

## 1.2. State of Play of the Living Conditions of Ethnic Groups in Việt Nam: Economic and Socio-anthropological Approaches

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### *(Retranscription)*

#### **François Roubaud**

After the regional panorama sketched out by Jean-Luc Maurer, we're going to narrow the focus with a lecture that is the result of a collaboration between economists and a social anthropologist. We are going to present the state of play of the living conditions of ethnic groups, which will put the spotlight on the interdisciplinary dialogue between economics and social anthropology which we started last year in the 2010 summer school.<sup>[4]</sup>

Our first section will be made up of a lecture on the economics of the situation of the ethnic groups in Việt Nam, then we

will examine the policies which have been implemented. Finally, we'll draw on the socio-anthropological vision of Christian Culas.

Firstly, why should we be interested in ethnic groups? Often, they are subject to discrimination. They are not the only ones: women, the disabled, religious or political communities can be affected, but ethnicity is one of the principal criteria for the analysis of discrimination in many countries. This discriminatory situation can be seen as unjust in the ethical perspective of the Rights of Man and contrary to the principles of citizenship and equity. Moreover, from an economic and instrumental perspective, it is inefficient: the minorities cannot realise their economic potential because of their reduced access

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[4] Razafindrakoto *et al.*, "How is the economic transition experienced and perceived by the population ? Analysis of the complementarity between quantitative and qualitative approaches", in Lagrée (scientific editor), *Transitions decreed, transitions experienced. From global to local : methodological, cross-cutting and critical approaches*, regional Summer School in social sciences « Les Journées de Tam Đảo », *Conferences et Seminars* collection, n° 2, AFD, EFEO and Tri Thúc publishing house, July 2010, pp. 181-259. Also available on the AFD and EFEO websites and at [www.tamdaoconf.com](http://www.tamdaoconf.com).

to land, education, credit, public sector investment, and this has an impact on the growth and development of the entire country. Finally, discrimination can be a factor in economic, social and political instability. Consequently, the idea of protecting ethnic groups has emerged, and indicators have been created, such as the “*Minorities at Risk*” index (Gurr, 1996) to give us a more precise understanding of the economic, social and political situation of different groups.

The negative impact of ethnic “fragmentation” or “splitting” should also be underlined. A whole section of the literature – mainly economic, but also from political science – focuses on the impact of ethnic diversity on economic, social and political outcomes in the world: growth, level of public investment, quality of institutions, interpersonal confidence, social capital, democracy, conflict, civil war, etc. (Mauro, 1995; Huntington, 1996; Easterly and Levine, 1997; Alesina, Baquir and Easterly, 1997; La Porta *et al.*, 1999; Alesina *et al.*, 2003; Fearon and Laitin, 2003). The results of these studies are very often significant: the more ethnically fragmented a society, the poorer the indicators. The founding study of Easterly and Levine in 1997, “*Africa’s Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions*”, shows that the arbitrary frontiers imposed by colonization created the conditions for failure in Africa. Numerous other studies followed.

This work raises a number of questions and issues.

Ideally seven criteria should be met for the definition of an “ethnic group” (Fearon, 2003):

- Its members have a common origin – real or imagined – recognized by themselves and others;

- Its members are conscious of belonging to a group and consider it – conventionally and psychologically – important;
- Its members share particular cultural characteristics, such as a language, a religion and customs;
- These cultural characteristics are valued by a majority of the group’s members;
- The group has a “territory”, a place of origin, or harks back to a shared country;
- The group shares a common History. This History is not completely mythical, and is anchored to some extent in historical reality;
- The group is potentially “self-sufficient” from a conceptual point of view – which sets it apart from castes or their equivalent such as the former nobility in Europe.

Following this ideal archetype, we can see that many of the groups today considered ethnic groups do not meet all the conditions. The concept has become hazy.

Ethnic groups have a History. Unlike the “Primordialists” (Geertz, 1973) who think that ethnic groups are “definitive” biological entities, defined once and for all, the majority – along with general public opinion – agrees with the “Constructivists” or the “Instrumentalists” who propose that ethnic groups are contingent, undefined and dependent on circumstances. The boundaries of ethnic groups are movable and can alter over time. They can be socio-political constructs imposed from outside or from within. Ethnicity can have multiple ramifications, which poses the question of the level of aggregation of quantitative indicators.

Ethnic groups are “endogenous”, *i.e.* intrinsically linked to the economic, social and

political context: for example, periods of recession give rise to quarrels over distribution which pit individuals against their ethnic opposition; a phase of sustained growth leads not to the hardening of ethnic divisions but to greater value being placed on national identity.

There are also philosophical aspects. If we consider ethnic fragmentation as a negative thing, this runs counter to the idea that “anthropological diversity”, like biodiversity, is a positive resource for a society.

Finally, and this attracts us particularly as quantitative scientists, there are fundamental problems in terms of measurement. How can we quantify this ethnic diversity? In the first place, there are legal aspects. Some countries do not allow statistics on ethnicity, like France, and this has recently been the subject of intense public debate – as much scientific as political. Other countries produce statistics on ethnicity, or race, as in the USA – “White”, “Black”, “Asian”, “Hispanic”, etc. The debate has positive and negative elements. Among the arguments “against”, it seems that ethnic statistics have a tendency to solidify, freeze or accentuate boundaries which didn’t really exist before; moreover, they can be used and manipulated for political or criminal ends – such as the Jews during the Second World War or the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, etc. As for the arguments “for”: to fight discrimination, we first need to identify it and measure it in order to understand and potentially act against it.

What are the existing measures, what are the indicators used and their limits? It is interesting to recall that the first indicators – for a long time the only ones – were created simultaneously by Soviet anthropologists

– *Atlas Narodov Mira* – and by the American team *Human Relations Area Files* (HRAF) (Lebar *et al.*) which were both published in 1964. Since then, several other bases have appeared: from institutions with the *CIA World FactBooks*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Library of Congress Country Studies*, *Ethnology Project*; from researchers like Gurr (1996), Alesina (2002), Roeder (2002) or Fearon (2003). As regards the measures, there are numerous statistical indicators. The best known is the index of fragmentation which calculates the probability of an individual meeting another individual of a different ethnic origin from his own. When the result approaches 1, fragmentation is high; when it approaches 0, fragmentation is almost absent, which signifies that this is a homogenous population group. An entire category of literature has developed indicators of segmentation which are linked to indicators of geographical or spatial segregation, like the polarization indicator.

The limits are also conceptual. First of all, the measures are based on a hazy concept which merges language spoken, skin colour, self-proclaimed ethnic origin, expert view, and so on. What’s more, they also depend on the quality of the sources used: these are almost always secondary sources and not sources which set out by checking the seven criteria set out above. Thus in France, for two research databases one year apart, the indicator of ethnic fragmentation rose to 0.272 in one case (Fearon, 2003) and was 0.1032 in the other (Alesina *et al.*, 2003). The difference is considerable, to say the least.

How is ethnicity treated in Việt Nam? From the general, formal point of view, the country works within a framework of non-discrimination on ethnic grounds.

# Box 1

*"Like people born from the same womb, whether they are Kinh or Thổ, Mường or Mán, Gia Rai or Ê Đê, Xê Đăng or Ba Na or from no matter what other ethnic group, we are all the children of Việt Nam, we are all brothers and sisters. We will live and die together, we will share moments of happiness and sadness, and whether we are starving or well-fed, we will help each other."*

Speech of President Hồ Chí Minh, April 1946

In Việt Nam, the problem is not *de jure* but *de facto* application of the law. Officially, 54 ethnic groups are recognized: the Kinh or Việt are the ethnic majority which represents 86% of the population; the 53 other ethnic groups total 14% of the population and the second-largest ethnic group in demographic terms comprises only 2% of the population. There is therefore a huge demographic difference between the majority and the largest minority group – which is not at all the case in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example. Finally, ethnic

statistics are authorised in Việt Nam, and variables are included in the surveys of the General Statistical Office (GSO).

