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Vietnam's Mountain Problematique

Debating Development, Policy and Politics in Mountain Areas

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To Sylvaine and Huong

Abstract

Mountains make up two thirds of Vietnam's territory and are home to some 25 million people. They host a great natural resource potential that serves the national economy with water, hydropower as well as mineral and forest resources. Some biodiversity hotspots and areas of cultural and environmental heritage are moreover important features for a growing tourism industry. However, there are serious development problems in mountain areas, caused by factors such as unequal terms of trade, political under-representation, and ambiguous relationships between the lowland and the upland population. During Vietnam's economic renovation process *doi moi*, the gap between the mountain regions and the prosperous delta areas continues to grow. The development situation in Vietnam's northern mountain region raises increasing national and international concern.

This thesis provides a political ecological analysis of Vietnam's mountain problematique. Its focus of investigation shifts between different scales from the local to the global and evolves around the three main themes of: 1) the mountain problematique; 2) the making and remaking of mountains in Vietnam; and 3) democratisation, decentralisation and the influences of better governance structures on sustainable mountain development. It explores the discursive plurality of mountain problems as being discussed in an international mountain development debate and shows how policies and concepts for the protection of mountain resources and the development of mountain communities get formulated, implemented and contested in the national and local contexts of a socialist country in transition.

The thesis analyses the underlying structures of Vietnam's mountain problematique, such as political system, policy style, structures of knowledge and economic orientation, that contribute to the emergence and persistence of environmental and development problems in mountain areas. It critically assesses the opportunities and constraints of the interlinkages between the political landscape of individual nation-states and mountain development embedded in an increasingly globalised policy discourse.

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Acronyms

ARDO	Agriculture and Rural Development Office
CEMMA	Committee for Ethnic Minority People and Mountain Areas
CPI	International Potato Centre
CPR	Common-property rights
FAO	United National Food and Agriculture Organisation
FIPI	Forest Inventory and Planning Institute
GDLA	General Department for Land Administration
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MoSTE	Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment
MPT	Ministry for Post and Telecommunication
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PARC	Creating Protected Areas for Resource Conservation Project
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SAM	Mountain Agrarian Systems Project
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Mountains in Transition

The International Year of Mountains 2002 has spread the word. It has become conventional wisdom to speak about mountains as the water towers of the future, forest and mineral resource providers, hotspots of biodiversity and cultural heritage, home of one tenth of the world's population, and source for societal recreation and religious and psychological inspiration. For all the functions mountains assume for humankind, they are internationally, nationally and locally contested landscapes, or to put it differently: they are politicised environments. Their very resource endowments, aesthetic appeals, and niche for both biodiversity and socio-cultural heritage place mountains in dense webs of economic, social, and political interests. At the same time, mountains and mountain peoples are considered as being under great pressure. It is claimed that environmental degradation in mountain areas is rapidly progressing and mountain cultures are on the verge of being lost forever.

Mountains were put on the international environmental and development agenda at the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development at Rio in 1992. They were identified as fragile ecosystems of which protection and sustainable development require specific attention and policy frameworks. Many insights into the complex nature of mountain environments and mountain societies have been gained by research and development programmes during the last ten years. And most recently, the International Year of Mountains 2002 has brought the case for sustainable mountain development successfully to the fore of the international environmental and development policy debates. Environmental degradation and poverty are identified as prevalent problems in mountain areas to be addressed with 'better' policies and more political commitment. However, our understanding about mountains and their relationships with the wider world is still relatively limited.

For many decades, research activities and policy interventions in mountain areas largely focused on how to deal with the biophysical factors that put constraints to agricultural production and economic growth and make the establishment and maintenance of infrastructure extremely difficult and costly. Huge progress was achieved in infrastructure development, and the search for opportunities for high value niche products, the establishment of nature reserves, and the delineation of unique zones for recreation strengthened the comparative advantages of the inherently disadvantaged mountain areas. However, more recent political and social science perspectives on mountains environments and societies suggest that the far reaching and rapid impacts of globalisation, capitalist penetration, and economic and social change have brought about more substantial and long-lasting changes to mountain communities and environments than physical and technological processes alone. Many of the mountain regions, for example, have for a long time been exploited by lowland industries for their natural resource endowment, often

through unequal terms of trade. The incorporation of mountain areas into larger political and national entities have made many mountain populations minority ethnic or religious groups. Settlement patterns have changed with migration processes and resettlement programmes. Dependencies on markets and political decisions made in the power centres of the lowlands have emerged. It seems therefore, that the problems of progressive environmental degradation, poverty, and social marginalisation are not confined to mountain environments and mountain peoples alone. Many of them are triggered and enforced by the nature of the relationships between mountains and the lowlands.

These relationships find expression in the current debates about the future of the world's mountains. These debates are characterised by a number of representations of mountains, each of them emphasising a different reason why the mountains need protection and special attention. It may be for their biodiversity, their resource endowment for today's and future national economic growth, their importance for recreation and spiritual refreshment, the cultural heritage they host and so on. And yet, each of these perspectives expresses primarily lowlanders' views of the mountains in which the mountain peoples' perceptions and knowledges of the mountain environments are seldom included. On the contrary, mountain peoples are frequently identified as the villains who cause both progressive environmental degradation and devastating upstream-downstream effects. They are perceived as being at the core of a veritable mountain dilemma and therefore need to be brought under (lowlander) control.

This study is going to debate and critique these representations and lines of argumentation. It does not share the view that the biophysical and socio-cultural specificities of mountain areas are solely responsible for the prevalent problems of poverty, environmental degradation and marginalisation in the world's mountains. Although there are undoubtedly material limits due to the mountains' environmental physicality, the study claims that mountains are not inherently disadvantaged regions vulnerable to local or regional degradation and marginalisation processes. It argues that many of the mountain problems are constructed by actors outside the mountain areas and that the way mountains are being constructed is historically situated and shaped by ongoing political economic, material and ideational changes. The thesis therefore does not totally de-essentialise or deny the physicality of mountains, but it strongly emphasises the influence on how they and their problems are being socially constructed.

This study is going to shift between different levels of analysis and evolves around the three main themes:

- The mountain problematique;
- the making and remaking of mountains in Vietnam; and
- democratisation, decentralisation, and better governance structures for sustainable mountain development.

The first theme, the mountain problematique, provides a focus for investigating the politicisation of mountains. It serves as the analytical framework for the entire thesis. It sets out to debate the tangible and constructed problem definitions as discussed among mountain policy actors in the international development policy arena. The theme is subsequently followed down to the national and local levels of mountain development in Vietnam. It is analysed against the empirical background of a contested mountain development context in Vietnam's northern mountain region. The first set of questions that the thesis is going to ask is:

What is a mountain problematique?; what distinguishes it from other identified environmental problematiques, such as desertification or climate change?; whom does it

serve?; and how does it feed into the formulation of international and national policies for sustainable mountain development?

A great number of people, organisations and national governments are taking part in the sustainable mountain development debate. They have many different views on mountain problems and despite various disagreements they contribute to the notion that mountain development is problematic. By doing so they create a legitimate arena for research, policy and political action. The current mountain development debate reveals their wrangle over optimal trade-offs between conflicting ideas of and interests in the mountain environment. The complex of issues, which is commonly associated with mountain development and environmental difficulties, is summarised here with the term 'mountain problematique'. This study is going to investigate the discursive plurality of the mountain problematique in its historical and current dimension. It is going to use political ecology to elaborate on, enhance and critique the mountain problematique. The term 'mountain problematique' does not only refer to the complex of the identified objective problems of mountain regions of the world as discussed in the international policy arenas of UNCED, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the Bishkek Mountain Summit 2002. It also points at the social construction of mountain problems. Mountain scholars, development agencies, conservation organisations and governments draw on the notion that mountain development is problematic and make a case for the mountains in the international development policy arena. Various versions and social constructions of the mountain problematique help them pursue their social and political agendas for the world's mountain areas. Their definitions of the mountain problematique help them to justify intervention and control in mountain areas, or to disburse financial resources to mountains. Some of the above actors, for example, may point at the continuous loss of forest cover in the mountains areas and call for more forest policing. Others may highlight the progressive degradation of biodiversity and may promote persuasive and financial incentives to take pressure from biodiversity hotspots in mountain localities. A third group of actors may draw attention to the struggle of a growing mountain population to achieve food security and pursues a Green Revolution agenda. The variety of these perspectives shows that a single version of the mountain problematique does not exist. There are many versions of the mountain problematique that vary, depending on how the involved policy actors define the mountain problems and which strategies they consider appropriate to address them.

The idea that mountain development is problematic and that many different policy actors are pursuing their own political and social agendas in the world's mountains is not a new point of view. Some fifteen years ago, Thompson, Warburton and Hatley (1986) and Ives and Messerli (1989) published a substantial critique of the so-called mountain dilemma and the strategies to come to terms with it. However, the arguments of those who call for more control to address the mountain development and environmental problems are still strong. Their versions of the mountain problematique need to be considered in the context of today's sustainable mountain development debate at the international policy level.

The mountain development debate is today shaped by concepts such as democratisation and decentralisation and how they may work towards sustainable mountain development. The debate has identified the political conditions as crucial for sustainable mountain development. Its focus has shifted to democratic policy procedures and policy mechanisms to support the politically marginalised. The international mountain development community stresses the importance of the democratic participation of the mountain population in the mountain development policy processes. It wants to make them real partners in a common struggle to come to terms with the development and environmental problems in mountain areas. Over the past decades, the mountain

development debate has experienced a transition that firstly dealt with mountains as technical and physical challenge and that nowadays is focusing more on political issues, such as the socio-political and economic relationships between the uplands and lowlands or the capitalist penetration of mountain areas and globalisation.

With the analysis of the problem complex associated with mountain development in Vietnam the thesis delves into the second main theme. It asks the second set of questions, which are:

What constitutes the mountain problematique in Vietnam?; what are its underlying structures?; which versions of the mountain problematique find entrance into the policy debate about sustainable mountain development in Vietnam?; how are policies for mountain areas established?; and what are their effects?

This theme offers insights into a national context of mountain development. It investigates how it corresponds with the issues discussed in the international mountain development debate and what the particularities of Vietnam's mountain problematique are. Vietnam represents a particularly interesting case of mountains in transition, namely the making and remaking of mountains in a Communist-ruled socialist country during its nation-state building and its most recent economic renovation period called *doi moi*. The analysis is carried out from the local level, drawing primarily on testimonies and accounts of mountain peoples. They are reflected against the national development, social, and political processes during the socialist and economic transitions.

Vietnam's mountain areas are marked with an unusual history of resistance against capitalism and dominating forces. The formerly almost inaccessible mountain areas were a refuge from where Ho Chi Minh organised the Socialist Revolution in the 1930s. They later served as battlefields where both France and the United States of America were defeated. In the process of the Vietnamese struggle against foreign colonisers and intruders the people of Vietnam were unified in an historically unique effort. But what still serves as a momentum of identity-building bears a history of socio-cultural tensions in the multi-ethnic state of Vietnam. The relationships between the 55 ethnic groups of the Vietnamese nation tend to be problematic. The only majority group of the *Viet* people (usually called *Kinh*) has always dominated national politics and the economy. In the early years of independence, between 1954 and 1975, a number of autonomous zones for peoples of different ethnic backgrounds were established. But the mountain areas became more and more incorporated into the emerging nation-state and national economy and were finally governed from a political and economic power base located in the lowlands. Processes of assimilation and the exercise of political control of the lowlands over the uplands accompanied nation-building. Prejudices against the cultural values and traditions of the mountain peoples are deeply rooted among the lowland population although as many as one third of the total population of Vietnam lives in mountain areas today.

Economically, the integration of mountain areas into wider market structures was largely accompanied with natural resource exploitation to enable the industrialisation of the lowlands. Vietnam's mountains bear a great resource potential in terms of timber, hydropower, mineral resources, and agricultural land for cash crop industries. They moreover host some biodiversity pools of international significance. In recent years, it became obvious that the Vietnamese mountain areas are under increasing environmental stress and that they show signs of advanced environmental degradation. For example, the extraction of valuable forest products and timber has reduced the forest cover from 42% of the total land area in 1943 to 29% in 1997. Biodiversity resources and the ecological balance are under great threat. In socio-economic and political terms, mountain dwellers have become increasingly marginalised as the discrepancies of living standards and

development opportunities between the uplands and the lowlands are growing. Centralist planning and industrialisation exploited the mountain periphery at a rapid pace while a growing mountain population still struggles for livelihood security generated from the natural resource base. It is said that environmental degradation and overexploitation of resources threaten the economic viability of the mountain regions and the country as a whole today (IUCN, 1999; World Bank et al., 2000). Some of the mountain areas in Vietnam experience social unrest. Immense planned resettlement movements from the lowlands to the uplands have caused severe and violent conflicts over land and ancestral rights.

During the last fifty years, life and development in mountain areas of Vietnam have therefore been affected by a history of domination of the majority population over the minority population, the lowlands over the uplands, and production quotas of the socialist economic planning over mountain subsistence economies. Today, the phenomenon of persisting mountain development problems gives rise to constant concern. The government's version of Vietnam's mountain problematique points at widespread poverty and high population growth combined with an over-exploitation of natural resources. Backward resource use practices and low level of knowledge of the mountain peoples are identified as the major causes of the problems in mountain areas. Awareness raising, devolution of responsibilities for environmental use and protection, and enhanced control are some of the official strategies to address the difficulties.

Other versions of Vietnam's mountain problematique reveal a different perspective. They point to the limited understanding of the social and political organisation of ethnic mountain peoples and the impacts of the socialist economy on the mountain environment. Limits in knowledge have nurtured misconceptions of and prejudices about mountain peoples' lives and traditions. They are persistently being reproduced. Moreover, the political culture and policy styles tend to avoid popular participation, support the political domination of the centre over the periphery, and favour top-down policies rarely responsive to specificities in the localities. These underlying structures feed continuously into the reproduction of Vietnam's mountain problematique.

