1999 Population and Housing Census to examine the difference in living standards between the Kinh/Hoa majority and other ethnic groups, and how these changed between the 1993 and 1998 surveys. The findings are that ethnic minorities are indeed disproportionately poor. Despite constituting just 14% of the population, ethnic minorities now make up 29% of all the poor in Viet Nam. Moreover, of 14 provinces with rural poverty rates of over 60%, 12 of these have populations in which ethnic minorities make up more than half the total. Ethnic groups found to have performed best economically were those most assimilated within Kinh society, while the least assimilated groups (particularly those in the Central Highlands and the Hmong in the Northern Highlands) have been left behind. Thus, the study observes that the most difficult challenge of public policy is to bring those groups most unlike the Kinh into the economic mainstream.

The study also aimed to detect differences among ethnic minority groups by examining such items as expenditures and schooling. It was hampered by the fact that the living standards surveys did not sample enough ethnic minority households to allow for much disaggregation. Moreover, the 1992–93 survey only allowed for 10 different ethnic groupings, rather than the official list of 54 different ethnic groups. However, a distinction between three broad categories (the Kinh, Hoa, and Khmer; one composite category for ethnic minorities that traditionally live in the Central Highlands; and another for those that originate in the Northern

Highlands) did shed some light on the major differences. The poorest groups were unambiguously the minorities of the Central Highlands. They saw their relative position fall, with an expenditure level that was half the national average in 1993 but little more than a third of the national average by 1998. The researchers identified significant differences between the situations of ethnic minorities in different regions. Northern highland minorities had benefited from economic growth in the 1990s, whereas the position of the central highland minorities had stagnated. The researchers then tried to derive policy prescriptions from their analysis, arguing that diversity in the socioeconomic development experiences of the different ethnic minorities indicated the need for a similar diversity in policy interventions designed to assist them.

Social assessment carried out by ADB, in the context of project preparation in Viet Nam's central region, similarly identified higher than average poverty levels for "indigenous" ethnic minority groups. Studies have shown that the rural poor are predominantly from indigenous groups. Indigenous households, together with female-headed households, are poorer than the average. Indigenous peoples' households suffer an average of 5.5 months food deficit compared to 3.3 months for Kinh groups, and appear to have less access to irrigated land than the Kinh immigrants. Immigrants are better-off than those born in the area, either indigenous or Kinh, suggesting that immigrants usually carry skills and knowledge, including knowledge of markets and government services,¹¹ that allow them to prosper even if they suffer a few initial years of poverty.

A paper on poverty reduction among ethnic minorities, conducted for the Poverty Task Force, aims to identify structural and other factors behind the growing poverty gap between mainstream Kinh/Hoa groups and certain ethnic minorities. Minorities have a lower maximum educational attainment level and substantially less access to water sources and benefits from remittances. They may actually have more agricultural land, but it is unlikely to be irrigated. Geographical location, involving remoteness and poor access to infrastructure, is an important explanation for lower consumption compared with that of local Kinh. Infant mortality, child mortality, and under-five mortality rates show enormous geographic differences, which correlate with high concentrations of ethnic minorities. In the Central and Northern Highlands, the regional

figures are above the rural average for Viet Nam and there are indications that in some parts, infant mortality actually increased during 1989–1994, while the national average remained the same.

QUANTITATIVE ASPECTS

Analyzing poverty within ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam is difficult because of the lack of systematic figures. Different statistics are published by various institutions and organizations. In this report, only government statistics are used.

At the provincial level, the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs in Kon Tum Province conducted a comprehensive poverty assessment in April 2001. As indicated in Table 4 based on data provided on the "Report of the Situation of the Poor" in Kon Tum, ethnic minority households account for a very high proportion of poor households compared with that in the total population.

National and economic growth improved during the 1990s both in the lowland and mountainous regions. In a study on living standards of the rural population, 85% of interviewed families felt that the quality of life had improved and only 4.4% felt it had worsened. The statistics are even more positive in mountainous areas (Table 5). Nationwide, the average monthly income per head in 1999 was D295,000. In the northeast and northwest mountainous parts of Viet Nam, the income level was 70% of the national average. In the Central Highlands, the income level was 17% higher than the national average.