The demographic growth of the minority groups is faster than that of the Kinh: 17% compared with 12% between 1999 and 2009, which is explained by differences in birth and death rates. Structural change, however, is very slow, and its difference between these two dates is scarcely perceptible: 85.9% in 2009 as against 86.3% in 1999.

**Table 15** *Level of Urbanization of Ethnic Groups in 2009*

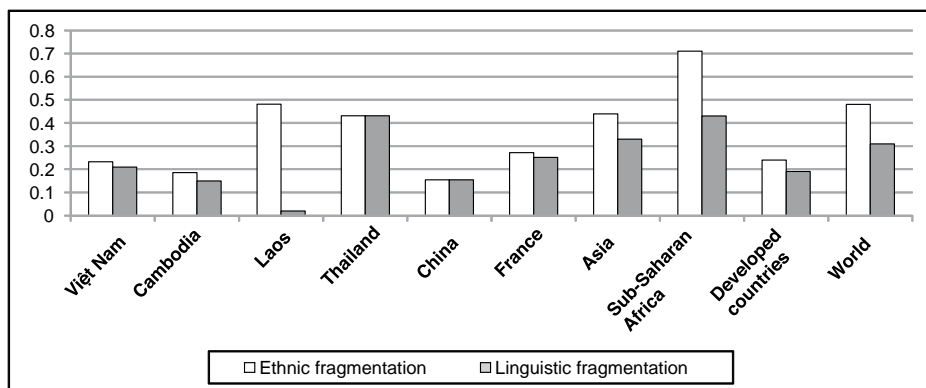
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urbanization rate
Kinh	23,885,666	49,708,761	73,594,427	32.5%
Minorities	1,551,230	10,701,340	12,252,570	12.7%
Total	25,436,896	60,410,101	85,846,997	29.6%

Sources: Population census (2009), GSO, authors' calculations.

A significant characteristic of the ethnic groups in Việt Nam is their concentration in the rural context, and more particularly in mountainous areas, which occupy the

majority of the surface area and are remote areas poorly connected to the Centre and the North. The rate of urbanization is almost three times higher among the Kinh.

**Figure 3** *Ethnic and Linguistic Fragmentation*



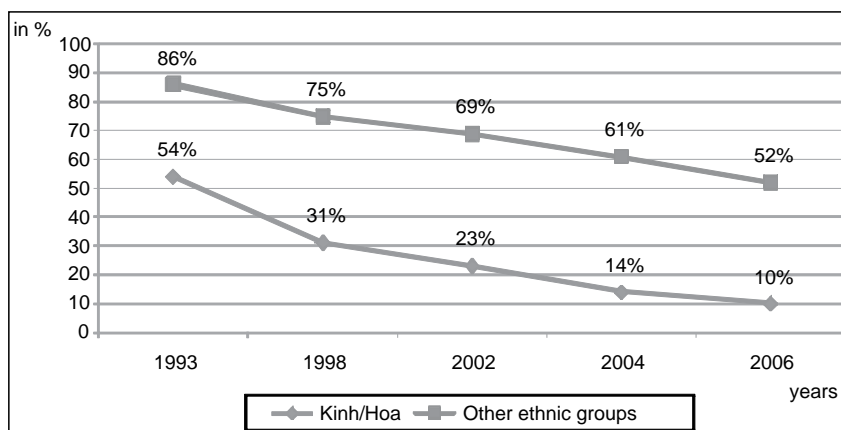
Sources: Fearon (2003) – only takes into account groups amounting to 1% of the country's population (four groups in Việt Nam).

Ethnic fragmentation is relatively weak in Việt Nam (0.233 according to Fearon, 2003; 0.238 according to Alesina *et al.*, 2003), lower than in France and around the level of that in developed countries. In general, developing countries have higher indexes of ethnic fragmentation which rise very residually – from which stems our instinctive feeling that this could cause problems for development.

### 1.2.1. Ethnic Groups in Việt Nam: What Are the Figures Telling Us?

Since there is no visible discrimination in terms of the regulations in Việt Nam, we must identify potential discrimination through the application of policies and the real situation of ethnic groups, which explains certain differences between the majority and the minorities; in brief, we must make a diagnosis of the socio-economic situation of the different groups.

**Figure 4** *Evolution of the Poverty Rate According to Ethnic Group from 1993 to 2006*

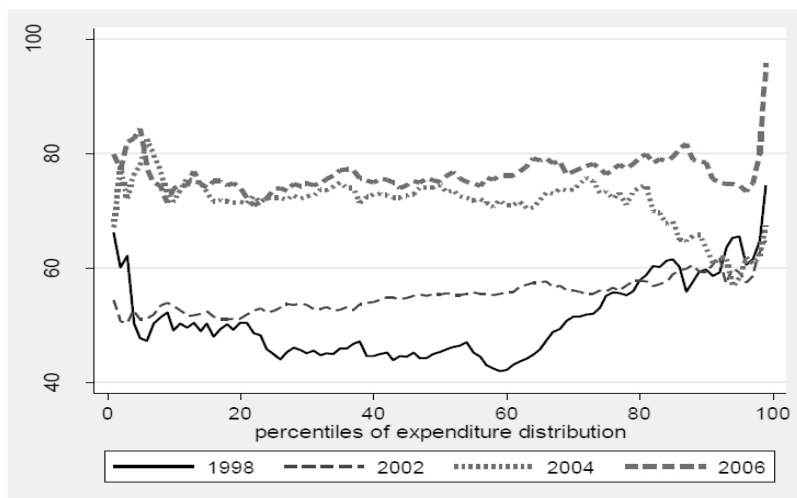


Sources: Baulch et al. (2010); poverty line GSO/World Bank (consumption); VLSS – Việt Nam Living Standard Survey – and VHLSS – Việt Nam Household Living Standard Survey.

What do the figures say? From a general point of view, donors cite Việt Nam as an example of poverty reduction. We can see a spectacular drop in poverty, whether among the Kinh or the other ethnic groups, but the rhythm is different. This reduction is much more rapid among the Kinh: in the space of fifteen years,

poverty was divided by five for the Kinh against “only” 1.6 for the other ethnic groups. In 1993, 22% of the poor belonged to a non-Kinh group; in 2006, non-Kinh represented 44% of the poor and 59% of the “starving” – i.e. below the threshold of monetary poverty.

**Figure 5** *Difference in Consumption per Capita between the Kinh and Other Ethnic Groups, 1998-2006*



Sources: Baulch et al. (2010); VLSS and VHLSS.

Inequalities of consumption increase over time. While the Kinh consumed on average 51% more than the other ethnic groups in

1998, this gap had grown to 74% in 2006. The gap is obviously wider where the distribution is highest, as the very rich are mainly Kinh.

## Box 2 *Techniques for Data Decomposition*

- Breaking down techniques
- Estimation of an earnings function for two sub-populations  
(*Kinh vs Minorities*):

$$\ln w_i = \beta x_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where  $\ln w_i$  is the natural logarithm of the hourly income of the individual  $i$ ,  $x_i$  is a vector of observed characteristics,  $\beta$  is the vector of the coefficients and  $\varepsilon_i$  a term of disturbance of zero mean.

- Breakdown of the average earnings gap between *Kinh* and *Minorities*:

$$\overline{\ln w_k} - \overline{\ln w_m} = \beta_k (\bar{x}_k - \bar{x}_m) + (\beta_k - \beta_m) \bar{x}_m$$

where  $\bar{w}_k$  and  $\bar{w}_m$  are the average earnings of the Kinh and the Minorities respectively and  $\bar{x}_k$  and  $\bar{x}_m$  are the vectors of the averages of the independent variables for the Kinh and the Minorities; finally  $\beta_k$  and  $\beta_m$  are the estimated coefficients.

The first term to the right of the equation measures the gap in earnings due to the differences in characteristics between the two groups ("the explained part").