Their natural resource potential and biodiversity hotspots make mountains in Vietnam and anywhere else highly contested landscapes. The nature of the politicised mountains needs to be analysed discursively. The study therefore is not reiterating the simplistic cause and effect explanations of poverty and environmental degradation which the government's version of Vietnam's mountain problematique suggests. On the contrary, it endeavours to shed light on as many of the notions and perceptions of mountains and mountain peoples as possible and examines how they find entrance into policy programmes. It investigates changing livelihoods and politics in mountain communes to reveal the mountain peoples' own views about their lives in the mountain periphery. The study provides insights into a local policy and development context in the northern mountain province of *Bac Kan*. It draws on empirical data collected in two mountain communes of *Ba Be* district inhabited by members of the ethnic groups of *Tay* and *Dao*. This local livelihood context represents a politicised mountain environment, contested by local, national and global players for its natural resource endowment, historical and cultural heritage and biodiversity. It is a place where the various representations of mountains find their local expression.

The third main theme of the thesis concerns the concepts of democratisation, decentralisation and the creation of better governance structures for sustainable mountain development in Vietnam. This theme combines the political ecological analysis of the mountain problematique with a discussion of different notions of democracy. It follows down the internationally discussed political concepts of democracy and decentralisation to the national level of Vietnam and the local level of politics in mountain communes. It

sheds light on how these concepts may or may not contribute to more democratic participation and representation of mountain peoples' interests for the pursuit of socially, ecologically and economically sustainable mountain development. The thesis is going to ask the third and last set of questions:

What are the characteristics of Vietnam's political setting?; how and why does it enable or constrain sustainable mountain development?; what scope does it provide for the democratic participation of mountain communities as partners in the environmental and development policy arena?

This set of questions delves into an important, so far largely unexplored subject of investigation regarding mountain development in Vietnam. In the process of Vietnam's economic renovation process called *doi moi*, Vietnam underwent a number of important but somewhat unusual political and economic programmes that aim at developing a prospering market economy under state management. Politically it remains a socialist republic ruled by a single party, the Communist Party. Under its recent political guidance a great number of economic reforms, environmental protection strategies, and pro-poor development programmes were formulated. For example, the allocation of property and tenure rights indicated a shift from state-owned resources and production factors to individuals and the private sector. Better institutional frameworks were developed.

The reforms were not only crucial for the country's well-being and development but were moreover a condition for Vietnam to become a recipient of a large volume of official development assistance funds. The economic renovation process and the subsequent opening of Vietnam's economy and society towards the world market and other global influences have also resulted in new bilateral and multilateral partnerships with donor countries. These relations oblige Vietnam to develop new programmes and policies according to an international understanding of development, good governance, democracy, and decentralisation. The international pressure to establish the rule of law and democratic participation for the citizenry is increasing. Initial reforms have been launched in the political sphere. Some of them even respond to the dissatisfaction and inequalities in the localities, and address problems such as corruption and the patronising political attitude of government staff and political leaders vis-à-vis the poor and marginalised. Issues such as downward accountability, responsiveness, efficiency, transparency, and public participation have been added to the political vocabulary of contemporary politics in Vietnam.

This third major theme analyses the case of Vietnam's mountains against this particular political setting of a Communist-ruled socialist country that decided to proceed a path of economic openness and multilateral obligations while retaining the model of a single-party regime. The study discusses the concepts of democracy and decentralisation and their particular notions in the context of Vietnam. It thereby takes up the discourse about the potential benefits of democracy and decentralisation as debated in the international development policy arenas. It discusses the opportunities and constraints to proceed with the experiment of sustainable mountain development in Vietnam by providing insights into political setting and Party politics in the national context and in the mountain communes. The aim is to critically look at how Vietnam's political leadership uses certain understandings of democracy in pursuing the internationally claimed agenda of sustainable mountain development. Processes of democratisation and decentralisation are analysed against the background of Vietnam's political setting and political culture. With this third theme, the issues being claimed in the international mountain development debate in its transition from technological towards more political agendas are tied to an analysis of mountains in economic transition and political transformation in Vietnam.

In sum, the thesis provides insights into the way environmental and development problems in mountain areas are being constructed and discussed in the international and national policy arenas. The thesis' analysis of various versions of the mountain problematique suggests to be aware of the great diversity, complexity and heterogeneity of interests emanating both from within the mountain areas as well as from the lowlands or urban power centres.

1.2 Mapping the Terrain

The thesis is structured in seven chapters. The succession of chapters corresponds with the above outlined lines of argumentation. Each of them contributes essential insights to answer the three sets of questions. The chapters which primarily draw on empirical evidence are designed as complete thematic analyses.

The theoretical, epistemological and methodological foundations of the study are outlined in Chapter two. It discusses the objectives, positionality, and epistemological grounds, introduces the theoretical themes, outlines the methodology and reflects on sources of error and ethical issues of research in other cultures and environments.

Chapter three critically examines the arguments and concepts of the international mountain development debate. It looks at the distinctiveness of mountains in their physical appearance as well as their functions for human and political life, conceptualised as 'mountain specificities'. This concept is used both to address the opportunities and constraints of development in mountain areas as well as to advocate for mountain-specific perspectives and policy interventions. Mountains are not only areas of limits and niches but they are also strongly politicised environments, as various representations of mountains in development discourse and policy practice show. Based on the international discussion at UNCED in 1992, the sustainable mountain development agenda as the new direction in mountain development is outlined and discussed. The chapter is critical about the agenda's emphasis on the involvement of mountain communities as equal partners in political decision-making, and its objective to adopt and implement the concepts of democratisation and decentralisation.

The chapters four to six elaborate on and enhance the theme of the mountain problematique by providing in-depth research insights into a mountain development context and the national characteristics of policy and politics in mountain areas of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Chapter four sets out to explore the history of nation-state building and socialist projects in Vietnam's mountain areas and how they contribute to the problem complex associated with mountain development in Vietnam today. It gives an historical account of uplander-lowlander relations and livelihoods in mountain areas. It then sharpens its focus to look at three mountain communities of *Ba Be* district. In this microcosm of the mountain development context in the northern mountain region of Vietnam a first set of contested representations of the mountain areas are investigated. The chapter examines how the interventions and policies during nation-state building and the collective period have affected the socio-economic and socio-cultural structure of the local mountain society and the natural environment.

The policies to address some of the current problems and challenges in Vietnam's mountain areas are analysed in Chapter five. A policy document analysis uncovers policy rationales and reveals the official problem definitions of what causes the prevalent problems in the mountain regions. Apart from poverty alleviation and infrastructure development programmes, forest management and biodiversity conservation policies are designed specifically for mountain areas. The chapter provides a policy process analysis of the forest management and biodiversity conservation policies and shows how they conflict and get contested in the local development context of *Ba Be* National Park area. With the

framework of political ecology the various representations of mountains of and power relations between different local, national and global policy actors are reflected against each other.

Chapter six provides an organisational analysis of the political setting of Vietnam's state and Party apparatus. It looks at the issues of governance and democratic participation in the current political context of Vietnam and reflects on the concepts found essential for sustainable mountain development, such as increased participation for mountain communities, devolution of decision-making powers, and local governance for sustainable natural resource management and livelihoods. It gives an overview of the state organisation, its type of decentralisation and the notions of democracy that are reproduced in policy-making and the political culture of Vietnam. By drawing on empirical data from *Ba Be* district the chapter investigates the delivery of government services to and modes of governance at the local level. It looks at the role of local cadres, the difficulties in their daily work, and the opportunities and constraints for upward flow of information from the grassroots people to the higher administrative and Party levels. Finally, the chapter sheds light on the power claim of the Communist Party and how it decides about the scope of political participation and the role of the civil society in politics in Vietnam. Against this organisational background of the political setting and the political roles, the opportunities and constraints for democratisation and decentralisation are assessed. It finds that the policy-making style and political culture of socialist Vietnam create a particular structural framework that contributes substantially to the increasing difficulties in mountain development, livelihoods and state of the environment.

The study concludes with Chapter seven, where the threads of the three main themes are tied together. The chapter discusses the consequences of the various versions of the mountain problematique in Vietnam and in the international policy arena. It stresses the importance of the underlying structures, such as political system, policy style, structures of knowledge and economic orientation, for the emergence and persistence of development and environmental problems in mountain areas. By looking at the most recent policy documents published in the course of the International Year of Mountains 2002, the chapter reflects again on the possible impact of the sustainable mountain development agenda on mountain communities and environments. Especially its political emphasis on democracy and decentralised forms of governance is critically assessed. Emerging from this discussion, the chapter outlines a future research agenda that focuses on what is key to understand when the sustainable mountain development agenda wants to make a difference. The focus of this future research agenda comes to lie on the interlinkages between the political landscapes of individual nation-states and mountain development embedded in an increasingly globalised environmental and development policy debate.

Chapter 2

Outlining the Approach

2.1 Objectives and Epistemology

The major themes of this thesis are sustainable mountain development, discussed in the particular case of a socialist country in transition, and issues of governance and democratisation for sustainable natural resource management. The thesis' objectives are therefore threefold. It elaborates on, enhances and critiques the mountain problematique as it is being discussed at both the international and national policy-making levels. It discusses the making and remaking of mountains in Vietnam during the country's socialist and economic transitions by focussing on livelihoods and policy processes in mountain areas. And thirdly, it engages in a discussion about democracy and mountain development. The thesis' examination of these three main themes, thus of mountain development, policy and politics in Vietnam, is an attempt to reflect both on the international environmental and development policy arena and on the upland-lowland political and social relations in a socialist country in transition. It reveals both the international interests in the mountains as well as the national interests of Vietnam in the resource endowment of its mountain areas on which most of its future local and national economic still depends. Of specific interest in the Vietnamese case is the Communist political leadership's attendance towards the economically precious environment and ethnically and culturally diverse mountain population.

In order to attain these objectives, the study's focus changes between different levels of analysis. It starts with the local level where it investigates people-environment relations most directly. It acknowledges that this level is embedded in wider political and economic systems and tightly bound to the national and international policy arenas. How ideas about people and environment get translated into policies is consequently further examined at a meso and macro level. The study assumes thereby that notions of people and the environment are being shaped by the political economy and ideational frameworks. The combination of these topics and the focus on multiple levels offer a chance to shed light on contemporary phenomena of the global-national-local interfaces in environmental and development politics.

In addition to the different levels of analysis, the various topics which this thesis explores are examined by a range of different disciplines. The investigation of the direct and indirect relationships between people and the environment, for example, is the classical theme of geographical research, also investigated by disciplinary strands such as environmental sociology, environmental anthropology, environmental economics, or the political science of the environment. The topics of economic transition and political change, such as the engagement between capitalism and socialism directed by a Communist political leadership, are subjects normally investigated by institutional economics and political science. The disciplinary transgression of such a multi-level and

multidisciplinary study suggests that it results epistemologically in theoretical and methodological eclecticism.

Blaikie (1999:131) and Bryant (1999:151) have pointed at the strengths and weaknesses associated with such eclecticism. It may appear ideally suited to an approach that aims to probe the complex juncture of political, economic, social and ecological processes with the perspectives from different academic disciplines. However, Peet and Watts (1996:6) point out that such an approach seems grounded less in a coherent theory as such than in similar areas of inquiry. With a lack of coherence, studies which apply this approach may lose some explanatory power as a result of their multidisciplinary grounds. Despite this potential risk to position itself between disciplinary terrains and within several epistemological strands, I argue that the present study gains exploratory and analytical depth from such eclecticism.

Epistemologically the study largely combines realist with post-structuralist stances. The realist position in it acknowledges the structural, objective problems of development and environmental change in mountain areas due to the material limits of the physicality of mountains. It aims at informing our knowledge of mountain development by contributing general statements about real and tangible problems. On the other hand, the post-structuralist stance acknowledges that the establishment of 'truths' about the researched people and environment are shaped by the relationship between the subject and object of research. Different actors, such as scientists, politicians or development experts may construct 'truths' about the same people and the same environment in very different ways. The post-structuralist stance informs our knowledge about mountain development and politics in mountain areas by elaborating on the manifold social constructions of their environmental and development problems. It questions powerful environmental knowledge that is usually scientific, formal and state sponsored and contributes to an understanding that is informed by qualitative, informal insights into the reasoning and truths of informants who are frequently avoided in scientific undertakings (Chambers, 1983).

The study focuses on human-nature relations and the manner in which these relations may be reflected in conflicting perceptions, discourses and knowledge claims about development and ecological processes in mountain areas. It pays much attention to the social construction of environmental problems and the reproduction of the crisis narrative, which may facilitate the control of peoples and environments by powerful actors via policy interventions. The international mountain development debate reflects a range of contested representations of the mountain environment which get translated into environmental and economic policies. These knowledge claims and perceptions of the mountain environment get negotiated and reinterpreted at the interfaces between the global, national, and local levels. Conflicting understandings may result in harmful policy interventions and undesirable outcomes. The study attempts to show that certain positions about the environment and about causal connections between it and society are wrong, and it tries to replace one truth with a new truth. Blaikie (1999:142) identifies this attempt as a distinctive style of writing to a consistent post-structuralist epistemology and methodology that holds on to a structuralist and realist epistemology. Post-structuralism combined with structuralist and realist epistemology results, after Demerit (1998:177), in a specific type of social constructivism. Blaikie (1999:144) refers to it as 'weak social constructivism'. It takes into account that there is a physical materiality. Water cannot travel up hill, for example, or slopes have undeniably implications on land use. However, a weak social constructivism stance claims that the nature of this physical reality is shaped by ongoing changes in the political economy and the history of changing material and ideational frameworks.

The problem with post-structuralist and social constructivist epistemologies is that it informs our knowledge with the whole range of social constructions that converge or

contradict one another. If practical solutions are desirable, a post-structuralist plurality of interpretations can be confusing and unsatisfactory for all actors involved (Blaikie, 2000). Therefore, the combination of epistemological stances, realised in this thesis, allows me to contribute to our understanding by revealing the plurality of social constructions whilst its realist stance avoids a slide into relativism and nihilism. Instead, in the sense of an 'engaged scholarship', the study attempts to provide realist insights and conclusions which might find entrance into the policy-making sphere.