Poor people account for only 16% of the total population, but 20% in the northeast and northwest and 27% in the Central Highlands (Table 5). This poverty rate in the Central Highlands combined with the higher than average income level there means that the discrepancy between wealthy and poor households in this area is 1.5 times larger than the national average level.

Infrastructure in mountainous regions has received most investment and attention (Table 6). However, the capacity to access and use newly-built infrastructure varies from one ethnic group to another. Ethnic minorities have much less opportunity to access and make full use of these resources. Earlier, it was noted that in remote areas where the national electricity grid

Table 4. Incidence of Poverty in Kon Tum Province

District	Proportion of Poor Households (%)	Proportion of Kinh Poor Households (%)	Proportion of Ethnic Minority Poor Households (%)
Kon Plong	49	10	60
Dak Ha	29	13	52
Dak To	48	21	61
Ngoc Hoi	36	13	42
Sa Thay	33	29	37
Dak Glei	42	1	44
Kon Tum Town	18	9	47
Average	32	12	50

Table 5. Self-evaluation of Poor Households in Viet Nam on the Status of their Livelihoods in the 1990s

	Nationwide (%)	Northeast and Northwest (%)	Central Highlands (%)
Poor households in 1999	16.0	19.8	26.6
Households with improved livelihoods	84.5	90.1	87.0

Source: National Department of Statistics, 2000.

Table 6. Rural Infrastructure, 1999

Area	Communes with Electricity (%)	Communes with a Road Passable by Cars (%)	Communes with a Primary School (%)	Communes with a Health Post (%)
Nationwide	85.8	92.9	98.8	98.0
Northeast	78.1	94.8	97.8	96.9
Northeast	54.6	85.4	95.8	99.4
Central Highlands	64.5	97.2	96.4	95.7

Source: National Department of Statistics, 2000.

has reached villages, only Kinh can afford to pay monthly and registration fees. This situation raises doubts about the effectiveness of such investment and its real impact on ethnic minorities.

Table 7 shows the values of a range of socio-economic development parameters in mountainous areas. It should be noted that the northeast, northwest and central highland areas have lower scores than the national average in all the criteria. They are especially low in the northeast where the GDP per capita is only about one third of the average level.

PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY FROM CASE STUDIES

During the 1990s, there were many research projects on poverty in Viet Nam, providing a clear picture of overall poverty in the country as well as analyzing its causes. However, little has been written on how ethnic minorities characterize and explain their own poverty.

This section presents an analysis of field studies conducted in Kon Tum, Gia Lai and Lao Cai provinces.

Table 7. Socioeconomic Factors

Area	Longevity (year)	Literacy Rate (%)	GDP Per Capita (D '000)	GDP Per Capita (PPP,US\$)	Human Development Index (HDI)	HDI Ranking within Viet Nam
Nationwide	70.9	90.3	5,221	1,860	0.696	
Northeast	68.2	89.3	2,641	941	0.641	6
Northwest	65.9	73.3	1,951	695	0.564	8
Central Highlands	63.5	83.0	3,093	1,102	0.604	7
Socioeconomic factors in 19 mountainous provinces						
Quang Ninh	71.1	92.8	4,626	1,648	0.703	11
Phu Tho	71.0	95.0	2,694	960	0.675	23
Lam Dong	70.8	91.1	2,872	1,023	0.662	31
Thai Nguyen	69.4	95.4	2,359	840	0.660	32
Dak Lak	65.6	92.2	3,504	1,248	0.647	41
Hoa Binh	67.3	92.0	2,180	777	0.637	46
Binh Phuoc	69.7	88.2	2,416	861	0.632	47
Bac Giang	67.4	93.5	2,204	785	0.632	48
Lang Son	65.2	89.4	2,846	1,014	0.628	50
Tuyen Quang	66.8	87.2	2,245	800	0.621	51
Yen Bai	67.2	84.8	2,205	785	0.612	53
Bac Kan	66.6	85.5	1,618	576	0.594	54
Cao Bang	62.4	76.6	2,503	892	0.576	55
Lao Cai	66.0	69.3	2,107	751	0.559	56
Son La	66.1	69.5	1,823	649	0.549	57
Gia Lai	61.8	69.3	2,575	917	0.546	58
Kon Tum	57.2	73.2	2,372	845	0.534	59
Ha Giang	58.8	68.1	1,521	542	0.503	60
Lai Chau	63.7	51.3	1,847	658	0.486	61

Source: The Publishing House of the National Department of Statistics, 2001.