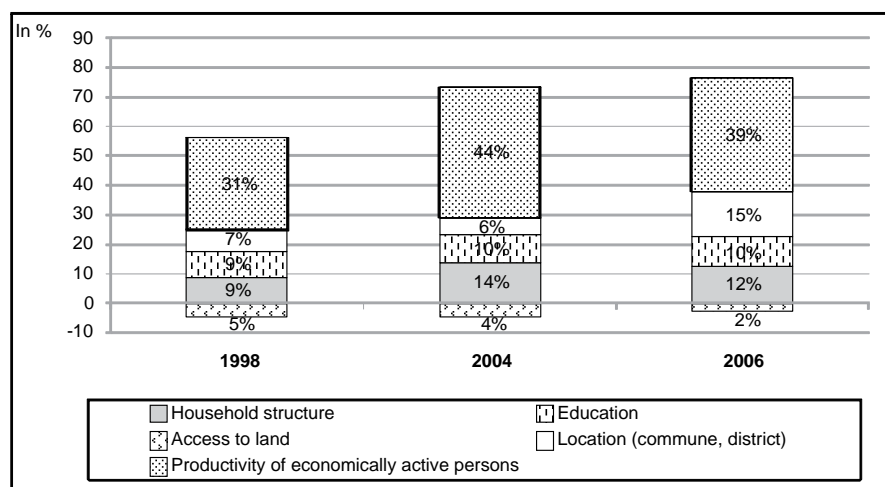
The second term corresponds to the gap attributable to the difference in the performances of these characteristics (coefficients; ("the unexplained part" or residual, or "**discrimination**").

Source: Authors' Constructions.

To go further, we must use techniques for breaking down data which will be the subject of our workshop. The objective is to examine, from the point of view of ethnicity or gender, the differences which could be explained

by differences in endowments – education, land, etc. –, and identify what remains, independently of these factors; this could potentially be discrimination.

**Figure 6** *Breakdown of the Gap in Consumption per Capita between the Ethnic Majority and Minorities in the Rural Context, 1998-2006*



Sources: based on Baulch et al. (2010); VLSS and VHLSS; Authors' calculations.

What about the difference between the Kinh and other ethnic groups?

In 1998, the Kinh earned 51% more than the other ethnic groups. This gap resulted in part from known factors: the structure of households – there are more children to take care of in non-Kinh households –, level of education – these groups are on average less educated –, access to land, location – they live more often in remote areas.

What can we learn from this graph? On the one hand, the advantages enjoyed by Kinh households in terms of “observable”

characteristics – that is, variables like education or health which we can identify and which we can address with policies – account for less than half of the overall gap. This means that the remainder is residual, and therefore potentially due to discrimination. Despite the policies put in place, this gap has not changed much over the years. On the other hand, some factors have been clearly identified, which is good news for public action: for example, ethnic groups have less access to education, so policies on education could improve their situation, the same applies to their demographic characteristics,



etc. However, there is also some bad news: the differences which were due to access to land, and in favour of ethnic groups, are gradually diminishing. The advantage they enjoyed in this area in 1998 has become almost insignificant in 2006. Furthermore, we can see an increasingly strong geographical concentration of non-Kinh ethnic groups: they are less mobile and more concentrated in the remote areas which operate at the fringe of development.

How shall we interpret the fact that more than half of the financial difference – representing a net gain of about 40% in favour of the Kinh – derives from a better exploitation of their endowment? Do the Kinh simply better exploit the resources they have to hand like education, land, ... etc.? Are there other objective factors which we have failed to take into account in our models: the quality of education or of public services, for example? What results from culture? What results from discrimination? We have arrived at the limits of the quantitative approach.

**Table 16** *Poverty Rate and Median Consumption per Capita According to Ethnic Group, 2006 (rural)*

	Poverty rate	Median consumption per capita (million VND)	Number of observations
Kinh/Hoa	13.5%	4,267	5,875
Khơ-me/Chăm	34.6%	2,819	122
Thái/Tày/Mường/Nùng	45.2%	2,729	420
Other Mountain areas (North)	72.4%	1,878	239
Highlands (Center)	73.6%	1,955	198
Others	50.1%	1,942	28
Total	20.4%	3,993	6,882

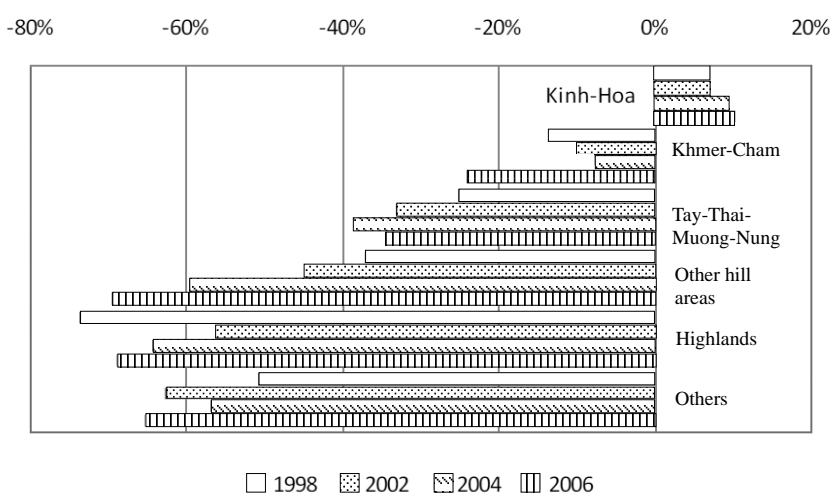
Sources: Baulch et al. (2010); VLSS and VHLSS.

How can we refine the analysis?

In the first place, we spoke this morning of the non-Kinh ethnic groups as a homogenous group. Is it legitimate to regroup them? As quantitativists, we are constrained by sample size: there are 53 non-Kinh ethnic groups, and we would need sample sizes which are out of reach to be able to distinguish them individually in surveys. In the standard survey VHLSS – *Việt Nam Household Living Standard Survey* – by breaking them down and keeping an acceptable level of significance, it is possible to differentiate five “minority” groups. On this basis, we can observe on the one hand that

the situation is still unfavourable to non-Kinh groups who consume less than the average and have a higher poverty rate – with the exception of the Hoa, of Chinese origin, who have been incorporated into the Kinh and in general are in a better situation. On the other hand, we can see that the differences within ethnic groups are sometimes more significant than the gap that separates the Kinh from the average level of the other ethnic groups. The poverty rate among the Kinh in 2006 was 13.5%. It was 35% among the Khmer/Cham, and 72% among the ethnic groups of the Northern mountains.

**Figure 7** *Consumption per Capita:  
Deviation from the National Mean (rural), 1998-2006*



Sources: Baulch et al. (2010); VLSS and VHLSS.

In terms of the dynamics, we can see that ethnic groups are diverging, with the exception of the Khmer/Cham who are moving closer to the average over time.

Average income among the ethnic groups is moving further from the average, and further from that of the Kinh.

**Table 17** *Income from Principal Employment, by Ethnic Group, 2007*

	N° obs.	Monthly income		Hourly income	
		(VND 1,000)	% of Kinh	(VND 1,000)	% of Kinh
Kinh (Việt)	275,543	1,108	100	5,898	100
Non Kinh	44,513	699***	63.1	3,880***	65.8
Hoa (Hán)	3,163	1,795***	162.0	8,566***	145.2
Thái	6,266	517***	46.6	2,886***	48.9
Tày	10,868	602***	54.4	3,357***	56.9
Mường	3,153	526***	47.5	2,891***	49.0
Khơ-me	3,316	875***	79.0	4,979***	84.4
Nùng	3,869	556***	50.2	3,189***	54.1
Hmông (Mèo)	3,352	418***	37.7	3,426***	58.1
Dao	2,218	401***	36.2	2,106***	35.7
Ê Đê	791	1,191	107.4	7,179**	121.7
Gia-rai	865	662***	59.7	3,719***	63.0
Ba na	749	741***	66.9	4,171***	70.7
Xơ-năng	863	422***	38.1	2,527***	42.8
Ra-glai	571	577***	52.0	2,973***	50.4
Cơ-ho	480	1,040	93.8	6,704	113.7
Chăm (Chàm)	477	924***	83.4	5,216*	88.4
Giáy	629	481***	43.4	2,669***	45.3
Other minorities (North)	1,110	521***	47.0	2,833***	48.0
Other Highlands (Centre)	1,484	564***	50.9	3,433***	58.2
Others	282	516***	46.6	2,768***	46.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>320,049</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>95.6</b>	<b>5,658</b>	<b>95.9</b>

\*\*\* \*\* and \*; significant to the 1%, 5% and 10% thresholds respectively.