The theoretical concepts applied and their epistemological traditions are being outlined in the next section.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

2.2.1 People and environment in the social sciences

This thesis is concerned with the fundamental question of the relationship between people and the environment in its broadest sense. That means the study does not only attempt to shed light on the direct human-nature relations of primary resource users in the northern mountain region of Vietnam. It also explores human perceptions about the environment and how they are translated into social institutions, policies and political programmes for sustainable development. The focus on human-nature relations therefore touches on the entire complex of society, culture, economy, politics, and ecology.

The relationship between people and the environment has been a field of study since ancient times but only in the past few decades has the investigation of people-environment relations been firmly established as a study area of the social sciences, such as human geography, environmental sociology, and political science. The concepts and theories developed for this kind of investigation show diverse epistemological strands and ideas of the relationship between people and the environment. For example, for many centuries the concepts of environmental determinism and possibilism provided seemingly plausible explanations of the people-environment relations. Environmental determinism claims that human activities are shaped by the environment, especially by physical factors such as the climate or the topography. Social behaviour and development are perceived as a result of the influence of the environment. Possibilism, on the other hand, offers a counter-position to environmental determinism. It states that the physical environment provides the opportunity for a range of possible human responses and that people have considerable discretion to choose between them. The environment sets limits but within those limits people can act and live from the environment as they wish (Glaeser and Teherani-Krönner, 1992; Johnston et al., 1994). Both environmental determinism and possibilism are grounded in Aristotelian belief which separates the human from the environmental or natural sphere. They reflect the idea of a linear evolution which does not give justice to the complexities of interactions and reciprocal relations between people and the environment of an ecological understanding (Hardesty, 1977). Environmental determinism and possibilism were challenged therefore by ecological concepts which explain the integrated nature of the people-environment relations.

Human ecology was developed in the 1920s and brings a philosophical interest and social science perspective to investigate the interactive and reflexive relations between people and the environment. In a first phase, human ecology was closely tied to biological ecology but later distanced itself from the deterministic, biologicistic terminology. In the 1960s and 1970s human ecology adopted an ecosystemic conception which allowed for the investigation of human-nature relations with systems analysis. Over the years, its conception of people and the environment became more integrative. Ecological or environmental problems were seen as consequences of economic, social and political

processes (Bargatzky, 1986; Huber, 1989). The objective of the new human ecology is to understand the society and its interaction with the environment. It investigates the adaptation of people to the environment and the influence of the environment on the human activities respectively. Human ecology has produced a large literature of space- and society-specific case studies on human-nature interactions. Its focus has traditionally lain in the investigation of specific localities and the complex patterns of social institutions and rules about human behaviour towards the natural environment. It has contributed to important insights into the social complexity of territory (Goldman, 1997).

Various strands of cultural ecology developed from human ecology in the 1950s. Cultural ecology investigates the human-nature relations with a special focus on culture. It asks how human culture is influenced through human activities with the natural environment and how different cultural traits impact on the environment. It claims that the kind of interaction between people and the environment is established by various socio-cultural factors, such as the social organisation, demography, economy, material culture, environmental perceptions, and religions and beliefs (Mischung, 1980; 1984; Bargatzky, 1986). Cultural ecology has extended the investigation of people and environment to the relationship between culture, social organisation and natural environment. It has largely contributed to the emergence of a differentiated view on complex interlinkages in the social organisation of societies taken up by the more recent concepts of people-environment relations. However, the emphasis on energy flow modelling and systems analysis resulted in a general unwillingness or inability to see that the local-level cultural and ecological communities being studied formed part of, and were influenced by a much wider set of political and economic structures (Bryant, 1998).

The global economic and political forces, which penetrated national and local levels, made a new perspective on people-environment relations necessary. While human and cultural ecology largely investigated the interactions in localities, political ecology has expanded its scope of investigation to multiple levels of the society, politics, and economy. The integration of anthropological-style local research with political-economic structural analysis became a key concern of political ecologists. The politicisation of the environment in the 1970s and the 1980s has contributed to the emergence of an analytical concept that investigates the interactions between the society, political economy, and the natural environment (Geist, 1992). Political ecology moreover developed in a time when the impacts of and changes brought about with globalisation became apparent. The investigation of the relationship between people and environment could not restrict itself to the direct interactions of primary resource users with the environment in specific localities, cultures, and societies. Blaikie and Brookfield (1987) have described political ecology as follows:

"The phrase 'political ecology' combines the concern of ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Together this encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself." (1987:17)

Political ecology has expanded its focus and includes both direct human-nature interactions and the contested views, perceptions and interests of people-environment relations that contribute to the politicisation of the environment. Political ecology identifies people as actively involved in the processes of environmental politics and environmental change. Depending on their various perceptions of the environment they pursue particular interests in the policy and political process.

Therefore, analytical concepts of people-environment relations have come a long way in investigating and explaining the environment and social organisational issues which shape the use and management of natural resources. Social relations and political agendas

issues have become central to today's studies of people and the environment. A discursive turn in the 1990s has even enforced the ascendancy of the political in political ecology (Bryant, 1999). With the trend to politicise the 'natural' or the environment in political ecological research, the explanatory weight of ecology in accounts of human-environment interactions has been downgraded, hence the attention has been increasingly shifting to the explanation of political-economic conditions of environmental change.

2.2.2 Political ecology

This study on development, policy and politics in mountain areas uses the tools of a number of the above concepts for the analysis of human-nature relations. Yet, with its primary focus on the politicisation of mountains and the socio-political structures of mountain development it relates mostly to political ecology. It makes use of political ecology to attain three objectives, each relating to one set of research questions. Political ecology is considered as the most recent and highly illuminating analytical concept for the investigation of the direct and indirect relationships between people and environment (Zimmerer, 1996). It avoids the above mentioned notions of environmental determinism, possibilism and essentialism of peoples and environments. It conceptualises people-environment relations as historically determined, situated and highly complicated. However, since the emergence of this research field no theory of political ecology was developed. Bryant and Bailey (1997:1) note that political ecologists have largely eschewed theory in favour of empirical analysis. In their work with foci on key environmental problems, concepts, socio-economic characteristics, actors, and regions political ecologists have drawn on a number of existing theoretical foundations, most importantly on those coming from the field of political economy. This has not necessarily helped the theoretical development of political ecology as political economy offers itself a wide spectrum of ideologies and theories. Yet, in their attempt to integrate place- and non-place-based analysis of people and the environment political ecologists turned mainly to neo-Marxism. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, they used dependency theory, world-systems theory or mode of production theory. Thus for many political ecologists neo-Marxism offered a means to link local social oppression and environmental degradation to wider political and economic concerns relating to production questions (Blaikie, 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987).

In Marx's understanding, human history is conceived as a struggle over material resources and power stands as central theme in a specific relationship to the distribution of resources, such as property or status, in society (Waters, 1994). The acquisition of resources enables to put things into effect, to change things, or to alter the physical and social environment through the exercise of power. Power implies that certain social entities have particular consequences for other, similar entities, either in terms of 'power to do' and alter things or in terms of 'power over' the social and material world of others (Giesen, 1993). The neo-Marxist or critical structuralist position claims that society is always dominated by a ruling economic and political class which determines the shape of the state.

For the political ecological analysis of the mountain problematique in Vietnam this theoretical foundation helps developing the argument of the study as follows: The establishment of the socialist nation-state of Vietnam was accompanied with the collectivisation of material resources in order to build a society with equal opportunities. This led to the acquisition of resources and power in the central state and the Communist Party who were responsible for providing the same conditions for everyone. Through its economic and political plans the socialist state exercised power to thoroughly transform the society and economy according to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. The central state moreover developed hegemonic attitudes over the periphery in terms of moral support and resources.

In this regard, the study combines local anthropological-style research with a political-economic structural analysis. In addition, the framework of environmental entitlements has offered theoretical and methodological backgrounds for more comprehensive explanations of the alteration of social and political patterns due to environmental changes in the localities. It works in the attempt to acknowledge disaggregated social findings and ecological heterogeneity in development policy and practice and implies the need for the creation of development strategies to empower local people (Leach et al., 1997; 1999). It offered a way of getting insights into disputes that are fought over in development and political processes which produce conflicts in terms of rights and obligations provided and imposed by the system of political and economic control (de Gaay Fortman, 1990). The various notions of today's mountain problematique are therefore both investigated in a local context as well as in their nestedness in the political-economic systems that shape the structural interlinkages between the uplands and the lowlands, unequal terms of trade, and biases towards the mountain population and marginality.

Political ecology examines, however, not only the political dynamics surrounding material struggles but also discursive struggles over the environment. It studies how conflict over access to resources are linked to systems of political and economic control (Bryant, 1998). The shift to discursive analysis happened with the incorporation of theoretical insights from the post-structuralist philosophy in political ecology (Escobar, 1995). It suggests that nature is socially constructed. The post-structuralist analysis of discourse is not only a linguistic theory. According to Escobar (1996:46) it is also a social theory, a theory of the production of social reality which includes the analysis of representations as social facts inseparable from what is commonly thought of as 'material reality'. Escobar's position was, however, criticised on various grounds, especially by a more populist and political activist group of critics (see also Ortner, 1995; Corbridge, 1997). They claimed that Escobar's social deconstruction creates a vacuum and is ethnographically thin. According to Blaikie (2000:1036), his deconstructive assaults upon the narratives and institutions which shape and are shaped by them rely most heavily on the linguistics weapons of postmodernism rather than on any heavy rational battering.

This thesis' approach is not going to carry out an Escobarian post-modern deconstruction. It uses merely the idea of socially constructed natures and works according to a discursive analytical framework in order to unravel the plurality of versions of the mountain problematique. The conception of the politicised mountains represents its nexus of material reality and social construction of the reality, articulated in various forms of discourses. Some of them find entrance into the systems of political and economic control and policy formulation.

2.2.3 Democracy

Democracy serves as the second theoretical foundation of this study. Its discussion of the discursive plurality of notions of democracy as both a political system and a socially desirable and imaginary future does not aim at new theory building. In an "age of confused democracy" (Sartori, 1987:6), in which we no longer seem to know, understand and agree what democracy is, this thesis aims to make a contribution to our understanding of political structures and ideologies in the postcommunist era. I am aware that I touch on a wide and contested field of debate about democracy that has many nuances and to which I cannot fully do justice. However, I attempt to contribute to a body of knowledge that is interested in different kinds of so-called democracies and their associated political practices and cultures. My focus lies on Vietnam's notions of democracy, defined as socialist democracy. It reveals some of the currently prevailing ideas of popular participation and decision-making in Communist-ruled Vietnam. The study wants to find out how Vietnamese

notions of democracy are promoted and what their effects are on local and national development. Again, this strand of investigation is linked to the overall question of people-environment relations in mountain areas and how the political framework of a socialist country in economic transition and political transformation may constrain or enable sustainable mountain development in the localities.

In its root meaning democracy is defined as "rule by the people" (McLean, 1996:129). It is sometimes identified narrowly with majority rule, and other times broadly to encompass "all that is humanly good" (Gutmann, 1993:411). Democracy is a topic that has already been examined from every conceivable angle for over twenty-five centuries. There is a lively debate about what it is and what it is not. And yet, there is neither a clear definition of the concept nor a mainstream theory of democracy. Whitehead (2002:3) suggests taking a theoretical starting point that understands democracy not as a predetermined end-state, but as a long-term and somewhat open-ended outcome. Democracy is not just a feasible equilibrium of a political system but a socially desirable and imaginary future. Democracy has not only a descriptive or denotative but also a normative and persuasive function. The problem of defining democracy is therefore twofold. Sartori (1987:8) notes that the concept of democracy requires both a descriptive and a prescriptive definition. He claims that one cannot exist without the other and, at the same time, one cannot be replaced by another. Indeed, there is an inclusiveness about the concept of democracy that is made use of by almost everybody who wants to make the world a better place (Shapiro and Hacker-Cordón, 1999).

Blaney and Pasha (1993:4) note that during the last decade, democracy has become some kind of a "world culture". This is more so since the collapse of the Soviet Union as it seems that democracy has finally triumphed over Communism. Blaug (2000:145) remarks:

"Nowadays everyone's a democrat. (...) Even dictators hold elections and claim they represent the will of the people. Democracy boasts a moral superiority as well as a unique performance. As the safest, most decent and most effective method of government, it has at last triumphed over its enemies, and now claims to be the only legitimate and viable political form."

The history of the idea of democracy therefore remains marked by conflicting interpretations. Looking at democracy as a political system there is a deeply rooted struggle to determine whether democracy will mean some kind of popular power (a form of life in which citizens are engaged in self-government and self-regulation) or an aid to decision-making (a means to legitimate decisions of those voted into power from time to time) (Held, 2001). This basic struggle has given rise to at least three basic variants or models of democracy:

- 1) Direct or participatory democracy, a system of decision-making about public affairs in which citizens are directly involved;
- 2) liberal or representative democracy, a system of rule embracing elected officers who undertake to represent the interests or views of citizens within the framework of the rule of law; and
- 3) a variant of democracy based on a one-party model, based on the principle that a single party can be the legitimate expression of the overall will of the community (Held, 1996).

Although many may doubt whether this last variant is a form of democracy at all, the political transformations of the Eastern European countries and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have given rise to a new debate about it. The postcommunist era has seen Communism, as one of the key counterpoints of liberal democracy, begin to combine

democratic procedures and institution-building with a socialist political doctrine (Holmes, 1997; Sakwa, 1999; Anderson et al., 2001). Vietnam is currently going through such a process. Democratisation and decentralisation projects have been launched, such as the grassroots democracy decree and the public administration reform. It is worth looking at how democracy and socialism are being tied together.