Results of discussions with government officials on their perception of poverty are presented. The section continues with a focus on how ethnic minorities in the surveyed villages perceive and identify poverty and its causes.

Perceptions of Government Officials on Poverty

In general, officials in the surveyed areas consider the main causes of poverty to be the following.

- Low level of awareness among local ethnic minorities. This characteristic is drawn from the fact that many ethnic minorities are illiterate, and they seem to be “slower” than the Kinh in absorbing new technologies.
- The slow pace of change in diversification of agricultural output.
- Poor infrastructure.
- Lack of roads, therefore limited access to and exchange with the outside world.
- Lack of capital.
- Lack of knowledge of modern agricultural production.

Perceptions of Ethnic Minority Peoples on Poverty

During the field visits, the consultants conducted focus-group meetings and household visits to the poorest and the better-off families and individuals. The consultants avoided using set standards to measure poverty levels and imposing concepts on the informants. The indigenous communities expressed their perceptions on poverty in 14 topics, grouped by the consultants into the following five dimensions.

Food Security

Food Insecurity

Insecurity in food supply is the primary concern of the poor ethnic minorities. Foods of ethnic minorities include rice and resources such as tubers, leaves, vegetables, and other forest and aquatic products. Food production deficits average between 3 and 6 months for most villages. Low cash incomes are not cited as a difficulty. Instead of laboring for other people in order to earn money, ethnic minority people still prefer working in their own ricefields to ensure the harvest for the next season: “You never know how much money is needed to buy rice to feed the family.”

Many people also seek off-farm laboring work, currently at D10,000–15,000 per day, equivalent to enough food for a household of 5 people for one day, including 6 kg of rice. However, most of this income is absorbed by the expenditure for household goods and supplementary foods. The need for new products, not used for livelihood previously, contributes to further expenditure. For example, a particular type of plant was burned to make salt. Now, due to forest degradation, these resources are not as plentiful. People buy oil, sea salt, and other additives for cooking.

Wildlife Encroachment and Natural Disasters

Poor people in the communes tend to have ricefields near the forest, which increases the risk of encroachment by animals. In Dak Xu commune, some of these households have lost most of their crops because of wild pigs. Hunting and trapping are prohibited. Despite this rule, however, wild pigs and fowls are often hunted to protect the crops and for food. The massive loss of forest area during the development process has had various consequences including soil erosion, drought, and flood, and a dramatic decrease in soil fertility. These problems are all clearly observed by villagers and were pointed out as a cause of poverty.

Basic Conditions for Production and Livelihood

Lack of or Infertile Land

The present survey reconfirms earlier studies showing that ethnic minorities perceive lack of land as one of the causes of poverty.

In Ngoc Hoi, there are 4,000 ha of agricultural land, of which 3,000 ha are managed as three rubber plantations. In Dak Lung commune, the process of securing land for these farms was simple, according to commune leaders. The farm representatives put forward a plan for rubber plantations to the commune people's committee. That committee then allocated land accordingly without consultation with commune members. The latter were then forced to move further into the forest to look for new patches of land for cultivation.

In Kong Plong district, only one fourth of the communes have land for paddy rice cultivation. The rest continue to practice upland rice farming in infertile areas of young regeneration forest because of increasing demand and the ban on shifting cultivation by the Government. This led to an unprecedented reduction in upland rice production.

If you go to visit a household and cannot meet them for two weeks or a month, you can be sure they are poor people. Only poor people cannot afford to work near the village, because there is no fertile land left. They often stay in the forest for weeks with their children.