Absence of asterisks means that the differences in income between Kinh and the other groups are not significant to the 10% threshold.

Sources: Roubaud (2011); LFS 2007; GSO.

In the context of our research in partnership with the GSO, we have succeeded in introducing into the official employment surveys (LFS 2007-2011), which involve very large samples, a variable to identify ethnic groups – which was not the case before. As the sample is particularly large, we were able to obtain far more detail than previously.

Thus, we can distinguish nineteen minority groups – and three aggregate groups. The results confirm our previous diagnosis. As regards income from employment, all the ethnic groups with the exception of the Hoa have monthly and hourly rates below those of the Kinh, the worst paid by far being the Hmong.

**Table 18** *Equation of Earnings in Principal Employment (Non-agricultural) by Ethnic Group in 2007*

(log of hourly remuneration; MCO)						
	<b>Model 1</b>		<b>Model 2</b>		<b>Model 3 (salaried)</b>	
<b>Kinh</b>	0.000	.	0.000	.	0.0000	.
<b>Non Kinh</b>	-.042***	0.009	-.050***	0.009	-.022***	0.006
Hoa (Hán)	-.024	0.017	-.043**	0.017	-.062**	0.014
Thái	-.066*	0.028	-.080**	0.028	-.044**	0.017
Tày	-.026	0.017	-.032*	0.017	0.026**	0.011
Mường	-.050	0.033	-.0419	0.033	-.061***	0.021
Khơ-me	-.046*	0.024	-.044*	0.024	-.031*	0.018
Nùng	-.060*	0.027	-.058**	0.027	-.024	0.019
Hmông (Mèo)	-.137	0.085	-.167**	0.084	-.017	0.050
Dao	0.004	0.061	0.010	0.060	0.047	0.041
Ê Đê	-.1730*	0.095	-.202**	0.094	-.176***	0.059
Gia-rai	-.205*	0.116	-.243**	0.116	-.049	0.067
Ba na	-.195*	0.108	-.224**	0.108	-.127*	0.068
Xơ-ăn	-.028	0.155	-.115	0.154	-.002	0.084
Ra-glai	-.403***	0.148	-.405***	0.147	-.054	0.111
Cơ-ho	-.229	0.209	-.228	0.207	-.006	0.132
Chăm (Chàm)	-.199*	0.079	-.190**	0.079	-.064	0.059
Giáy	0.076	0.085	0.088	0.085	0.080	0.058
Other minorities (North)	-.033	0.054	-.014	0.054	0.006	0.033
Other Highlands (Centre)	-.060	0.073	-.091	0.073	-.013	0.042
Others	0.228*	0.109	0.180	0.108	0.235***	0.068
<b>Fixed Effect Provinces</b>	Yes		Yes		Yes	
<b>N° Observations</b>	202,877		202,877		107,908	
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.185		0.197		<b>0.427</b>	

\*\*\*, \*\* and \*: significant to the 1%, 5% and 10% thresholds respectively.

Absence of asterisks means that the differences in income between Kinh and the other groups are not significant to the 10% threshold.

Note: (non reported) control variables in model 1 are sex, education, professional experience, place of residence (urban, rural);

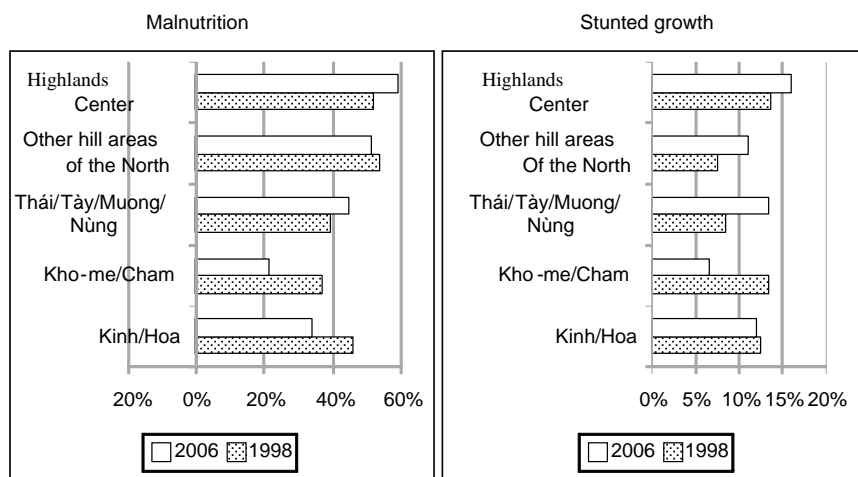
for models 2 and 3 the institutional sector of employment is added

Sources: Roubaud (2011); LFS 2007; GSO.

After controlling for human capital, there remains an average gap of 40 to 25% to the detriment of non-Kinh ethnic groups. But if we limit ourselves to non-agricultural jobs, i.e. mainly to salaried jobs, we can see that hardly any gap exists between the Kinh and other groups. Thus, in town, ethnic groups which have migrated are not discriminated against because they have equivalent levels of performance – in terms of employment revenue – to those of the Kinh. Until now,

research was targeted more on the rural minority groups because the vast majority of these live in the country, and sample sizes were too small to allow the study of minorities in the city. Two questions emerge from these results: why do ethnic minorities so seldom migrate? And are the individuals who have migrated in some way special, non-representative because they have self-selected?

**Figure 8** *Indicator of Nutritional Status of Children under 5 years According to Ethnic Group (Rural), 1998-2006*

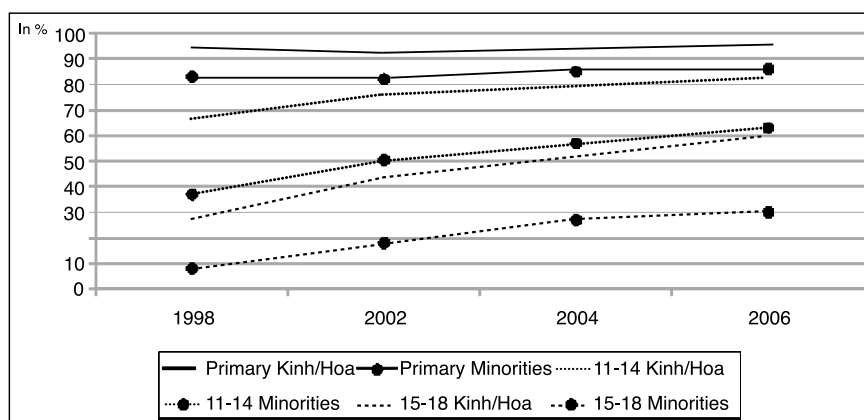


Sources: Baulch et al. (2010); VHLSS 1998 and VHLSS 2008.

Let's move on now from this field of analysis, focused on income and consumption. By looking at other aspects of living conditions, we will see that the indicators are systematically to the detriment of ethnic

minorities, whatever the dimension of well-being considered. Thus the indicators of childhood nutrition deteriorate over time – again with the exception of the Khmer/Cham.

**Figure 9** *Net Schooling Rate by Level of Education According to Ethnic Group (Rural), 1998-2006*



Sources: Baulch et al. (2010); VHLSS 1998 and VHLSS 2008.

We find similar results for education: it is improving in Việt Nam but less rapidly for the minorities; this finding is even starker at the higher levels of education.

In the end, all the indicators at our disposal from surveys converge to show that even when broken down, the situation is different for the various non-Kinh groups, but the latter are always at a disadvantage in relation to the Kinh.