The record of democracy in this postcommunist world of formerly communist countries is mixed. Some states never began the transition to democracy, others started and then turned backward, and only a few can be counted as consolidated democracies a decade after the process began (Breslauer, 2001). Anderson *et al.* (2001:154-159) find that the postcommunist experience poses a puzzle that cannot be understood by existing theories of democracy. The variety of postcommunist regimes cannot be encapsulated by the prevailing terminology of conventional democratic theories. The authors stress the processes in which there is a prominent role for human agency. They draw the link between macro- and micro-level analysis for their approach to theory building and find that people matter. They highlight, for example, how the political elites' discursive choices influence the choices of individuals to remain passive or to take sides in politics. Or they point to the discretionary powers of office holders and chief executives in democratising states and how they influence the creation of democratic institutions. There is no doubt from their analyses, though, that the dispersion of political power is necessary for a stable democratic order. The authors argue that in order to enhance our understanding of the various notions of democracy investigations of cultural indicators of political change towards democracy and decentralisation are needed.

Anderson *et al.*'s (2001) contribution to Postcommunism and the discussion of democracy's meanings and substances suggests that there must be new theory building. In the authors' opinion new definitions or new alternatives to democracy need to be found. They advocate for flexible understandings and models of democracy on the grounds that new understandings of democracy might emerge from the diversity of meanings and concepts. They set a high standard for the evaluation of future progress in democracy theory building and challenge the field to rethink structural explanations for changes taking place in turbulent environments (Breslauer, 2001). Despite their rather optimistic conclusions for theory building and empirical work on the topic of democracy a certain degree of caution is required. Whitehead (2002:21), for example, notes in this regard that "there is the historically undeniable fact that both political and economic monopolists have tended to dress themselves in the garb of democratic respectability while promoting rival objectives [and that this] is no excuse for us to endorse their misuse of language".

For my investigation of Vietnam's mountain problematique, I argue for a broadened notion of democracy that can engage with governance issues in postcommunist socialist countries. This will enable me to identify the current scope for political participation and accountability which create tensions in governance and local decision-making. Those tensions related to the mountain areas, such as the political representation of a minority population or the ability of putting mountain peoples' interests on the national political agendas, are examined here. Although the Vietnamese concept of democracy heavily curtails the political participation of the Vietnamese citizenry, the Communist leaders, nevertheless, are alert to the future legitimacy of the Party. The leaders seem to be forced by the economic and social transformations to make concessions that enlarge the scope for civil society action. A discursive analysis will help me scrutinise the Vietnamese versions of democracy and to identify political cultural traits.

Vietnam's own interpretations of democracy also needs to be reflected against the background of international development politics. Shapiro and Hacker-Cordón (1999:1) note that democracy is frequently believed to diminish injustice and oppression, bring reason to bear on the organisations of collective life, reduce the likeliness of war, protect

human freedom, and facilitate economic growth. They state that it may be going too far to say democracy is all things to all people, but it is fair to say that there is a strong propensity to associate democracy with a wide array of activities and outcomes that people value. In addition, the respect for human rights and the demand for political reform have become preconditions for economic aid. The code word for such preconditions is political conditionality (Sørensen, 1993). The intrinsic desirable values ascribed to democracy also give rise to the promotion of concepts such as decentralisation, especially democratic decentralisation, or good governance.

Especially through the latter democracy is promoted in countries all over the world today (see also the latest Human Development Report by UNDP, 2002). The concept suggests that governance structures are 'good' when three elements are in place: a democratic political regime; the exercise of power in relation to the resource allocation; and the government's capability for policy planning and practice (Shimomura, 1999). Despite many attempts to define good governance, for example by OECD or the World Bank, the use of the concept is rather problematic. There are, for example, different interpretations of what a democratic political regime is or how and by whom power is exercised is much contested in the national polity. Nevertheless, good governance is seen, especially by the multilateral development organisations, as important requisite for poor countries to achieve real development and to reduce poverty. With the concept comes a clear political drive towards multi-party democracy, the rule of law, human rights, efficiency, accountability, transparency in governance and public administration, parliamentary control, open and free media, equity, and modest levels of military spending. Shimomura (1999:16) criticises in this regard that the current discussions about good governance reflect a dominance of Western donors' logic and preference of parliamentary or liberal democracy. Therefore, donor support for good governance is firmly tied to development agendas but nevertheless advocates political changes in the direction of liberal democracy. It may be criticised that good governance is a relatively 'depoliticised' way to force poorer countries to adopt Western interpretations of democracy. As will be shown in the case of Vietnam, both the rhetoric of democratisation and good governance reflect reinterpretations based on the cultural and political backgrounds of the individual nation states. Shimomura (1999:16) claims that more attention should be paid to these politically sensitive issues.

This thesis will take up some of these considerations when looking at Vietnam's mountain problematique. Some of the concepts discussed above have also been promoted in the international mountain development debate. The thesis is going to analyse what their meanings are in the context of Communist-ruled Vietnam and how the mountain peoples' political interests are represented in national policy-making and political affairs. The discussion of Vietnam's notions of democracy informs the historical analysis of the political projects and the social and political interventions of the Communist Party in the mountain areas. It is used to shed light on the political practice of government officials and local cadres. It helps assess how responsive the political setting is to address the problem complex associated with peripheral mountain areas and marginalised peoples.

2.3 Thematic Analysis

The empirical data gathered and the literature consulted in the course of this thesis are scrutinised in relation to various thematic analyses. A discursive analysis as part of the theoretical foundation of political ecology is carried out throughout the thesis. It is used to examine the politicisation of the mountain environment, as discussed in the international and national environmental policy arenas. Especially in chapter three, the discursive analysis helps identifying the powerful and long established notions of the mountain

environment and how they reproduce themselves in the face of alternative ones. Policy documents and agendas provide the set of data used to frame the arguments of the mountain development debate. In the subsequent chapters the discursive plurality of mountains and mountain problems is a recurring and important analytical focus. It involves the analysis of competing representations of the mountains and how they get translated into programmes and policies concerning the mountain environments in Vietnam.

Based on the literature review on Vietnam's transformations during the past five decades and the empirical data of life histories and livelihood data a historical narrative of development and change is elaborated and analysed in chapter four. The historical narrative serves as a framework for understanding the importance of certain events, such as the war for independence, the establishment of a socialist economy, nation-state building, and major reforms launched in the 1980s in Vietnam. The narrative is a cognitively and discursively complex genre that routinely contains some discourse components, such as description, chronology, evaluation, and explanation. For example, it can depict a linear or more complex chronology of unfolding events and an overarching explanation of why a particular event transpired at a particular point in the narrative sequence (Ochs and Capps, 2001). The historical narrative is used in an idiographic way here to provide insights into a local context and to discuss it against the background of the national history. The analysis of a historical narrative is used to help to understand how a problem or a phenomenon is shared by a group of people (Lieblich et al., 1998). A version of the mountain problematique is derived from within the mountain areas through the testimonies of local people.

Environmental and development policy as well as the policy process are the themes of chapter five. Policy-making is seen as a diffuse, complicated activity where various policy positions are presented by a range of different groupings of actors (Keeley and Scoones, 2000). Two questions usually precede policy-making. They ask 'what is the problem?' and 'what can be done?'. Policy is here understood as formal decisions, laws and programmes, actual practice and implementation. A discursive analysis of policy documents and the policy process helps exploring the social and political agendas that influence policies (Apthorpe, 1984; White, 1994). The analysis scrutinises policy and project documents to identify policy rationales and uncover policy narratives and provides insights into how policies come into being and what their effects and outcomes are. The policy process analysis looks at roles assumed by different policy actors and at the stages of the policy process, such as agenda-setting, decision-making and policy-formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Lindblom, 1980; Grindle and Thomas, 1989).

An organisational analysis of the state and Party system and their effects on political participation and decision-making at the local level provides the analytical framework for chapter six. This analytical framework largely looks at the political structure and forms of governance and how competences and responsibilities are distributed between the national and local level of the state administration (Edralin, 1996; de Wit, 2000). The organisational analysis reveals the importance of both the distribution of political powers as well as the political organisational culture that largely determine the outcome of central policy implementation and the bigger national political projects of decentralisation and democratisation.

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Research design

This study engages in a discussion about scales, notions of materiality and problems, and peoples' voices. Firstly, I am interested in understanding how the different scales from the

international to the very local policy level inform each other and how the contents of debates and accounts, documented in policy statements or given directly by people, provide an overall or specific picture about mountain development. Secondly, I attempt to find out in what setting of international environmental policy debate mountain peoples are embedded. I am going to re-read the sustainable mountain development agenda. I will show how the agenda works with the physical reality of mountains as well as how it creates and reproduces social constructions and policy narratives. I want to understand how the particular contexts within which people act is shaped and how this context influences their actions. Thirdly, I attempt to identify unanticipated phenomena and influences, and want to understand the process by which events and actions take place.

To achieve all this, I adopted an entirely qualitative approach. The strength of qualitative research derives primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words instead of numbers (Maxwell, 1996; Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Denzin and Lincoln (1998:8) furthermore add that qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. I rely on ethnographic data and speech, gathered in interviews with individual informants and focus groups meetings. This bears a great methodological challenge and may not be representative. I bring direct speech as evidence but acknowledge that I have my own researcher's positionality that shapes the interpretation of the empirical data.

Qualitative interpretations are always constructed and the interpretive practice of making sense of one's finding is inherently political (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive, and, above all, there is no single interpretive truth. On these epistemological grounds qualitative research has been criticised as being unscientific, or only exploratory, or entirely personal and full of bias. There is no doubt, that this study has been shaped by my biographical, ideological, and material background. Having grown up in Switzerland, where mountains and high hills are almost omnipresent, the cultural, socio-economic and physical aspects of mountains were part of my educational repertoire and identity-building. Although I have always been living in the urban lowland area, where I enjoyed the privilege of higher education, my concern was primarily with development issues, rural life and the poor and marginalised. As an academic I have taken up this concern for various reasons. Foremost, I wanted the peoples' voices to be heard and their cultural knowledge and heritage to be acknowledged. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, which has for a long time been assuming a pioneering role in mountain development, supported my attempt with research grants. Through contacts to the Swiss Development Cooperation and their partner organisations I have gained insights into internationally funded development projects and collaboration with local partners. The selection of my case study sites in the mountains of northern Vietnam was made with reference to the ongoing project work of a Swiss NGO. All these circumstances certainly have influenced the exploration and interpretation of life and politics in my research sites in *Ba Be* district, *Bac Kan* province, northern Vietnam.

Bearing the above criticism of qualitative research in mind, with this study I embarked nonetheless on a qualitative, explorative and interpretive journey. The few insights from the relatively small literature on society and environment in the northern mountain region of Vietnam did not allow me to develop solid hypotheses. Instead, the research started off with a set of argumentations derived from a literature review on mountain development, natural resource management, and economic transition and a first visit to the future field study area in Vietnam. The focus on local people's livelihoods and institutional arrangements in natural resource management made the starting point of the inquiry. The study developed through a people-centred approach. The choice for this

approach was born out of the opinion that the local people's social histories and livelihood contexts are not well understood and, therefore, that the reproduction of misconceptions about them still dominates in policy practice of intervention and political attitude towards them.

In the iterative research process, more insights into local livelihood contexts through interpretation and triangulation and the appearance of new questions meant that the study developed from an inquiry of livelihood issues into a policy analysis. It concluded with an analysis of the political framework, in which socio-economic decision-making in the mountain environment and political life at the local level of Communist-governed Vietnam are embedded. Thus, one theme was born out of the previous one.

The explorative and interpretive objectives as well as the iterative process of the study required a relatively long and extensive period of fieldwork in Vietnam. Field research took place from April to May 2000 and from August 2000 to June 2001. Seven of these twelve months were spent in the village communities and the district town of *Ba Be* district. From September 2000 till May 2001 I was always accompanied by my research assistant who is a graduate in foreign economics from Hanoi National University and student at Hanoi School of Foreign Languages. She is the daughter of two lecturers and has spent most of her life in Hanoi. Before she became my assistant to work as interpreter and mediator, she had never been to the northern mountain areas nor stayed away from home for a long time. She took lively interest in our work and in the development context found in the mountain areas. Today, she is working as an assistant in an agricultural networks and extension services project in one of the most peripheral provinces at the border to China and Laos. For further comments and reflections on the work relation between researcher and assistant see sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4.

2.4.2 Methods

Both data collection and analysis of this study are characterised by methodological and theoretical eclecticism as the following overview shows. The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects the attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Case study

At the core of empirical work in Vietnam stands the case study of three village communities in the northern mountain district of *Ba Be* where most of the primary data on mountain development and environmental politics was gathered. The case study allows for an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as life cycles, organisational and managerial processes and so on (Yin, 1989). Stake (1998:86) identifies three different types of case studies: the intrinsic, the instrumental, and the collective case study. The type chosen here is the collective case study. It is an instrumental study extended to several cases as it is interested in providing insights into an issue (livelihoods, policy intervention etc.) or refinement of theory (transition, democracy). The case study approach in the end presents something unique, but the case study can usefully be seen as a small step toward generalisation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). It emphasises the uniqueness, particularity, and diversity of the cases and uses them as arguments to inform policy about the specificity of peoples and mountains. The choice to adopt a case study approach and to look at the situation and contexts in detail required spending long periods of time in the studied communities and an emphasis on observational evidence.

The three case study sites were selected with regard to the following three considerations. Firstly, they should represent a sample of the ethnic, socio-economic and ecological diversity typical of mountain areas in Vietnam. Secondly, they should provide

an example for the dense web of interests in mountains articulated by local, national and global players. And thirdly, the internationally, nationally and locally contested representations of mountains should be debated in their immediate environment (see section 3.3.1 for contested representations). *Ba Be* district hosts a National Park of physical and biological uniqueness. The only mountain lake of Vietnam is home to a great number of endemic fish, its shores are densely forested, and some samples of highly endangered primate species are said to be living there still. This makes *Ba Be* an interesting place for international conservationists and national tourism projects. And, of course, it is still home to the local inhabitants who have been living there for decades. This local context, explored through a case study approach, included various versions of the mountain problematique in Vietnam and helped finding out what it constitutes (second set of research questions).

The selection of case study sites was also influenced by aspects of logistics and accessibility. A Swiss NGO, with which I was loosely affiliated, had been working in one of the two communes for some years. Especially for the selection and introduction to the villages, I could make use of the NGO's contacts and subsequently enjoyed the unexpected privilege of being able to visit the villages whenever I wanted and to stay there as long as I wanted.