The communal ownership and use of agricultural land and forests meant that households and family clans were entitled to exploit and use them with strict observance of customary laws. There was no purchase of land or other assets. The Dak Xu commune moved in 1987 to a site beside a road as part of the resettlement program. Not only has their lifestyle changed but also their view on land has become one measured by cash. Land disputes between the indigenous people and immigrants in the surveyed communes have become a heated issue.

Land-grabbing incidents and land disputes happen so often in our village. We were not aware

of the value of land before. Now we have to compete with outsiders who are a lot faster than us.

A recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, in six provinces in the Central Highlands and the southeast where immigration is significant, showed that less than 4% of the land occupied by migrant families was allocated to them by the Government, 47% was privately purchased, and 46% was secured by forest clearing.

Before ethnic minorities can secure enough land for their households, all the more fertile areas of land have been taken by either outsiders or people who have access to cash. This cash-oriented economy has over the past decade replaced the subsistence economy, causing a number of difficulties for the indigenous groups. It has changed their lifestyle and values while preparations have not yet been made for them to enter a new social structure and absorb new values that are more market oriented.

They now even charge for domestic animals such as cats or dogs that they used to give away for good luck.

Since the early 1990s, when the market economy accelerated in the lowland areas, migrants have arrived from the deltas in the Central Highlands. They have rented or bought land from indigenous people. At the same time, they have also secured land by hiring indigenous people or northern upland migrants to clear forestland. This cash flow has changed the land-clearing pattern of the indigenous communities. Instead of clearing only enough land for cultivation, they now clear land to make money. Other minority groups, who come almost empty-handed, also create heavy pressure on land by clearing for cultivation. The overall results have been as follows.

- Income from land selling or renting has motivated the indigenous communities to clear more land and move further inside the forest.
- The open market has exposed both the indigenous people and migrants to perennial and fruit crops. However, success in growing these crops depends a great deal on familiarity with complicated techniques and market fluctuations. The Kinh, who

have better access to information and have money, tend to be more successful than the ethnic minorities, who often find it difficult to adapt to the change. Therefore, the latter tend to sell or rent land and move away to continue growing their traditional crops.

- Some more adventurous indigenous households decide to keep up with the change. However, when adverse circumstances (e.g., drop in price or natural disasters) occur, they tend to sell land and move away instead of continuing to grow other crops.

However, the lack of land and inability to expand into forest areas have stopped land trading in many villages. In the surveyed sites, ownership of land has become, more than ever, crucial for the survival of ethnic minorities.

Once you sell land, it means hunger for your family. There is nowhere to go to clear land anymore.

Most poor people interviewed either have no idea about land use-rights certificates (red cards) or have not yet been granted one. Allocating land-use rights requires measuring, mapping, and determination of "origins," and other steps, which are extremely time consuming. In addition, red cards are granted for agricultural land only. In Chu Pha district, only 21% of the total agricultural land has been mapped and red cards granted. The cost for measuring was D100,000 per hectare until this fee was abolished in 2001. According to district officers, ethnic minority people do not appreciate the significance and security provided by the red cards. The concept of customary rights over land is still strongly held. Disputes frequently occur when land allocation rights are sought over an area that is claimed by others under customary systems.

Apart from ignorance of new developments such as the cash value of land, poor ethnic minority people are often not educated and become marginalized from village meetings, which are the only source of information on the government's new laws and directives. Even if they attend such meetings, they are not able to understand fully matters that are most essential to them.

No Inheritance

This facet of poverty refers to a number of aspects including land, assets, and cultivation experience. The most important aspect is that wealthy people in villages are those who inherited large areas of land from their grandparents or parents. Poor families are those who either came late to an area with many children or failed to secure a good tract of land. Their children cannot now expand the family's holding and have to divide among themselves the present land area.

No Permanent Houses

Poor people in the surveyed areas live in small temporary shelters made from leaves, bamboo, and mud. These shelters are unstable and are often located near families' upland ricefields, which are far away from villages. The distance between their residential location and farmland does not allow such families to adapt quickly to a new lifestyle and concepts.

She always lives in her ricefield because she does not have a house in the village. She cannot attend commune activities and events...She does not know the value of land now and, therefore, she does not feel the necessity to obtain a red card.