The gap between the Kinh and the other groups derives from characteristics which we have identified (see above) or which we can deduce because they are hard to measure, like language for example – the non-mastery of Vietnamese can cause problems when making economic transactions, during interactions with the administrative authorities, at school, and so on. In a survey by Programme 135 (P135), we showed that being able to speak Vietnamese, for a member of an ethnic minority group, reduced poverty

when compared to those who could not (Herrera *et al.*, 2009). Obviously, the quality of the land is also important – the Kinh mainly cultivate irrigated land: 88% irrigated land compared to 44% for the other ethnic groups. In addition, the low urban migration by ethnic minorities can be explained by their lack of networks and information, notably as regards the new, more flexible policies regarding residence permits.

The question of culture remains, and will be broached during the qualitative surveys which Christian Culas will speak about. We could imagine that pressure from the community, social and religious conventions and obligations could limit productivity and the desire to accumulate riches, which are perhaps not the most important objective for these ethnic groups. In majority culture, stereotypes have a tendency to stigmatize and discriminate against the minorities. A study of the treatment of the minorities in the Vietnamese press (Nguyễn Văn Chính,

2010) shows this clearly: it's stated, among other things, that the minorities are less "civilized", that they are "backward", and "more

attached to primitive beliefs, superstitions, taboos, etc."

**Table 19** *Values, Attitudes and Behaviour as Regards "Integrity" According to Ethnic Group in 2010*

<b>B1. What is your opinion of the following types of behaviour?</b>	<b>Kinh</b>	<b>Non Kinh</b>	<b>Crude diff.</b>	<b>Crude diff. <sup>(1)</sup></b>
A leader does something which is illegal but allows your family a better standard of living ( <i>reprehensible behaviour</i> )	93.2%	77.5%	+ 15.7**	+**
A leader does something which is illegal but allows your family a better standard of living ( <i>unacceptable behaviour</i> )	89.8%	66.3%	+ 23.5***	+***
An official demands an unofficial payment for a service which is part of his job ( <i>unacceptable behaviour</i> )	88.5%	78.7%	+ 9.8**	+**
<b>B2. In your view, a person considered as having integrity in daily life means that this person:</b>				
Shows solidarity and support to his family and his friends in any situation, even if that means breaking the law	19%	30.8%	- 11.8**	-**
<b>B3. Which is more important: to have riches or to have integrity?</b>				
Having riches is more important and it is acceptable to lie or cheat, ignore the law and abuse your power to attain that objective	3.7%	13.5%	- 9.8**	-***
<b>B5. What is most important?</b>				
Finding ways to increase family income is most important, and it is acceptable to ignore the law and abuse your power to attain that objective	7.1%	19.8%	- 12.7***	-***

\*\*\* significant to 1%; \*\* significant to 5%; \* significant to 10%; n.s.: insignificant to 10%.

(1): logistical model; control variables: sex, age, level of education, place of residence (urban, rural), religion, sector of economic activity.

Sources: Dang Giang et al. (2011); Youth Integrity Survey YIS 2010; authors' calculations.

To go further in the area of culture, we have tried to touch on values from a quantitative point of view by doing a national-level survey (including minorities) on integrity and corruption among the young (Dang Giang *et al.*, 2011). We see that the non-Kinh ethnic groups seem, in certain cases, more "accommodating" as regards the principal moral conventions and corruption in daily life. We have created a range of hypothetical questions which converge. For example, a civil servant demands an unofficial payment

for a service which is part of his duties: is this unacceptable behaviour? We see that fewer people from these groups than from the Kinh consider this behaviour unacceptable. Which is more important, to be rich or to be honest? Even though they represent a minority overall, there are more non-Kinh individuals who think that to be rich is more important, that it is acceptable to lie, to ignore the law and to abuse power to attain this objective. We have research under way to explain these results.

**Table 20** *Experience of Corruption and Confidence in Institutions According to Ethnic Group in 2010*

B7. Have you been confronted by corruption in the past 12 months?					
	No contact		Level of corruption (among those in contact)		Difference (net) <sup>(1)</sup>
	Kinh	Non-Kinh	Kinh	Non-Kinh	
a. To obtain a document or a permit	64.2%	80.2%	20.4*	10.2	n.s.
c. To get medicine or get yourself treated in a health centre	55.6%	63.4%	30.3***	7.4	+**
d. To avoid a problem with the police	81.3%	92.9%	28.3	28.3	n.s.
B8. What is your opinion of the level of integrity of the following services today?					
	Without integrity		Difference (Crude)		Difference (Net) <sup>(1)</sup>
	Kinh	Non-Kinh			
a. Local/national administration	36.2%	47.2%	-11.0		-***
b. Police, Security forces	45.2%	43.6%	1.6		n.s.
e. Public health centre	44.2%	30.6%	13.6*		n.s.
f. Private health centre	40.6%	48.2%	-7.6		n.s.
g. Public enterprise	50.7%	35.2%	15.5***		n.s.
h. Private enterprise	54.4%	52.5%	1.9		n.s.

\*\*\* significant to 1%; \*\* significant to 5%; \* significant to 10%; n.s.: insignificant to 10%.

(1): logistical model; control variables: sex, age, level of education, place of residence (urban, rural), religion, sector of economic activity.

Sources: Dang Giang et al. (2011); Youth Integrity Survey YIS 2010; authors' calculations.

Our approach towards practices and behaviour has been identical. We see that the Kinh are more affected by corruption. Visibly, the relationship between the State and the other ethnic groups does not always progress in the way one would have predicted. But paradoxically, and although they are less affected by corruption, the ethnic minorities have less confidence in the local and national administration.

This has consequences for a number of development projects, because finding an entry point to reach ethnic groups is really a problem in terms of delivering results from the policies that are implemented. It is important to develop programmes which allow the best possible participation of ethnic groups in the design of policies and in follow-up and evaluation.



**Table 21** *The Management of Infrastructure Projects within the P135-II Programme: the Reality of the Participative Process*

	P135-II	Non-P135-II
<b>Phase of project selection</b>		
Organization of meetings for the selection of projects	86.5	80.2
Participation by households in meetings for the selection of projects (%)		
- 1: according to commune leaders	87.7	87.0
- 2: according to the responses given by households	49.3	50.0
Households in agreement with project selection: (1: commune leaders)	98.1	98.5
Households which expressed an opinion (2: household responses)	27.4	31.8
Households whose opinion was considered in selection (2: household responses)	55.4	56.7
<b>Supervision / follow-up of projects by the local population</b>		
Infrastructure projects followed up by the population	81.9	76.0
Participation by households in meetings (1: commune leaders)	87.7	87.0
Participation by households in meetings (2: household responses)	49.2	50.0
Detailed financial information made public (1)	52.8	66.7
Households which had received detailed financial information (2)	11.1	10.6

Sources: Herrera et al. (2009); P135-II Baseline Survey 2007; authors' calculations.

The P135 programme, conceived according to the principle of participation, constitutes a step forward in this domain, but it is far from being fully effective. Thus, leaders at the communal level declare that 90% of the populations are consulted and actively participate, while only 50% of the beneficiaries state that they have participated in these reunions and consultation (Herrera *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, looking more deeply, the work of Christophe Gironde and his team (2009) shows that the modalities of this participation, such as voting by raising hands, the order in which people speak at these meetings – leaders give their opinion first, which makes it difficult for anyone who disagrees –, create social pressure, which limits the beneficial effects of this participation, and of course changes the picture painted by the statistics. So we must go beyond statistics to analyze the real situation.

Are the Vietnamese authorities aware of these difficulties, which are not only economic but political?

If we look at action taken in the public sector, we can say that overall, for ethnic groups, there are two types of policy:

- Policies which are not intended only to target ethnic groups. In fact, any policy has a potential impact on minorities: for example if a policy benefits the rural context, and if ethnic groups are over-represented there – which is the case in Việt Nam – they will benefit from it more than most. Thus, policies linked to the coffee boom on the Central plateau are somewhat favourable to certain ethnic groups. Typically and in contrast, the promotion of foreign direct investment in the urban context is unfavourable to ethnic minorities. However:

- There are policies which are implemented specifically for the minority groups, such as transfers or improving conditions for these groups – for example policies which allow exemption from school fees or free social welfare or access to credit. There are also policies which target communes or regions where minority groups are over-represented – such as the P135 programme which we spoke of earlier.