Baseline survey

A baseline survey was carried out in the three village communities as a method to get acquainted with the people and their livelihood contexts. The baseline survey helped establish contacts with people while building a sampling frame and a data base for all later work (Bernard, 1988; DFID, 2000). A questionnaire was used to facilitate data collection of basic household characteristics such as household economy, agricultural production system, and membership in village institutions, organisations or the Party (see Household Data Sheet in Appendix I). Initially, I chose the households for the baseline survey randomly. Later, a selection was made based on socio-economic indicators such as housing conditions and location of the household in the village community.

The interview situation for the baseline survey had an informal character and time was allowed for further conversation and questions from the side of the interviewees. At the time of fieldwork, the total number of households in the three village communities was 140, out of which 75 were visited and interviewed (*Ban Chan* 50%, *Tan Lung* 100%, *Pac Ngoi* 25%). For most of the villagers this was not the first time they had answered survey questions, as government and development organisations frequently carry out surveys, depending on their need of information. However, most of the time these surveys do not generate in-depth insights but help guiding policy formulation or project intervention with rather superficial and incomplete insights. In the following chapters one of my arguments is that the policies applied for mountain areas lack consultation with the people and neglect their aspirations and livelihood struggles. Although the government surveys ensure some kind of problem identification on the ground, their design prevents the upward flow of information about conflicts, livelihood struggles and so on.

In one of the researched communities, *Pac Ngoi*, the rapid succession of a number of surveys during the last three years caused the problem that people were not willing to cooperate without knowing what this survey was 'good' for. They were tired and annoyed of being repeatedly used as sources of information for numerous studies, from which they apparently did not derive any benefits. Therefore, instead of carrying through the baseline survey in its structured form, data collection was continued by using unstructured interviews. Baseline data of this village community, already gathered by a conservation project shortly before fieldwork in *Pac Ngoi* started, could be accessed from the project

documentations. This data was written up in their participatory rural appraisal (PRA) reports of which I received copies.

Social mapping and well-being ranking

While visiting the households during the baseline survey a checklist for social mapping was used in order to collect basic data on housing and property by observation only (Schönhuth and Kievelitz, 1993). These observations overlap with the characteristics according to which different households were ranked in the well-being ranking exercises.

Well-being and wealth ranking provide information on the criteria of various people for defining which differences between the communities' households are of greater importance and which characteristics are valued above others. It contributes to the analysis of difference and the nature of unequal social relations, especially when those considered poorest, worst off and most deprived, are included in the exercises. This provides a range of key local indicators of well-being and ill-being and gives insights into the livelihoods of the poor and how they cope (Scoones, 1995; Chambers, 1997). It is a quick way of getting an overview of diverse opinions among informants. The rankings are relative comparisons of wealth, concepts of well-being, and do not require discussion of absolute income and other assets (Mikkelsen, 1995).

I used card sorting as one of the most common techniques for ranking, especially for social stratification research. There are two types of ranking, firstly, ordinal ranking, and secondly, scoring or weighting differences. Wealth ranking by card sorting is based on either group exercises or individual interviews. In the three village communities of *Ba Be* district, well-being ranking exercises were conducted for scoring or weighting differences. Twenty-three informants, 10 women and 13 men, were asked to do the ranking. The first set of ranking exercises were done by members of better-off households. In a second step and in order to get a more detailed understanding of the ranking criteria and perceptions of the socio-economic differences, members of poorer and poorest households of the villages were asked to do the ranking. Most of the informants ranked the households according to four groups which were labelled 'good', 'average', 'poor', and 'very poor' or *doi* (meaning lack of food, lack of everything, hungry).

However, there are limits to the method, which the researcher needs to be aware of. The assessment of well-being rankings tend to be static, relative and difficult to quantify. Distortions can occur if, for example, one person dominates in a group exercise and overrules others. Some informants may also be reluctant or unreliable in ranking themselves, their near relatives or their close friends. Individual working sessions and cross-checking with the other informants helped dealing with such distortions.

Both baseline survey and well-being ranking were useful methods to explore who is who in the three studied village communities. They moreover provided an important referential background for the interviews with key informant. This helped in the attempt to identify and distinguish between different views of environmental and development problems held by both the villagers and local cadres.

Participant observation

Participant observation fieldwork involves an array of data collection methods, of which some are described in this section. Participant observation involves getting close to the people and making them feel comfortable enough with the researcher's presence so that they can be observed and information about their lives can be recorded. Bernard (1994:138) distinguishes between two types of participant observation, where the researcher is either a participating observer or an observing participant. The former participates in her informants' lives and shares the same conditions like them but remains an outsider, the latter is or becomes one of them and studies their lives from an insider perspective.

Participant observation makes it possible to witness and observe situations of daily and ritual life. In the three research sites of *Ba Be* district the fact that my assistant and myself shared the same conditions of daily life and participated in house and field work, contributed to the acceptance (and sometimes also amusement) of our presence in the communities. We were invited to attend a death ceremony, a wedding, a healing ritual, and we were allowed to observe an official household ranking exercise at the commune centre. We transplanted rice seedlings, and climbed up to the upland fields where we experienced the hardship of crop cultivation on marginal areas. However, we remained participating observers.

Interviews

The most important method for primary data collection for this study is the qualitative interview. The literature distinguishes between informal, unstructured, semistructured and structured interviewing (Bernard, 1988; Mikkelsen, 1995; Jones, 1996). Informal interviewing takes place during direct or participant observation in any situation during the day. Any conversation is regarded as an interview situation and, if the situation allows it, relevant questions are placed accordingly. This type of interview was used throughout the whole period spent in the village communities.

From the baseline survey and the interactions with the villagers a sample of key informants was established. My key informants were, on the one hand, a number of young, middle-aged and elderly farming women and men who provided data on livelihood and natural resource management issues. Women carry out most of agricultural and life-supporting activities in the three research sites, collect fuel wood, construct fences, raise pigs and chicken and so on. They have an intimate knowledge about all technical aspects and factors for decision-making in natural resource use and management. Men also take part in agricultural activities, especially in field preparation, clearance of upland fields, cattle and buffalo herding, and fish rearing. As we worked in the fields mostly together with women they made the bigger share of this group of informants. As female researcher and assistant we had access to both the female and the male spheres of farming and political life in the communities.

The second group of key informants were village and commune leaders, in office or retired, who were predominantly middle-aged and elderly men. An exception were the chairwomen of the Women's Union and a number of school teachers. For the interviews with all key informants the unstructured and semistructured type of interviewing was chosen. Time and place for the interviews were set in advance. To make an interview appointment also meant giving explanations about the purpose and the topic of the interview. Ordinary villagers were either met at home or in the fields, where unstructured interviews were conducted. Both village and commune leaders were either met at home or in their offices in the commune centre. In the beginning, the semistructured interviews with them always had a formal character but if time allowed it the conversations continued as informal interviews after the interview session by appointment. Unstructured or semistructured interviewing always provided scope for questions emerging from the key informants' information and contributed, in most cases, to a relaxed and reciprocal interview situation.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with government officials and development experts at the district and central level. These expert interviews had a formal character and were limited in time and focus. They provided insights into officials views and opinions about the mountain peoples, the state of the environment, and the problems faced in development and natural resource rehabilitation or conservation.

Informal, unstructured and semistructured interviews matched well with the situational and language circumstances in the communities. During the interview sessions

both researcher and research assistant were taking notes. The interviews were written up and coded according to themes shortly after the sessions. The interviews were only tape-recorded upon agreement with the informants. The use of these types of interviewing poses some problems, such as that different information is collected from different people with different questions. Data collection is less systematic and may be less comprehensive. The comparability of the responses may be reduced (Mikkelsen, 1995). Seale (1998:209) moreover questions the authenticity of the accounts. However, the long periods spent in the village communities helped to build trust and relationships and provided the opportunity to talk to the key informants on various occasions. In the end of field research, I felt we had collected a comprehensive set of data.

Oral histories

The recording of oral histories may be defined as a special type of interviewing, the in-depth interview. In the literature the term oral history is interchangeably used as life history, self-report, personal narrative, life history, oral biography or memoir (Yow, 1994). Oral history research methods are especially appropriate from writing or recording biographies. Here, oral history is used to describe the method of inspiring someone, a narrator, to begin an act of remembering and to talk about it. It refers to the recording of an oral account, the life history of a middle-aged or elderly person.

In the three village communities of *Ba Be* district seven life histories of four women and three men aged between 41 and 73 were recorded. The narrators were asked to talk about their lives, the economic and social situation in the past, and the changes which occurred during the economic transition period. The interview situation was entirely in the hands of the narrator and my research assistant, who did not provide translation during these sessions. I assumed the role of a listener and observed the situation and the story-telling atmosphere. The life histories were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated.

Focus group discussion

The focus group discussion is a further type of interviewing. It is a relevant method when the dynamics of the group situation is considered to provide additional useful information (Mikkelsen, 1995). Focus group discussions were conducted at the end of fieldwork in the communities. I reported on findings and reflections to the village and commune leaders which they subsequently discussed. Another focus group discussion was conducted with commune leaders, National Park staff, development project staff and researchers. On this occasion a series of land use maps from the 1980s and 1990s was presented to them on the basis of which agricultural dynamics and environmental changes were discussed (see maps in chapters four and five).

All of the interview-type methods helped working towards answers for the second and third set of research questions concerning what constitutes the mountain problematique in Vietnam?, which versions of the mountain problematique can be identified?, has the altered policy and political frameworks helped improve mountainous livelihoods?, what opportunities for participation do the local communities have? and so on. From the many interviews different insights into cultural life and mountainous livelihoods were gained. Oral histories and discussions on the policy and economic changes since decollectivisation provided data to establish local histories of development and change.

Literature review

Every research project usually starts off with a literature review. The review of literature is essential to find out whether and how the topic to be researched is already being discussed and to elaborate an original or critical argument. In brief, it is conducted to use the ideas in the literature to justify the particular approach to the topic, the selection of methods, and demonstration that this research contributes something new (Hart, 1998).

While the literature review helps to develop the argument of the study in the beginning, it is again an important tool after the collection of empirical data. The literature becomes a source for organising and expressing ideas derived from the empirical evidence and for its reflection by existing theories and concepts.

The policy document analysis is considered as a special type of literature review, which was of central importance for this study. The sources for this review are policy documents, such as, to name but a few, The International Programme for Action for Sustainable Development (Agenda 21), the Adelboden Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Areas, the Five Million Hectares Afforestation National Programme, or the Decree on the Exercise of Democracy in the Communes. Their review gave insights into policy rationales, rhetoric and discourse, and helped to relate the suggested policy instruments, procedures, and strategies with the data collected in the field.

The literature and policy document review provided an important source to work towards answers for all three sets of research questions. The discursive analysis of literature and policy documents allowed to elaborate, enhance and critique the mountain probematique, to reflect on the mountain development debate as political forum for local, national and global players, to discuss some of the internationally debated issues in the context of Vietnam, and to further examining it in terms of political change and democratisation processes.

2.4.3 Sources of error

It was mentioned before that qualitative research is exposed to many criticisms of being unscientific, overly exploratory, and not contributing to objective truth. A lot of this criticism is based on the fact, that the qualitative researcher is always a biographically situated researcher. There is a potential bias in the methodology that may compromise the reliability and validity of the data and interpretations as researchers tend to select those texts and sources of data which support the arguments of their studies. This thesis cannot be protected against this kind of criticism although self-reflexivity and the consciousness of limits of knowledge, creativity and originality have been part of the entire research process.

Secondly, and also as mentioned before, the data collected in the informal, unstructured, semistructured and in-depth interviews cannot be as representative as from quantitative surveys. However, the choice for these types of interviewing was based on the researcher's intention to capture a wide range of views and authentic experiences rather than complete representations.

Thirdly, and very importantly, the work with an interpreter poses questions about the reliability of data and validity of interpretations for two reasons. On the one hand, Vietnam is home to 55 ethnic groups from five different language families. The *Tay* and *Dao* of *Ba Be* district belong to the *Thai-Kadai* and *H'mong-Yao* language family groups, while my interpreter is *Kinh* and speaks an Austro-Asiatic language. Despite the many anticipated difficulties, we were lucky to find that all of the *Tay* and most of the *Dao* people spoke *Kinh*.

The work with a research assistant or interpreter, on the other hand, always adds some challenges to the fieldwork situation (Kohler, 1991; Roost Vischer, 1997). The language and social skills become clear only after some time of work in the communities, and the ability to assume the role of the go-between, facilitator, mediator is not given to everybody. In most respects, work with my interpreter was efficient and enabled me to proceed as I intended. Before going to the field, we practiced fieldwork in a different area. I thoroughly explained to my assistant the approach and objectives of the study and taught her qualitative research methods. I prepared every interview session as a semistructured

interview with an interview guide, which allowed my assistant to get familiar with the topics, objectives, and questions of the interview. We also discussed and developed tactics for interviews which touched on sensitive or political issues. Interviews were written up by both of us individually. Tape-recording and notes supported the accuracy of data collection in a different language. Finally, we spent long weeks in constant presence of each other, were exposed to each others criticism, frustrations, and tensions, and became close friends.

2.4.4 Ethics and protocol

Conducting a research means not only to be aware of its strengths and weaknesses but also of the rightness and wrongness of our actions as researchers in relation to the people whose lives we are studying, to our colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work. Miles and Huberman (1994:297) list a range of ethical issues which come up at different stages of the research, such as the project's worthiness, the researcher's competences, the relationship with respondents, harm and risk, questions of privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, data ownership and so on. Dealing with these ethical issues effectively involves heightened awareness, negotiation, and making trade-offs among ethical dilemmas.

Carrying out fieldwork in ethnic communities like those in *Ba Be* district, which mostly belong to the poorest segment of Vietnam's population and are sometimes cut-off from the dynamics of the economic development in other parts of the country, means being aware of the intervention the fieldwork represents (Schuler, 1982; Mikkelsen, 1995). A researcher needs to be aware of the impact on the informants and communities by her presence and attitude in conducting the study as she may raise expectation profiles and hopes, or may affect the local people's self-confidence and self-respect.