Economic Activities

Lack of Farming Experience

Many studies have stressed that lack of experience in farming and financial management is an important cause of poverty for ethnic minorities.

In Chu Pah, the ethnic minorities have been exposed to paddy rice cultivation since the French colonial period. However, their ricefields are mostly located near streams to take advantage of the natural water flow for irrigation. They have only one harvest of rice each year. An increase to two harvests annually in this community would require the use of techniques that are not adequately provided by extension workers at any level. Yields of paddy rice in the fields of ethnic minorities are only one third of those in Kinh ricefields.

Before 1985, villagers in Dak Lung worked in a collective farm subsidized by the Government through provision of seedlings, fertilizer, and technical

assistance. Ethnic minority households were requested to contribute labor and received shares of the rice harvested. After the breakdown of this collective system in the 1990s, ethnic minorities were left with insufficient knowledge to start generating sufficient food and incomes. At present, land is allocated to individual households. The change from a subsistence to a partly subsidized and finally to an open market economy has confused a large proportion of the ethnic minorities.

Poor Management of Assets and Expenditures

Managing large sums of money requires a range of skills and an understanding of and a capacity to engage in trading systems. Most women in Dak Xu are not capable of paying back a loan from credit programs. According to them, after the provision of credits ends, they become poorer.

We do not know what to do with the loan money. We do not know how to plan and moderate our income-generating activities and expenditure. And how can we pay back the loan with such interest?

Fluctuations of Prices

Coffee has been the most popular and lucrative cash crop in the Central Highlands. The severe drop in its price during 2000–2001 has caused some serious dilemmas, especially for ethnic minorities. Most of the cash available in coffee-growing households was invested in fertilizer and irrigation for this demanding crop. Now, in many villages, people are removing their coffee trees to start growing new crops. However, the majority continue to wait for the price to increase again. Ethnic minorities in almost every village complained about this sudden change and blamed the Government for not keeping its promise to buy their produce. Some members of these communities have become totally confused as what to grow to generate cash income after they remove their coffee trees.

Health and Education

Poor Health

Most of the households identified by the communities as the poorest households are either headed by a woman or by persons with a disability or poor health. Lack of working capacity due to disability or poor health is always cited as the first sign of poverty:

I am poor because my health is so bad that I cannot engage in any activity at home. But I am still better off than my neighbor who also lives alone. She has better physical health but is mentally ill. She even cannot recognize edible foods.

In all surveyed communes, there is at least one health post with 3–4 staff. However, the health posts are either too far away or not adequately equipped and without medicines necessary to deal with even conventional diseases.

Ethnic minorities have almost ceased using traditional herbal medicines due to the depletion of these herbs and restricted access to them in the forests, most of which are now managed as either state farms or state forest enterprises.

Western medicines have replaced most traditional healing systems. However, the frequency of health service use is still low in the communes. In many but not all communes, the Government subsidizes medicine for common diseases. Most poor people cannot afford to pay for medicine that is not freely available at health posts. Medicine for headaches costs the equivalent of two days labor. Furthermore, only sick persons themselves can buy or be given medicine. Most poor people live alone, are disabled, weak, or live far (1–14 km) from health posts.

In Po Y commune, a fairly big and well functioning clinic was built in recent years, funded by the European Commission. The number of persons using this clinic remains minimal. The patients are mostly people with available cash and border police officers.

High Cost of Education

There are only a few primary schools in the villages surveyed. Most of them were built by villagers and have only one or two rooms. In Doch 1 village, there are 85 students attending classes from grade 1 to grade 5. There are no boarding schools at the commune level. Sending children to the only boarding school in the district is beyond the financial capacity of villagers. The district selects two students from each village and pays for their attendance at this secondary school.

Family Networks and Cultural Change

Family Breakdown

Incidence of family breakdown by divorce, widowhood, or domestic violence, is used by the poor to express their perceptions on poverty. Poor people are clearly aware of their vulnerability regarding this social value.

My husband left me when I was struck with illness and became paralyzed. For a long time, I could not work to support my son and myself. I do not have any relatives in this village; my husband is Kinh. My son has now grown up. He is the only source of income for my household.