Inter-provincial budgetary transfers, which are particularly massive in Việt Nam and far higher than those seen in Europe – 20% of the GDP created in Hồ Chí Minh City stays in that province, while half of the GDP of the Northern provinces comes from other better-endowed regions –, are one of the first categories of policies. These enormous transfers favour the inhabitants of poor regions of the country, and include a large proportion of the ethnic minorities. However, because the population of these areas is mixed (Kinh/non-Kinh), are these budgets shared out fairly at the province or commune level? Christian Culas will analyze this question in more detail.

### Christian Culas

In this second part of the lecture, I will summarize the policies implemented by the Vietnamese government to deal with the ethnic groups since the country's independence, then I will spend longer on an anthropological "state of play" of the living conditions of the ethnic groups.

### 1.2.2. What Policies with Regard to Ethnic Groups?

*The various policies followed in Việt Nam as regards ethnic groups from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards could not be summarized in this document. In agreement with the authors, we direct the reader interested in these particularly complex issues to the selective bibliography offered at the end of the chapter.*

With the reunification of Việt Nam in 1975 came an overall national project, which was to forge a "new man" based on socialism. This was a unifying project both politically and culturally. The two autonomous zones in the North of the country which had been created in the 1950s were dissolved.

The 1981 Constitution brought to light the ambiguity of the State between a desire to defend Vietnamese culture and its unity, and the evocation of its ethnic diversity; one can sense tensions between the singular Vietnamese culture and the plural of its ethnicity.

Significant population movements were orchestrated by the State, with in parallel the creation of new economic zones – displacements of delta populations, notably Kinh, towards the mountainous provinces and the regions seen as isolated. These displacements affected between three and five million individuals. Kinh people, relocated to mountainous areas, became

businesspeople or worked in the service sector – very rarely in the agricultural sector. The cultural mix increases.

### *Some Measures not Specifically Targeted at the Ethnic Minorities*

The land reform law of 1993 marked a significant change in the relationship between the rural population and the State: land would from now on be attributed to households for defined periods – rice terraces for 25 years, forest lands for 50 years, habitable plots for a “long duration” without precise definition. For the first time, a cadastral survey with personal land titles was created. This

allowed households to gain land titles, and others were evicted.

François Roubaud mentioned the development of coffee in the Highlands and of rubber; these crops heightened the tensions between local ethnic groups and national production companies which derived a large part of their land from the expropriation of the local population. Overall, the development of the provinces advanced, but to the detriment of the ethnic groups which were often dispossessed of their land and rarely employed in the plantations, in contrast to the Kinh populations displaced from the deltas who became the new users of this land.

#### Box 3

*Numerous programmes in favour of disadvantaged populations: the National Programme to combat poverty, the National Programme for the provision of water and sanitation in rural areas, etc.*

*Programme 135 or “Programme to reduce poverty in communes facing extreme difficulty in mountainous areas and with ethnic populations”*

*- Phase 1: launched in 1998 (7 years’ duration)*

*- Phase 2: 2006-2010*

*Participation of numerous international donors (World Bank, UN, etc.)*

*Thorough preparation: many consultations and studies; a particular emphasis on local capacity-building, participatory approaches and decentralization of management which is left to the communes*

*Implementation under the responsibility of the Committee on Ethnic Minorities (CEMA).*

*Source: Author’s construction.*

### *Policies and Programmes in Favour of Ethnic Groups*

Let’s come back to these policies adopted to restore the balance of development between the Kinh and the ethnic minorities. Programme 135 affects over 40 provinces

in Việt Nam and targets ethnic groups. It remains difficult to grasp as it is concerned with almost every aspect of local life: infrastructures – roads, bridges, schools, dispensaries, etc. –, agricultural assistance, training, health, etc. This intervention is limited by its own multi-thematic ambition.

In addition, its implementation and attribution, whether at local, communal or provincial level, are cruelly unclear.

Phase 1 of the programme (1998-2005) was mainly managed by the provinces. During phase 2, the donors, realising the ineffectiveness of the programme, altered its scale by intervening at the district and commune level. In reality, the results of the two phases were not very different. Currently we're in phase 3, and responsibility lies with the Committee on Ethnic Minorities, a national body which has almost the same status as a ministry.

How can we interpret the differences seen between the expected outcomes of an ambitious programme and the actual results in the field? The ethnic groups' lack of understanding of the programme is often mentioned. However, the Vietnamese authorities who managed the programme at different levels didn't really grasp it either. How could those on the receiving end at village level understand it better? Communication and language used between the ethnic groups and the programme's mediators are often cited, but it's important to nuance this because the bulk of local actors for the ethnic groups did speak enough Vietnamese. We must look to another difficulty, one of relationship: depending on how the State administrators presented themselves to the ethnic minorities, the latter might prove reticent about communicating, and therefore find it difficult to participate in these programmes. So it's not only a problem of language ability but also of the level of confidence between the representatives of the State and the local population.

### *Some Data on the Scale and Political Representation of Ethnic Groups in Việt Nam*

How are the ethnic groups represented at national level? At the level of the Vietnamese National Assembly, representation is rather good – about 17% of its members belong to ethnic groups, which is higher than the actual proportion, 14%. Do they hold key positions or lowly ones? What is the link between a member of an ethnic community and the defence of that group's interests at Assembly level? Many members of ethnic groups, when they reach the corridors of power, forget their origins and get caught up in the power games at national level. Thus an ethnic representation does exist at the start, but is hardly effective in terms of acting at the highest levels of the State to improve the realities of daily life for the ethnic groups.

### **1.2.3. The Socio-anthropological View: Attempts to Unpick these Issues**

The observations above about ethnic groups cannot really be challenged, but the statistics can be discussed. Overall, the level of development of the Kinh and of the ethnic groups differs at all levels. Most projects, particularly large-scale ones financed by the international community, prove to have limited efficacy. In this third section, we will see the reasons for this failure and why the relationships between the State and ethnic groups are so complex.

Firstly, there's a problem of lack of understanding or adaptation. The Vietnamese State applies standards defined at national level, which are based on those imposed internationally. At the ethnic, local level, one can question the effectiveness, utility or

acceptance of these standards. In addition, in numerous projects, ethnic groups resist and struggle against the way in which development is imposed on them. This kind of challenge hardly ever finds its way into the evaluation reports of development projects; adding some descriptions of misappropriation and resistance would however be highly valuable in gaining a better understanding of field realities.

As you may have noticed, I avoid using the term “ethnic minority” because it is linked to a specific ideological position. As François Roubaud has shown, ethnic groups have multiple, heterogenous realities. The Hmong, the Dao, the Thai, the Nung, the Brou and others are present in several countries, and their classification at national level is a political and social construct.

The term “minority” firstly brings to mind a demographic characteristic. It’s obvious at national level – 14% of the Vietnamese population – but the reality can be very different at the province or district level where these groups can become numerically the majority.

One could also unpick the other connotations of the word “minority” – have these populations not reached their “majority” in the sense that they are not responsible? We will see that this “lack of responsibility” is often cited as one of the difficulties for development projects in ethnic villages. We also find this idea in the Vietnamese Constitution which sets out that the State will take charge of the “material and moral development of the ethnic groups”.

**Figure 10** “Minorities” Described on What Scale?

**At local level**

**Province of Lào Cai: 65% minorities**

- Điện Biên Phủ: 79% ethnic groups
- Hà Giang: 80% ethnic groups
- Lai Chau: 86% ethnic groups (Northern Việt Nam)

Ethnic groups  
65%

**Kinh population**

**At State level**

**Việt Nam: 14%**

- Laos: 52% ethnic groups
- Thailand: 3% ethnic groups

Ethnic groups  
14%

**Kinh population**

**At regional level**

**(hill regions of 5 countries)**

Việt Nam, Laos, Thailand, Burma, China

Ethnic groups  
70-80%

**Population which control the State**

Source: Author's construction.