Our presence in the communities was such that we did not distinguish ourselves from the others in terms of living conditions, nutrition, and means of transportation. In aspects concerning the research, its objectives and methods, I was always very open and transparent. An abstract of the research proposal was handed out for reference to both the district and commune officials and to the village leaders. Interviews and other data collecting events were mostly by appointment. In the end of most working sessions with the informants small gifts (usually goods they lacked, such as vegetable oil or salt) or allowances (small amounts of money) were offered, depending on the amount of time and work required for data collection. This was not to buy information but to express my respect for the informants who dedicated some of their working time to us. Our awareness about ethics while doing our work led, on the other hand, to the relatively rapid acceptance of our presence in the communities.

Regarding the ownership of data, I have always considered myself as the owner of the data collection and the interpretation while my respondents remained the owners of their accounts. To express this, I often use direct speech in the following data chapters both to give them voice and to present an authentic report and contextual analysis. I have not changed any names of the localities but the informants remain anonymous. However, a list of respondents whose direct speech is cited is provided in Appendix II. It lists some personal data of the informants, such as age, ethnicity, or position in the village organisation, as well as the data collection method applied.

After having outlined the epistemologies and methodologies of my approach to the investigation of mountain development and Vietnam's mountain problematique the following chapters will now elaborate on and respond to the three sets of research questions. The analysis starts with the international mountain development debate and continues with the investigation of the empirical case study of Vietnam's mountain problematique.

Chapter 3

Deconstructing Understandings of Mountain Development

3.1 The Mountain Case

Mountains make up two thirds of Vietnam's national territory and stand in sharp contrast to the economically prosperous delta areas of the Red River in the north and the Mekong River in the south of Vietnam. In the process of comprehensive economic reforms the economic and social discrepancies between the uplands and the lowlands in Vietnam have grown rapidly. Many aspects of the socialist economy have been liberalised, economic models have been diversified, decentralisation processes have devolved authority and budgets to the provinces, and policies and programmes of 10-year economic plans have become more qualified according to sectors and geographical regions. Vietnam undergoes an experiment where the engagement between socialism and capitalism unfolds challenging processes. But as Liljeström *et al.* (1998:247) remark, there are winners and losers in Vietnam's "dismantled revolution".

Vietnam provides an example for the far reaching and rapid impacts of globalisation, socialist and capitalist penetration, and economic and social change in mountain areas. The problems which typically emerge from these economic and political forces, that have reached the remotest mountain village, are social marginalisation, widespread poverty, environmental degradation, and to some extent social and ecological upstream-downstream effects, such as out-migration or natural calamities due to deforestation and environmental exploitation. That mountain development and environmental protection are problematic issues does not only hold true for Vietnam. Similar problems caused by economic and political issues are also the concerns of many other mountainous regions of the world.

This chapter explores the geographical and conceptual characteristics of mountains in research and development today. It sheds light on the politicisation of mountains in international and national development debates and uncovers some of the main representations that feed into the many versions of the mountain problematique. It investigates the origins and perseverance of notions of the mountain environment, how they are reproduced despite a number of alternatives, and critically assesses their impact on our understanding of mountains today.

3.2 Mountain Specificity – Curse or Boon?

3.2.1 The distinctiveness of mountains

Mountain areas are widely considered as fragile ecosystems with limited economic opportunities. They contain a distinctive trait that other major ecosystems, such as deserts, polar regions, coastal zones, grasslands, tropical rain forests and other forest ecosystems do

not represent. This unique characteristic is verticality. Steep slopes and altitude are facets of mountain landscapes that individually, or in reciprocity, lead to marginality in the sense of human utilisation and adaptation.

Steep slopes encompass geomorphologically high-energy environments. Weathering processes combined with gravity induce large mass transfers downslope and inhibit the development of mature and deep soils. The combination of slope instability and reduced biomass productivity increases the vulnerability of the mountain landscape from human intervention. High altitude of rugged mountain landscapes or high plateaux constrain biomass productivity due to reduced temperatures and, depending on the climatic zone, aridity (Ives et al., 1997b; Jeník, 1997).

Whilst mountains may be clearly discernible in a physical sense they also perform distinct functions in human and political life. Based on the work of Mountain Agenda (1992; Stone, 1992), the contributions to *People and the Planet. Pinnacles of Diversity* (UNFPA et al., 1996) and *Mountains of the World. A Global Priority* (eds. Messerli and Ives, 1997) the significance of mountains for humankind can be summarised as follows:

Mountains form in many parts of the world international and provincial frontiers. Many of them are in contention and very pernicious and destructive armed conflicts, guerrilla activities and devastating drug wars hinge on some of the mountains. The 'war against terrorism' in the Afghan Hindu Kush, the Karen guerrilla movement in the mountains of Myanmar, or the continued Chinese occupation of Tibet exemplify the actuality of international and national political conflicts carried out in mountain regions. On a more positive, yet not less political side, mountains harbour the largest number of distinct ethnic groups, varied remnants of cultural traditions, environmental knowledge, and habitat adaptations. They host some of the world's most complex agro-cultural gene pools and traditional management practices. Mountains contain the largest number of environmentally protected areas of any of the world's major landscape categories. They provide the direct life-support base of about a tenth of humankind and serve as the abode of the deities of many of the world's religions. Moreover, they provide an overarching spirituality, aesthetic, source of myth, legend and psychological balm and aspiration for society at large.

The distinctiveness of mountains highlights the otherness of mountains among the world's ecosystems and geographical categories. Their physical and socio-cultural particularities distinguishes mountains primarily from lowlands, the main reference according to which the significance and importance of mountains for economic, political and social concerns are perceived and socially constructed.

3.2.2 Opportunities and constraints

Mountains regions contain specific features which may not be attributed to mountains alone but their high degree and significant impact on resource use patterns, nature of production and exchange activities, including external linkages, differentiate mountains from other areas (Blaikie, 1984). The key features, referred to by Jodha (1992:44; 1997:315) and Pain (1996:66) as "mountain specificities", include restricted accessibility, fragility, marginality, diversity and heterogeneity, specific niche and human adaptation mechanisms. These conditions or 'specificities' bear both impeding and supporting factors for economic and social development in mountain regions.

Jodha (1997:314) identifies five factors which tend to inhibit development in mountain areas. Mountain conditions limit 1) the capacity of agricultural systems to absorb inputs; 2) the scope for resource-use intensification and upgrading through infrastructure development; 3) the production opportunities and gains associated with the scale of production systems similar to the Green Revolution in the plains; 4) the exposure to and replicability of development strategies from the plains; and 5) the generation of surplus and

exchange at favourable terms of trade. The circumstances created by restricted accessibility, fragility, marginality and to an extent diversity are a primary source of the above limitations. Besides these hindering factors, Jodha (1997:316) moreover points out that other mountain specificities such as diversity, niche and people's capacity to adapt to objective situations also have considerable potential to satisfy some of the basic conditions associated with high performance agriculture. Niche production of off-season fruits, vegetables or traditional crop varieties can generate high market revenues. The ethnical and ecological diversity is furthermore a prerequisite for an already existing or future ethno- and ecotourism industry.

The history of the dynamics of development in mountain areas can be viewed in terms of the ways in which mountain communities have managed these constraints and opportunities created by mountain conditions. It cannot be assumed that all of them have always done well in dealing with the mountain specificities, but a great number of mountain communities have developed sophisticated patterns of management systems for the sensitive mountain ecosystems. Adaptation to the natural environment is often expressed by altitudinal stratification of people, settlements, and land use. A great variety of land use types and products, especially under conditions of subsistence production, usually characterises natural resource use in mountain areas. The necessity for mountain farmers to utilise the entire range of the environmental potential has often led to a vertical arrangement of their land parcels for mountain agriculture (Grötzbach and Stadel, 1997)(see also sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2).

In many non-tropical mountains, such as the Alps and European mountains, the High Atlas and mountains of South and Central Asia mountain dwellers have developed 'staggered' or 'echelon-like' land use systems. Historical examples from the Swiss Alps show up to six distinct echelons, operated over an altitudinal range of more than 2,000 metres. The system starts with a first echelon of vineyards in the Rhône valley and goes up to high alp pastures (Wachter, 1995; Uhlig, 1995). Yearly temperature variation and the short succession of seasonality according to altitude allows only temporally limited use of the higher ecological belts. The operation and maintenance of the staggered mountain production system demand the management of diverse natural resources with different sensitivities and productivities. This kind of mountain production system also requires a high level of mobility of the people and their flocks. Herding the livestock and processing milk on the summer pastures, tilling and cropping fields in middle and lower altitudes, and transporting the products require numerous movements between the main, permanently inhabited farmstead in the valley and the various echelons being operated seasonally.

In the tropics, high-altitude echelons can be used the whole year round although alternation of dry periods and wet periods may still result in seasonally restricted agricultural activities and land uses (Grötzbach and Stadel, 1997). Despite sophisticated irrigation systems in the mountains of Vietnam, Thailand or the Philippines crop cycles are often restricted due to seasonal lack of water and low temperatures. Mountain agricultural systems do often not generate more than one yield per year and are naturally disadvantaged in comparison to the two to three annual rice yields in the plains. Intensive mountain agriculture is carried out in the valley bottoms, extensive upland farming, agroforestry and pasture take place at middle altitude. In an intact mountain agro-ecosystem the higher ecological belts are normally covered with watershed forests. Where the forest has been cleared the higher zones are also used for upland cropping, agroforestry and pasture but the loss of forest affects the hydrological cycle and the stability of the slope (Kunstadter et al., 1978; Marten, 1986; Schmidt-Vogt, 1995).

In summary, livelihoods in mountain areas are characterised by adaptation to and management of marginal, ecologically fragile environments. Yet, the concepts of fragility and marginality are relative ones. Those who are used to the marginal and fragile

environment will find it easier to deal with it than outsiders, such as development experts operating from the lowlands (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987). The mountain dwellers are therefore not only subordinated to the environmental determinism of the mountain environment but have modified the environment to match with their needs. The adaptation process of natural resource use in mountain regions is generally not a one-way but a two-way transformation between natural resource management and environmental regime (Jodha, 1997). It is moreover linked with and influenced by economic and political frameworks of the wider national and international market structures. The mountain specificities identified as marginality, difficult accessibility, fragility, heterogeneity, human adaptation and niche need to be considered all as partly physical and partly socially constructed. As such they influence policy frameworks designed for mountain areas.

Chapters four and five of the study take up on these issues. They will investigate mountainous livelihoods as well as the impact of changing economies and policies on the natural resource use patterns in the northern mountain region of Vietnam. They will point at the consequences of certain social constructions of mountain development problems for policy-making and policy implementation.

3.2.3 Human and political dimensions

In socio-cultural terms mountain regions are characterised by a high socio-cultural diversity as they host the greatest number of distinct ethnic groups and cultural traditions. Factors such as isolation, seclusion and periphery explain the diversity of mountain cultures to a certain degree. Grötzbach and Stadel (1997:29) point out, however, that these factors should be used in relative terms only. They primarily imply low levels of external relations as mountain communities were never shut off completely from interaction with the wider world. The authors, moreover, state that psychological and cultural distance from the majority lowland population facilitates the perseverance of traditional cultures while spatial distance from the centre induces social and political marginality (Grötzbach and Stadel, 1997; McKinnon and Michaud, 2000). Historical strands and environmental, socio-economic and political conditions distinguishes the mountain peoples from the majority lowland and urban population.

In recent times, modernisation processes, as the driving force of integration of mountain areas into nation-states, has revaluated the mountain areas. Their integration has led to new socio-economic functions, settlement patterns and dependencies (Stone, 1992; Mountain Agenda, 1992). In many places, modernisation has improved living conditions through better transportation and communication systems. On the other hand, increased accessibility of the mountains has given the nation-states the chance to integrate the previously relatively inaccessible but strategically and economically important mountain areas. The result was a consolidation of the political authority of the state over the remote areas. Better access to and better knowledge about the rich natural resources, such as hydropower, timber, and mineral resources also changed the relationship between the mountain areas and the plains. Unequal terms of trade have increased the dependence of the mountain areas on the markets in the lowlands. Many mountain regions lost their previously enjoyed, relative economic and political autonomy. These two new forms of political and economic marginality of the mountains have reinforced each other and often led to greater inequalities between the uplands and the lowlands as well as progressive environmental degradation in the ecologically sensitive mountain regions.

Funnell and Parish (2001:223) identify three principle strands of the marginalisation process in the mountain areas. The first process is that of internal colonialism which creates uneven development between the regions due to unequal exchange. The second strand of the marginalisation process concerns the various social and ethnic divisions. Once a mountain area has been incorporated into a larger political and national entity it is

often the case that its population will become a minority ethnic or religious group. Many of them become subject to assimilation and 're-education' programmes. The third element of marginalisation is linked with the previous two and concerns the role of the state, both in its political institutions and economic policies. The political representation and power of mountain regions within national polity depends upon the precise nature of the political institutions and their operational rule. However, in many countries mountain areas are not well served by the political structure, either because local democratic institutions are very weak or because the mountain areas *per se* are not clearly recognisable as entities within the political establishment. Without specific political mechanisms, mountain areas are often under-represented in the national parliaments and are over-ruled by the more powerful urban political leadership. Although there is a global trend towards decentralisation and democratisation, spurred by liberalism and world trade, which may give more voice to mountain communities, the same forces are increasingly placing mountain regions in severe comparative disadvantages to the non-mountain regions (Ives et al., 1997a).

The distinctiveness of mountains in their physical appearance and the many associated opportunities and constraints for development in mountain regions is summed up in the notion of mountain specificity. This conception recognises that there are 'real', scientifically proven problems which impinge on mountain development, such as the constraints on biomass production and agricultural productivity, and the ecological fragility due to steep slopes and high altitude. On the other hand, there are also 'real' chances and comparative advantages of mountain regions to participate in the wider market structures of services and industries, given that the policy frameworks play well for them too. The notion of mountain specificity points to the fact that mountains represent geographical landscapes with a specific material physicality that requires special attention. But again, the nature of this reality is shaped by political economy and history.