Most indigenous groups living in the surveyed areas are matriarchal. Different generations used to share the same "long house." The oldest woman in a long house is the owner of the house and usually has full knowledge and experience of household management, agriculture, and other business. Nowadays, this tradition is disintegrating and is being replaced by the nuclear family. Nuclear families live in separate houses and have their own area of land. Girls marry early and leave home without properly learning cultivation techniques and advice from their parents.

It is difficult to start everything now. Luckily, my mother and I still live near each other. I can learn slowly from her things that I do not know.

Laziness and Alcohol Addiction

Some women interviewed said their husbands engage in a number of activities and distractions that did not exist previously in their villages. The husbands have become lazy and drink alcohol more often with their friends. The tradition of sharing rice wine around the open fireplace in Nha Rong has been abused and turned into alcoholism. Women pointed to this phenomenon as a cause of poverty.

No Relatives

Surprisingly, lack of support from relatives was stressed as cause of poverty. Although villagers give food to the poorest and most hungry people at times, support from relatives tends to be on a more regular and firm basis. In many surveyed communes, landless individuals can rely on their circle of relatives who own land; they contribute labor to the landowners and receive a share of the harvest.

Ms...was left with four small children after her husband's death. She does not possess any land. She sometimes works for other people to earn cash, but the main source of food for the five members of her family is from working in her cousin's ricefield.

Social and Cultural Changes

The indigenous people used to live in such remote areas that communication with the outside world was almost nonexistent. The village is the basic social unit. In the Central Highlands, it is also the highest social organization. Villagers do not know any other social structure beyond it. Their lives have been regulated by customary laws. *Gia lang*—the most respected person—or the *gia lang* council manages all issues related to administration. In the past, the villagers went to *gia lang* to seek advice on issues related to nature, climate, and forest before making decisions on farming and livelihood.

Drastic changes in the environment, technology, farming operations and lifestyles, and the penetration of the State have limited the role of *gia lang*. Village society has been affected by a new official institution: the village chief, who is elected by the villagers and approved by the commune leaders. This person manages administrative issues. As well, there are new organizations and beyond the village there are higher administrative levels. However, from the present survey, ethnic minority people still highly appreciate their traditional institutions for management of village issues. All informants expressed the need to have customary laws and a *gia lang* in their village.

The poor people spoke about their inability to fully participate in festivals and rituals, and about the breakdown of their traditional beliefs. For example, according to indigenous religious beliefs, trees have souls like human beings. In the past, wood was used for household construction purposes such as building houses, firewood, cattle barns, boats, and coffins. Before cutting down a big tree, they held a ceremony to mourn the soul of the tree. Wood from that tree must be used for the purposes stated during the ceremony. Nowadays, wood is harvested on an industrial scale and traded for cash by outsiders. The forests close to their homes have rapidly disappeared. Access to wood and other forest resources is very limited.

The *nha rong* (communal house) was the cultural and often physical center of a village, a place to gather every night to talk, drink, dance, and exchange

experiences regarding livelihood practices. In all surveyed villages, people are now moving to new areas, mainly beside roads. The circular settlements do not exist any longer; the *nha rong*, therefore, has disappeared with all its rituals. In some communes, it has simply been transformed into a building called the cultural hall of different architectural design and made with a tin roof. In Dak Lung commune, the *nha rong* was replaced by a small brick house with tables and chairs instead of a wooden floor and a central open fireplace. Villagers gather here for meetings that are different from their traditional gatherings. The new *nha rong* is not acknowledged or accepted by the community as a part of their cultural life. In other communes, villagers gather in the village head's house for meetings. According to ethnic minorities, the *nha rong* is not just a festive site. It is the place where poor people can learn from those better-off. There is no longer a mechanism for sharing and exchanging knowledge and experiences.

The design and placement of resettlement villages do not allow the communities to find resources easily for building a proper *nha rong*. The frame of a *nha rong* is made from big logs. According to the *gia lang* in Dak Lung Commune, it now takes four days to reach the area in the forest where big trees can be found. However, this area now belongs to a state enterprise and, therefore, there is no access for local people. Even if they were allowed to log in this area, it would be difficult to carry the big logs back to the village.