Let's try to describe the ethnic populations on three different scales. At the local level (province and district), the ethnic groups are in the majority in all the Northern and frontier provinces according to the Vietnamese census of 2009. If we look at the situation in 1995, the percentage would be even higher because that would be before the great waves of migration of the Kinh from the delta towards the mountainous areas. Although five million Kinh from the delta settled in the highlands, there remained a very clear majority of ethnic groups in these areas. Despite being in the majority at local level, ethnic representatives are however in the minority in the bodies of local politics. It would be interesting to look at what percentage of people from ethnic groups have held positions of major responsibility over the last 20 years, whether at provincial level, in the People's Committee, in the Party or in other decision-making structures.

Let's compare the situation with those of other countries in the region. In Laos, the ethnic "minorities" are in the majority at the national level. In Thailand, they represent only 3% of the population. At the level of Southeast Asia, looking at land above 500m in altitude, ethnic groups are clearly in the majority. These points show that depending on how you present the data, the results are different. The State term of "minority" is not relevant in all contexts and should be used with care, whilst underlining the preconceptions. Unfortunately, many researchers do not challenge this terminology and the ideological position which underlies it, both of which raise issues.

### *National and Ethnic Standards of Development*

Let's turn now to ways in which we can evaluate development among ethnic

groups. The issues around the construction and choice of criteria are in the worst case Western-centric, in the best case nation-centric – that is to say that each State produces its own logic, in agreement with the majority, dominant population, and this will then be applied to the ethnic groups. Are these criteria really applicable to the minority groups, and how effective are they? Looking at the needs of ethnic groups, it is interesting to note that project P135 is active in many communes with a rather high level of development: strong self-sufficiency in food, households with motorbikes, televisions, refrigerators, etc. Projects often intervene in areas where the inhabitants already have the necessary minimum. How have the needs of ethnic groups been evaluated and according to what criteria? These questions remain as opaque and hazy as the definition of the ethnic groups themselves. Projects take into account too seldom the way in which beneficiaries think of development and would like to achieve it. Not all individuals have the same plans, the same wishes. Wouldn't it be more relevant to have specific criteria which include the way individuals see their own development at local level?

Earlier, François Roubaud mentioned criteria such as geographical distance, difficulty of access to public services, to schooling, healthcare, etc. These approaches are necessary but insufficient:

- (In)accessibility is not necessarily experienced as a negative issue. For example, some Hmong and Dao groups produce cardamom above 1,000 metres of altitude in the most remote areas of Lào Cai province. These agricultural producers are the richest in the province despite living in the most remote villages. Here, the

relationship between roads and poverty does not operate. Neither did it in the past: the remote villages which were opium producers were far richer;

- As regards cultural, linguistic and communication distances; some groups are thought not to be able to speak Vietnamese. But the major issue is the way in which the representative of the State presents him/herself in the villages. The ethnic groups which usually interact with the administration are often sceptical and suspicious. There are issues around listening, negotiations, and so on;
- The distances involved in identity are even more sensitive and harder to measure. Each person belongs to a different group – has a sense of belonging to his family, his village, his commune, his province, his State or his ethnicity. This sense of belonging is determined by relationships of confidence and identification. It is interesting to note that these criteria have never been measured;
- The level of trust also raises issues. Very often, ethnic groups are very suspicious as regards development projects and the people implementing them. This is never brought out in evaluations. Local memory is also important, as a village which had already had a fairly negative experience with a project would be very hostile towards any new project.

*Ethnic Groups Do Not Want to Implement Development Projects such as They Are Proposed by the State?*

What autonomous initiatives exist outside the project? Here are three examples which seem significant to me:

- The case of tree-planting from local nurseries, outside any project. The contrast is striking: the national level reforestation project involving five million hectares of forest (project 661) attained a success rate of about 45% locally after three years – despite technical support, training and financial support –; in the same areas, the same types of trees were introduced by ethnic groups from their own nurseries without support. The success rate reached 70%. Naturally, projects rarely mention this kind of local initiative which could undermine the intervention;
- We have the example of “organic” training, designed to support the production of “clean” vegetables, delivered at district level when in fact the techniques had been known for several years. Our interviews demonstrated that the beneficiaries had learned nothing new, but had been thrilled to have spent 2 weeks at district level;
- To show you that ethnic groups are not that disconnected from networks: in 2011, after a sharp increase in the price of manioc, numerous villages in the north of Việt Nam increased their cultivated land areas by 40% as compared to 2009. The significant increase in income which resulted was directly linked to their knowledge of stable and durable Vietnamese and Chinese purchasing networks.

How do ethnic groups get along with development projects?

The local population often readjusts projects to suit its own needs. We’re currently working on a case in point. It involves a commune of 16 villages, of which seven are classed poor and should in theory receive assistance from project P135. In reality, we have seen that ten to twelve villages have benefited

from support. At the commune level, the authorities decided to bypass the criteria defined by the national programme:

- This does not appear in any report on the project: so there is no official trace, but this is visible during field surveys;
- This proves the local flexibility of the project, but it is an unanticipated flexibility. We can also see at the local level a very strong capacity for reappropriating projects. Projects are transformed through a local reformulation, and people make of the project what seems important to them. But on the other hand, participation is weak;
- A positive aspect of reappropriation: it allows assistance to villages which need it, but this happens outside the official framework of the P135 programme; these local arrangements make the programme more equitable;
- A negative aspect of reappropriation: powerful families profit from this flexibility to their advantage, and this gives inequitable results.

What methods of resistance do ethnic groups use against changes imposed from the outside, and against development projects?

As was the case with readjustments, it is very difficult to find cases of resistance to projects in written documents. In our case study, we went to Hmong villages with a Vietnamese-speaking interviewer and one who spoke Hmong. We realized that Hmong interlocutors often pretended not to be able to speak Vietnamese and refused to talk to the staff who spoke Vietnamese. However, they were much more open with the surveyors who spoke their language. In reality, the Hmong people we spoke to spoke Vietnamese well, but refused to do so

in certain contexts. What we have here is the choice not to communicate, it is not linguistic competence which is in question.

Besides, in the villages the beneficiaries never say "no" to a project even if they are convinced that it is useless. They accept it in order to adapt it or opt for a totally passive attitude towards it.

The State intervenes a great deal with ethnic groups including in the cultural domain – in terms of freedom of expression but also for the length of wedding celebrations or funeral rites. Let's take a significant example. Many of the ethnic groups in the North are Taoist. During the major communist period when combating religions and superstitions was a priority, government agents came to the villages to destroy ritualistic books. After thirty years, the agents of the same State services returned to the villages to protect the holy books and put them in museums (!). The relationship between the State and the local population is determined by history and political choices. If you read history diachronically, you begin to understand elements of the relationship between the State and ethnic groups.

How can relations of trust be established on this basis? How can the ethnic groups take ownership of projects which, according to them, *"have the objective of helping to improve our lives"* but which are *"dreamt up by people who know nothing of our daily life"*?

I will finish this lecture with various propositions:

- The economic dimension is essential, but we must suggest a wider reading of wants and needs. From long-term surveys, we can state that social conditions, social networks,



quality of life defined by local criteria, local equilibrium between needs and working hours, the local balance between independence and consumption, etc. must also be taken into account;

- It is important to consider the point of view of local actors, which is rarely done. Often, in the best case scenario, the main local actor is the village chief; in the worst-case, it's the head of the Patriotic Front or the head of the commune who have administrative positions of power and are for that reason more likely to make consensual speeches than describe the reality of local conditions. On the other hand, in development, one rarely comes across "ordinary peasants";
- We should also bypass the verbosity of the "participatory approach", which only takes account of local actors once the project is finalized on paper and supported by a donor, that is once the project cannot be further altered;
- Finally, if we stand back a little we can imagine that the current standards of international development will be different in a few years, for example as fashions change and have an impact, poverty, biodiversity, climate change, reduction of carbon emissions, good governance, etc. will become obsolete, and we will then ask other things from the ethnic groups to enable them finally to find a normal place in modernity and in the bliss of consumption.

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## Exchanges...

**Nguyễn Thị Văn, Institute of sociology**

Could you pinpoint for us the communities in which you did your research? Did you participate in a particular project, or were you just talking about development projects for reference?