The conception of the mountain specificity stresses the mountains' distinctive functions in human and political life. It advocates for mountain-specific development frameworks and policy mechanisms and raises attention for the environmental, socio-economic and political problems of development in mountain areas. It enhances the conceptual approach to the analysis of the various notions of the mountain problematique by a realist perspective. It demands to carry out a succinct analysis of mountain conditions as well as to be aware of the relativity of mountain regions vis-à-vis the lowlands. Therefore, also the real and constructed nature of mountain specificities is an element that feeds into a number of different representations of mountains. Some of them are discussed in the following sections.

3.3 Mountains – A Battlefield of Contested Representations

3.3.1 Discourses and agendas

The physical, social and economic functions which mountains perform for humankind, such as the supply of water, the provision of mineral and plant resources as well as space for recreation, religion and tourism, place them in a dense web of interests and make them a battlefield of knowledge and struggle for control. Today, most mountain areas are, to varying degrees, economically, socially and politically integrated in nation-states and linked with lowland communities and the wider world. Mountains, widely perceived as a resource provider of the future especially regarding water resources, face however major challenges by the changing nature of their relationships with the lowlands. This section is concerned with the contested representations of mountains and mountain narratives. It

outlines the main stances in problem definition and policy-making for mountain development taken by numerous strategising agents and points at conflicting interfaces.

There are at least three representations of mountains which are globally debated and contested by numerous agencies and agents engaged in development and conservation. These are:

- 1) Mountains as hotspots of biodiversity and cultural heritage which have to be preserved;
- 2) mountains as hosts of vast resource potentials to be exploited for economic development;
- 3) mountains as regions with inherent environmental and development problems affecting the lowlands by ecological and social upstream-downstream effects.

Each of these points has found entrance into the international sustainable mountain development agenda, as later sections of this chapter will show. Some agencies and actors draw on several of these simultaneously.

A great number of international conservation organisations and NGOs, such as IUCN, WWF, or Flora and Fauna International, have pursued an agenda of biodiversity conservation in mountain areas. Among them the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) has been an important facilitator. It is a multi-lateral agency which mobilises financial resources to deal with four key threats to the global environment, including mountains. These are identified as biodiversity loss, climate change, the degradation of international waters, and ozone depletion. The GEF has its own operational programme for mountain ecosystems which falls under the biodiversity focal area. Many of the mountain nature reserves, protected areas and National Parks with biodiversity value receive assistance by the GEF, among them *Ba Be* National Park in the north of Vietnam, where empirical data for this study was collected.

The conservation concepts applied today represent a wide range from the classical National Park idea of untouched nature to integrated conservation and participatory conservation concepts (Nepal and Weber, 1995; IUCN et al., 2000; Garrity et al., 2001). The international conservationists' agendas include national attitudes towards biodiversity conservation and local communities' livelihood systems to different extents. There are a number of conflicts at the interfaces between international and national as well as national and local players. Biodiversity-rich countries are likely to receive a lot of attention and funding for biodiversity conservation. National priorities for conservation might, however, not support the international conservation agenda but channel the funds into different directions. Or else, local communities which are asked to carry out conservation services might not cooperate because they cannot benefit directly from the establishment of a National Park or a protected area. At these interfaces the biodiversity resources in mountain areas are strongly contested.

Closely related to the conservation agendas is the marketing of 'nature'. Biodiversity, ethnic diversity, the aesthetics and psychological balm of the mountains for society are traded goods in a growing tourism industry. The conservation discourse is therefore to some extent linked with the second position which perceives the mountain environment as vast resource reservoir which feeds into economic activities and processes.

The discourses associated with the second representation are identified as modernisation and industrialisation for national and regional economic growth. In the processes of modernisation and industrialisation national economies have exploited the natural resource potential of mountain areas in different intensities. For centralist and many less developed countries the peripheral mountain regions had the function of donors of resources. Stone for Mountain Agenda (1992:263) reports that the hyper-trophied

centralisation of planning and the sectoral approach to development in the former Soviet Union and socialist economies seriously harmed their mountain regions. The increased utilisation and depletion of the easily accessible resources of the lowlands caused a continuously expanding invasion of remote mountains, sometimes associated with large resettlement programmes. The mountain resources were therefore used as means to boost national economic growth and increase living standards, especially of a growing urban population in the lowlands. The Green Revolution was replicated in the mountain valleys to satisfy the growing food demand among the mountain population. But the inequalities between the mountain regions and the plains continued to grow. As mentioned earlier, the mountain conditions for agricultural development and industrialisation inhibit the gains from scale of production known from the plains. Economic forces and a growing demand for mountain resources from both outside and inside the mountain areas have widely increased the pressure on the mountain ecosystems. Critical stances regarding this position originate largely from the centre-periphery concept and the hegemony of the central state over the peripheral areas, also reflected in the above outlined processes of marginalisation.

The third representation points at the problems in social and economic development inherent to mountain regions. This last point bears particularly contested discourses and policy stances. It touches on issues of control and autonomy, on political representations and mechanisms for support of disadvantaged regions. The interlinkages between the mountains and the plains have in many nation-states been part of national policy frameworks and have been addressed to varying degrees. Rieder and Wyder (1997:88) provide a conceptual framework for analysing the influence of political affiliation on mountain areas that distinguishes between the policy priority for mountain areas in affluent and rather poor national economies.

In Switzerland, as a rare example of an affluent mountain state, specific policies for mountain areas and peoples have been developed throughout the nation's political and economic history (Moser, 2002). The federalist political system is the motor for these pro-mountain policies. It ensures equal representation of all cantons in the Council of States, independent of their economic and political power. One of the central regional policies of Switzerland, for example, concerns the decentralised settlement pattern. In order to prevent strong concentrations of population in the lowlands the policy provides infrastructure for remote and difficult accessible mountain communes and financial redistribution mechanisms to support agriculture and environmental protection services at higher altitudes. Tourism development is also a major policy project in Switzerland. It contributes substantially to the economic prosperity of the mountain region and is accompanied by identity-supporting initiatives for local livelihoods, culture, and produce (Bridel, 1984; Darbellay, 1984; Flühler et al., 1992). These policies strengthen the political integrity of the nation and solidarity with economically disadvantaged regions. As the mountains in Switzerland are an important source for national identity and economic growth a strong rural vote of both lowland urban and rural and mountain people has favoured pro-mountain policies during the last 150 years.

In a less developed, socialist country like Vietnam mountains assume very different functions than in Switzerland and are most likely not considered as a source for national identity building. Rieder and Wyder (1997) would argue that mountain areas receive relatively little support as most of the financial funds are used in the principal national development centres in the lowlands and industrial agglomerations. Undeniably, a lot of Vietnam's and foreign direct investments as well as development funds aim at economic development in the two delta areas of the Red River and Mekong River. However, tools have been developed to attack the development problems in the mountain areas. In the 1990s, the Infrastructure Development Programme in Mountain Regions as well as the Support Programme for Poor and Remote Mountain Communes were launched

(Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1998a; Xinhua News Agency, 2002). They attempt to come to terms with the difficulties, such as transport, communication, education, access to credit and so on by providing funds for infrastructure. Other policy corrections have been made through public administration reforms. Steps have been taken to strengthen local governance structures and to enhance political participation concerning locality-specific, and therefore also mountain-specific, concerns.

Based on these different discourses various policy actors and agencies have developed their own problem definition regarding mountain development and the state of the mountain environment. Their problem definitions are the point of departure for individual, national or international agenda setting and policy formulation. How the problem gets defined is the product of institutional practice and individual activity that reflect particular types of knowledge (Hajer, 1995). Some discourses get actively promoted in the policy-making arenas. By sharing the same discourse and interests policy actors create networks and alliances which help them influencing the policy process. As discourses start from different premises they can provoke serious conflicts over policies in terms of decisions, laws, programmes, and actual implementation practice (Keeley and Scoones, 2000).

Depending on which kind of discourse and representation is shared by policy actors the mountain problematique is perceived and identified in a different manner. There is a wide spectrum of notions of the mountain problematique, from extreme versions of the world's mountains super-crisis to more constructive versions that consider the discursive plurality of mountain problems.

The next sections are going to take the issue of contested representations of mountains and political practice concerning mountain development a little further. They discuss and critique the crisis narrative in the mountain development debate which has received wide attention in the policy-making arenas. As with other policy narratives, the crisis narrative describes specific 'stories' which are in line with the broader set of values and priorities of a particular discourse (Sutton, 1999). It can serve the purposes of certain groups of policy actors who wish to bring a specific problem definition to the fore of policy-making and is used as a call to action.

3.3.2 Crisis – the ultimate policy kick?

Until the 1950s mountains were perceived as vast, rugged, remote landscapes, seemingly inured to human environmental impacts. The former understanding of mountains was limited to the physical environment and livelihoods in mountain areas were largely explained as environmentally determined (Funnell and Parish, 2001). In the second half of the 20th century, mountain areas have experienced a rate of change, induced by economic, environmental, social and political transformations and development processes, which is unprecedented in history and therefore all the more challenging. It has caused a change in perception of mountain areas. Whereas mountains were previously seen as unchanging entities, a contrasting view on their state emerged in the 1960s. Over-development, winter sport and mass tourism in mountain ranges like the Alps and rapid population growth, deforestation, accelerated run-off and devastating down-stream effects in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region nurtured the perception that mountain environments were caught in downward spirals of overexploitation and depletion leading to a world super-crisis (Ives and Messerli, 1989).

The notion of a crisis in the world's mountains found rapid entrance in popular view on mountains and their environmental and development problems. The perception of a world super-crisis in the mountains was further nurtured by a powerful and widely acknowledged model of explanation of the process of environmental degradation and its consequences in mountain areas and their adjacent lowland regions (Eckholm, 1975;

1976). Because of its seeming applicability to the situation in Nepal and the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region Eckholm's model came to be called the Himalayan Environmental Degradation Theory. It consists of eight main components and the two metaphors of 'downward spirals' and 'vicious circles' of poverty and environmental degradation in which mountain dwellers and lowland populations are caught. The theory is briefly summarised as follows:

An unprecedented strong population growth in the 1960s and 1970s rapidly increased demands for fuelwood, construction timber, fodder and agricultural land on which to grow food in the Himalayan mountain region. The needs of the burgeoning subsistence population therefore exerted increasing pressures on the forest cover and deforestation took place at an alarming rate. Due to deforestation and the cutting of agricultural terraces on steeper and more marginal mountain slopes the normal hydrological cycle got disrupted and soil erosion and loss of land through accelerated landslide incidence increased. During the summer monsoon the adjacent plains were severely affected by occurrences such as floods, massive siltation, changes of river beds, loss of agricultural land and increase of diseases. The high erosion and the associated continued loss of agricultural land in the mountains was then assumed to lead to another round of deforestation, demand for fuelwood and so on. As fuelwood progressively became over-taxed regarding available human energy, an increased quantity of animal dung got used for fuel, reducing the yields on the fields due to lack of natural fertilisers. The series of vicious circles, each linked to others, operated inexorably to drive a downward spiral. The apparent impossibility to break any of these circles led to the prediction of widespread environmental and socio-economic ruin in the near future (after Eckholm, 1976; Ives, 1987; Ives and Messerli, 1989).

The scenario infers that a few million hill farmers are responsible for massive landscape and climatic changes that are affecting the lives and property of several hundred million people in the adjacent plains. Ives (1987:191) points out that these critical implications raise two related points. On the one hand, the downstream countries, as victims of this unwarranted and irresponsible environmental disruption, could justify reprisals in economic, political and military terms. The hill farmers' activities as a cause of growing environmental disaster affecting millions of people living in the plains need to experience corrective measures, thus they need to be better controlled. On the other, the Nepalese interests are served well by this image of helpless drift into environmental and social chaos since it may account for a continuous, disproportionate amount of international and bilateral development aid in relation to its total size and population.

3.3.3 Encountering the crisis

The notion of crisis in the world's mountains and some of the explanations used in the Himalayan Environmental Degradation Theory are reproduced until today in the mountain development debate. However, it was found that these views tended to be overwhelmingly those from centres of population and power from outside the mountains (Ives and Messerli, 1989; Blaikie and Sadeque, 2000). Undoubtedly, there are 'real' problems associated with mountain environments and mountain development due ecological fragility, limits to agricultural productivity, difficult accessibility, high infrastructure costs and so on. However, the crisis is yet another social construction that is playing a part in the discussion about sustainable mountain development. It has a lot of meanings and can be seen as a discursive call to barricades that points at conditions which cannot be stopped when the required structural reasons are not in place.

Today, the crisis narrative in the world's mountains according to the above described Himalayan Environmental Degradation Theory is extensively criticised for its lack of reliable data and its assumptions based on cause and effect explanations that are poorly understood and overstated. Its explanations of degradation and devastation in mountain

regions and the adjacent lowlands have proven to be highly simplistic and analytically questionable.

However, almost ten years passed after the appearance of the Himalayan Environmental Degradation Theory until it was encountered by fundamental critique. Thompson, Warburton and Hatley and Ives and Messerli have challenged the seemingly intellectually satisfying model of explanation most thoroughly (Thompson and Warburton, 1985a; 1985b; Hatley and Thompson, 1985; Thompson et al., 1986; Ives, 1987; Ives and Messerli, 1989; 1997). Ives and Messerli (1989:1) note that in the early stages of their own Himalayan research they also had accepted the Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation as self-evident. Their integrative research approach has eventually taught them, however, to reject it. They state:

"While we are convinced that there is an enormous problem facing the Himalayan region, we believe that it is clouded in uncertainty and complexity. Much of the problem is contained within the overly simplistic view, as expressed in the Theory, with its assumed cause-and-effect relationships, that appears to have captured the imagination of so many people, both onlookers and actors." (Ives and Messerli, 1989:1)

The degree of generalisation of facts and the tendency to accept uncritically a large number of inter-related assumptions had clouded the analytical scrutiny of the theory and other models of explanation. Thompson *et al.* (1986:6) argue that speaking about 'the' problem and generalising data across such a vast region is futile. Mountain research is challenging due to a great uncertainty concerning data and limited understanding of the complex and diverse mountain environment. Any cause-and-effect relationship has to be interrogated carefully in order not to reproduce the environmental orthodoxies and to provoke large scale interventions with limited or even negative effects (Forsyth, 1998). It is claimed that the ideas and models of explanation, which are appealing at a macro level, must first be related to the institutional reality at the local level, and action taken only when this is understood. The critique advocates for more inductive studies of the mountain livelihoods and the economic and political relationships between the uplands and lowlands and to take into account the remarkable heterogeneity of the mountain regions in terms of physical, ecological, social and cultural features.