Development projects in favour of ethnic minorities, notably those financed by the World Bank, do an *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation. I myself have participated in different evaluation teams for development projects in the mountainous regions of Việt Nam. I have not come across the same problems that you mention in your presentation. I am not saying that you are wrong, but I don't agree with your point of view from which, to my mind, the reality of Việt Nam is absent. Research in the mountainous regions of the North and in the Mekong delta show clearly the positive benefits which development projects have brought to poor communities. Moreover, the second phase of the poverty reduction project, financed by the World Bank, prioritizes the issue of gender – women's participation is encouraged. The participative approach is taken into consideration.

**Roeungdeth Chanreasmey,  
Technology Institute of Cambodia**

Like Việt Nam, Cambodia is made up of several ethnic groups who have benefited from development plans and anti-discriminatory measures. What are the needs of the ethnic groups? Will they accept the majority group? In Cambodia, we have developed strategies for access to education, health and political life for these groups, all the while preserving their traditions and ways of life. Do you

think that the ethnic groups really want to integrate into the labour market, especially in the service sector and in urban areas?

**Mireille Razafindrakoto**

Our research work is under way. We are raising questions and suggesting partial answers, which are not in any sense conclusions. In the first place, François Roubaud sketched out the "state of play" using classic indicators for the analysis of the development of different categories of individuals, populations and ethnic groups. After that, we searched for the rationale behind these figures, using an anthropological analysis. These development plans are not totally negative, and fortunately some effective, relevant programmes exist! In addition, we are not criticizing the participative approach itself, but its implementation. Could the projects in which you were involved and which you consider successful be put into widespread use?

At the macro, quantitative level, projects addressing ethnic minorities do not seem very effective – let me ask you to look again at the table on the management of infrastructure projects above. The evidence suggests that the participatory approach does exist, but we must look at the conditions and means of its application. So for example, when asking about the satisfaction a project gives, evaluations often use only closed questions (yes/no). In addition, we can see a clear distortion between the answers given by the project leaders and those of the households involved in the meetings about project selection – 90% against 50%. Where does this difference come from? How are these consultations and meetings organized? Only 30% of households express any opinion. Doesn't this raise questions?

## Christian Culas

I won't deny that the Vietnamese State puts into place projects which transform the lives of peasants and ethnic groups. However, my objective here is to analyze the weaknesses of these projects – not their strong points. In addition, three levels of data exist: 1) official figures, which are often produced after the surveys; 2) figures produced after short surveys using “mechanical” methods (questionnaires, PRA, etc.); finally, 3) the figures we have produced after a long-term survey – two years of immersion –, where we asked no questions, but participated in local life and left the villagers to express themselves according to their own rhythm. Let's come back to the anecdote about the “organic” training for peasants; it points to the fact that the donors and the people responsible for the project are either uninformed or leave certain points out of their reports. Either way, this is a problem. Often, these populations are very critical of development projects, but obviously they are not sharing their opinions with the people in charge of project evaluation. What I am puzzled by is the overall relationship between the conception and the perception of projects. Often, projects are designed far from local realities, based on rapid surveys structured to obtain a certain type of response which excludes everything which does not fit with the rest. The data which Ms. Vãn mentions are data of type 2, produced through short-term surveys. They are therefore fairly positive but different from thorough anthropological data, which result from immersion in the practices and habits of the inhabitants; these are inaccessible to people who only stay in the village for one week. I'm currently working on a thorough study at Lào Cai in a Tay community. One would think that by scaling

up what is known at a small scale, it would be possible to bring a new angle to the larger scale. The anthropological approach – which starts from micro-level studies, presupposing that the neighbouring community is fairly similar – functions in the opposite way from that of economists – who start with large-scale statistics to formulate general laws.

## Christophe Gironde, University of Geneva

François has presented the overall differences between the Kinh and the ethnic minorities. Do broken down data exist at the local level? Are the differences at local level greater or smaller than the overall figures? He also showed us a table showing their different evolution over time, respectively. These evolutions – are they not respective but linked? Using the method of breaking down presented, is it possible to connect the progress of one to the detriment of the others? Finally, there is one question which has not been asked but to my mind is obvious: why are participative sessions biased? To my mind, social pressure is strong: how can one contradict the project leader, the Party secretary of the commune, the president of the People's Committee, the representative of the Patriotic Front; how can one defend one's point of view publicly, on the platform? On another point, representatives explain that it is very complex to run truly participatory processes, which would result in potential tension between individuals' different aspirations. One must take into account not only how populations function, but how the administration does so too.

## Virginie Diaz, AFD

I would like to underline that there are several types of international aid. There are not only the projects described by Christian Culas,

but also budgetary aid, given directly then managed by the Departments at the central and national level. As a donor representative, I can tell you that there are many projects which do succeed and are positive for the population. Obviously, projects fail too, some spending is not justified on the ground, which can create numerous problems. Finally, I'd like more details on the origins of programme P135 and its design.

### Grégoire Schlemmer, IRD

As regards discrimination, to my mind we have spoken more about minorities than about ethnic minorities. A whole range of issues which can discriminate against groups has been presented: geographical distance, linguistic factors, poverty, rural way of life, etc. However, very few truly ethnic aspects have been put forward, in terms of belonging to a specific group. Obviously the factors are often correlated, but the ethnic factor is rarely exclusive. I agree with what has been said by Christian Culas. But this concerns any local population, not only ethnic groups. It's above all a problem of communication within a dominant relationship. One must find an interlocutor who has known the population over the long term.

Ethnicity is also a form of political affiliation. This is not often argued because it touches on the sensitive question of competition with the State. When one speaks of "ethnic groups" I question that term – the Kinh are an ethnic group. When one uses the term "minority", that doesn't specifically refer to ethnicity.

### Nguyễn Thị Thiếng, National Economics University of Hà Nội

It seems to me that the definition and the use of the term "minority groups" should not

be so politicized. The label refers above all to demographic significance, and we know that the Kinh represent about 80% of the total population of the country.

### Christian Culas

I welcome the interventions which take a critical approach, citing local examples. I re-emphasize that my intervention is focused on what does not work. If you read the evaluation reports of development projects, you will find very little on what does not work. My work relates to a few particular cases, which does not stop me recognizing that the Vietnamese State does implement projects that work. I've worked in Việt Nam for fifteen years now, and I am absolutely aware of the efforts that the government makes towards the Hmong, for example, which is a population that does not easily accept standards and constraints imposed from the outside. On the other hand, the Hmong are one of the most successful ethnic groups in economic terms, and one of the best integrated into the administrative system in Laos and Thailand. That's something worthy of reflection.

Qualifying a population as a "minority" is certainly demographic; but another interpretation is possible, I would even say necessary, to gain a broader comprehension of the relationships between the State and its various different populations.

### François Roubaud

The definition and the statistics used in our presentation are the official ones. This is not a reinterpretation using different definitions or data.

As regards programme P135, it covers all communes with ethnic minorities living in

poverty, which corresponds to 43 provinces out of 63.

To answer Christophe Gironde, we have the means to examine the gaps at local level. When we use our techniques for estimation and breaking down, we take account of the gap caused by geographical location. In this presentation, we have shown you the figures at regional level. I believe that at the local level the gaps between the Kinh and other ethnic groups should be smaller, because in the mountains the populations are on average poorer than in urban areas or areas of rapid development.

On the second question, relative to the Kinh who monopolize the resources of other ethnic groups, my immediate response is negative.

Vietnamese growth and redistributive policies are not a zero sum game. Overall, the poorer socio-economic development of the ethnic groups is not to the advantage of the Kinh.

Finally, to reply to Grégoire Schlemmer, the equations show that there always remains something residual in the differences between living standards, something which is not linked to geographical location, nor to educational level, nor to capital, etc., and which is therefore entirely due to ethnicity.

*Lecture text*  
([www.tamdaoconf.com](http://www.tamdaoconf.com))

*Bob Baulch, Pham Thai Hung, Nguyen Thi Thu Phuong, The Economic Development of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, Policy Brief, Hanoi, 9 p.*



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