The notion of crisis in the world's mountains has repeated the crisis narrative also attributed to other global environmental problems such as desertification or climate change. It is a narrative reproduced by anyone who wants to raise attention to a pressing concern and it thereby persistently survives, often without analytically sound arguments. The mountain development debate does therefore not principally distinguish itself from other debates about environmental problematiques. However, it has developed the perception that the mountain problematique is of global scale and concern. It is criticised on exactly these grounds. In their critique of the Himalayan Environmental Degradation Theory, Thompson and Warburton (1985b:116) have asked "what are the facts?" and "what would you like the facts to be?". With these provoking questions they have pointed at the role of organisations and policy actors in creating different images of crisis and degradation to match their political ambitions. Blaikie and Sadeque (2000:195) note that the reproduction of crisis in policy and international circles benefits almost everyone in terms of professional affirmation of one's role, for attracting funding, justifying intervention and so on. Meanwhile, critical scholars, who have moved away from the logical positivism of natural sciences to post-structural and post-modern epistemological stances, have begun to reveal the social and political agendas of various actors as central aspects in their analyses. Thompson *et al.*'s work has accordingly emphasised the rich plurality of existing problem definitions, each of which takes its shape from the particular social and cultural context it helps to sustain (Thompson et al., 1986). The authors state:

"It is the connections – between the natural environment, the myriad of strategising agents and the large scale social perturbation – that will have to be explored and understood before we can really tell whether anything can be done about the environmental degradation of the Himalayan and if so what." (1986:83)

The critique of the crisis narrative and models of explanation of environmental degradation in the mountains highlights two main points. Firstly, data on mountain environments as well as ecological and socio-economic interlinkages is incomplete and inherently difficult to upscale. This has led to misinterpretations and reductionist assumptions of the complex livelihood systems in the mountain areas as well as of the multifaceted interactions between the mountain regions and the adjacent lowlands. Responding to these shortcomings, this study aims at contributing to a more complete picture of a mountain development context in a socialist country in transition. Despite its focus on a microcosm of local development it enhances our understanding of environmental discourse, politicised mountains, local livelihoods, problem perceptions, and the interlinkages between the uplands with the lowlands. Its attempt combines anthropological-style research in ethnic mountain communities with an analysis of the economic and political framework in which Vietnam's mountain development is being debated.

Secondly, scientific facts and perceptions about mountains in their physical and socio-cultural appearance have been negotiated and manipulated by strategising actors and institutions. Many of them are represented by 'outsiders' such as urban lowland populations, political elites, and development agencies. On the one hand, the crisis narrative serves the needs of one group of people who need to attract attention and funding and rationalise intervention in mountain areas for the public good. On the other, conceptions such as that of mountain specificities serves the needs of another group advocating for the recognition of the historically, socio-culturally, economically and politically distinct mountain population for whom mountain-specific policy frameworks need to be developed.

Both for research and for the development of policy frameworks the social constructivist perspective on mountains served as a way to work towards a more comprehensive set of data and deeper insights into the complex nature of mountains and their relationships to the lowlands and the wider world. The work of those who have encountered the crisis narrative about the world's mountains have helped in sharpening the focus and analytical scrutiny of this study. It distances itself from the reductionist environmental orthodoxies, for example reiterated by the vicious circle of poverty, population growth and environmental degradation. The study sees itself as taking up the requirements of a contemporary research agenda for mountains that debates the state of the mountains in a changing world by disentangling various perceptions, problem definitions, political agendas and policy interventions in mountain areas. Mountain environments, agriculture and natural resource management, mountain societies and their interconnectedness with lowland economies are investigated with recognition of their complexity and heterogeneity as well as the uncertainty factors associated with mountain life. In the tradition of a critical political ecology it largely moves away from the measurement of biophysical processes as a guide to degradation, and focuses instead increasingly on local adaptations to change, social movements and institutional structures.

3.4 Sustainable Mountain Development Agenda

3.4.1 UNCED 1992 and Chapter 13

The retrospective look on the process of the politicisation of mountains reveals that the notion of crisis in the mountains of the world has proven to be a powerful social construction of environmental and development problems that have caught the attention of a wide audience and policy-makers. Despite its many shortfalls it has contributed to a change in perception of mountains as fragile environments and spaces for human life in an international arena. The literature produced by mountain scholars have eventually laid the foundation for a better understanding of physical, human, economic and political processes in the mountain areas of the world (Ives and Messerli, 1989; Stone, 1992; Mountain Agenda, 1992; Ives et al., 1997b; Jodha, 1997; Funnell and Parish, 2001). Their early work has significantly contributed to the international recognition of the global importance of mountains and raised the awareness for mountain specificities. Mountain ecosystems were explicitly included in Agenda 21, the United Nations Programme of Action from Rio 1992 (UNCED, 1992). Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 intends to show the way forward in 'Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development'. The document states:

"Mountains are an important source of water, energy and biological diversity. Furthermore, they are a source of such key resources as minerals, forest products and agricultural products and of recreation. As a major ecosystem representing the complex and interrelated ecology of our planet, mountain environments are essential to the survival of the global ecosystem. They are susceptible to accelerated soil erosion, landslides and rapid loss of habitat and genetic diversity. On the human side, there is widespread poverty among mountain inhabitants and loss of indigenous knowledge. As a result, most global mountain areas are experiencing environmental degradation. Hence, the proper management of mountain resources and socio-economic development of the people deserves immediate action." (1992:109)

Key priorities which emerged from Chapter 13 for sustainable mountain development are: 1) the recognition of the special status of mountains; 2) the need for new legal and institutional mechanisms to protect fragile mountain ecosystems and promote equitable development; 3) investment in mountain development and conservation; and 4) the better understanding of resource flows to and from mountain areas (Sène and McGuire, 1997). These priorities emphasise a mountain essentialism, with the consequence that mountains are predominantly discussed in Agenda 21 as distinctive geographical landscapes with real development problems. The discursive plurality of mountains and the social constructions of mountain problems have not found entrance into this important document.

As a result of the discussions at Rio, two programmes were agreed:

- 1) Generating and strengthening knowledge about the ecology and sustainable development of mountain systems;
- 2) promoting integrated watershed development and alternative livelihood opportunities.

The two programmes represent different aspects of prevailing thinking about mountain development. The first of the two programmes subscribes to the view that the highly vulnerable mountain environment cannot be adequately protected without a substantial increase in knowledge. Certainly, our knowledge about the vulnerability of the environment is still limited but the real issue concerns the provision of information that can mobilise specific political action (Funnell and Parish, 2001). The first programme opens up

the considerable debate about the efficacy of improved knowledge *per se* and how it is used by policy actors pursuing their diverse social, political and environmental agendas. This is a topic already discussed earlier and to be taken up throughout this study, but which is not addressed in Agenda 21. The question how much we need to know about the problem before people are willing to take action is in itself a political question and is contingent upon the prevailing pattern of social norms and political power. The Agenda's research programme, however, focuses primarily on basic research and appears to side-step such political issues.

The second programme intends to challenge the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation by promoting development programmes through effective participation of local people as a key to preventing further ecological imbalance. It stresses the role of smallholder activities in the soil erosion process and promotes strategies of land use planning and management. The suggested approach to integrated watershed development and alternative livelihoods is, however, rather technocratic and neglects the political and institutional determinants of livelihoods in mountain areas. Questions of access to, control over, and management authority for mountain resources are much debated not only within the mountains but also between the mountain and the lowland areas. While the urban lowland political elite still largely attempts to exploit and conserve the mountain areas for its natural resource potential, it fails to adequately compensate the mountain peoples for their loss of livelihoods based on mountain resources.

The two programmes outlined in Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 lack a political debate about mountain development and 'adequate' natural resource management. They inherently assume that the mountain problems today lie primarily within the mountains and their inhabitants. However, as has been argued and will be shown, many of the discussed difficulties originate from the interlinkages of the uplands with the lowlands. The two programmes do not address these problematic relationships and the role of lowlanders as major contributors to the problems associated with mountain development. In addition, Chapter 13 for the sustainable management of fragile ecosystems does also not reflect the current debates about the definition of problems, the production of knowledge, and the design of intervention strategies. It leaves many questions unanswered, such as: who is going to take action?; what are the political agendas of the agencies and actors involved?; and who are the beneficiaries of the programmes?

Before touching ground and getting involved with the poor and marginalised mountain communities directly, the two programmes have in the first place encouraged international and regional networking and lobbying for the case of mountains. In 1995, the Mountain Forum was founded, and international and interagency networks between institutions such as the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), International Potato Centre (CIP), International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF, now World Agroforestry Centre), the International Mountain Society and Mountain Agenda have been strengthened (Sène and McGuire, 1997). Their function includes the advocacy for mountain specificities to be recognised in national and international policies. They work with the following definition of sustainable mountain development:

"In concrete terms, sustainable management of mountain resources means enabling mountain populations to earn a livelihood, providing protection against natural hazards, enhancing conservation of natural resources, safeguarding social and cultural traditions, and supporting development that takes account of the special features of mountain regions and ensures that the interests of both mountain and lowland populations become equal parts of a fundamental social contract." (FAO et al., 2002:1)

The case for mountains has presently found its peak in the celebration of the International Year of Mountains 2002, where these issues have been addressed (FAO, 2000). These networks have considerably contributed to the fact that mountains today are acknowledged as important geographical landscapes and that the problem complexes associated with them are subjects to wide discussion. On the other hand, all the networking and policy debate at the international level may have delayed research and action on the ground. With the International Year of Mountains 2002 some of these shortcomings have been addressed and solved.

3.4.2 Putting mountain communities first

The actual global action for mountains, the International Year of Mountains 2002, expands the programmes ratified in Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 by an important further step in managing the fragile mountain ecosystems. FAO notes:

"Since UNCED 1992 the initiatives to transmitting the message on the global importance of mountain areas have been positive but inadequate. There is still the challenge of promoting appropriate policy formulation, and of creating and implementing new programmes for the conservation, management and development of mountain areas." (2000:13)

The intentions of the International Year of Mountains primarily aim at helping the poor and marginalised people living in mountain areas by drawing attention to their cultural heritage. By raising public awareness, the International Year of Mountains tries to encourage adequate political, institutional and financial commitment for concrete action towards implementing sustainable mountain development. The World Mountain Symposium took place in October 2001 and more conferences with mountain scholars, government representatives, and multilateral organisations were held in preparation for the Rio+10 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. The highlight of all these preparatory meetings, workshops and conferences for the case of mountains was the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit in late October 2002.

Rhoades (2000:5) emphasises that the recent success of bringing mountains to the international environmental policy stage should not deter from moving on to more demanding, innovative programmes that will make a significant difference in mountain villages and landscapes. The International Year of Mountains 2002 has not yet resolved this issue. It must still be critically asked: Does the objective of drawing attention to their cultural heritage actually help mountain peoples? And how does awareness raising actually help ensuring adequate and better action towards sustainable development? Once again these questions touch on issues of knowledge, representation, and power. What is going to happen when awareness for poor mountain peoples is raised through studies and surveys carried out in mountain communities?

The current debate on the research-policy dynamics identifies some problems which seriously affect the constructive bridging of knowledge and policy practice (Stone, 2001). For instance, there can be problems caused by social disconnection of both researchers and decision-makers from those who the research is about or intended for. Effective implementation is prone to be undermined by policy makers and leaders who are dismissive, unresponsive, or incapable of using research for making a change in policy practice. Research for awareness raising moreover generates the problem about the contested validity of knowledge(s), issues of censorship, control and ideology. In the mountain development debate Rhoades states:

"The time is ripe to break new ground, move out of the well-trodden ruts of modern development paradigms, and create truly innovative approaches that directly engage mountain peoples themselves." (2000:5)

He claims that no approach can be integrative unless the voices of the mountain peoples themselves are present and heard. This is a plea for a paradigm change in development, not only regarding mountain development but development in general. It reflects a trend towards people and their endogenous, pluralist and contested views of development. Already in the early 1980s, Chambers (1983:44) advocated for a balanced pluralist approach to rural development, which allows observation and unexpected details to qualify and generate theory, rather than for theory to limit what is noticed and considered relevant. Chambers (1983:46) argues that traditional and conventional research and development practice tend to share the top-down, core-periphery, centre-outwards biases of knowledge and that they are in danger of overlooking the pluralist approach to understanding from bottom up, from the periphery towards the core, and from the remote towards the central. He claims that the micro level is again and again out of focus and emphasises that things have to be seen also from the other end. There have been attempts to give mountain peoples more voice, such as the publication by Panos entitled "High Stakes: The Future of Mountain Societies" (2002) and the Panos homepage which creates the opportunity to listen to mountain voices all over the world (<http://www.mountainvoices.org>).

However, it may be doubted that the current moves towards sustainable mountain development are actually going to perform the paradigm shift claimed by Rhoades. It seems more likely that the mountain development agenda utilises the international rhetoric to load itself with objectives and ambitions that finally are hard to be met. For example, the international mountain development debate suggests putting people and mountain communities centre stage. Whether mountain communities are included in economic and political decision-making concerning their livelihoods depends on political cultures and policy styles, which differ greatly amongst the nation-states. In their cross-country policy analysis for mountain areas of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region Blaikie and Sadeque (2000:56-57) identify three particular policy styles. The styles are labelled 'classic', 'populist', and 'neo-liberal' and each of them has a number of ideological and philosophical assumptions. The classic style tends to be prescriptive, top-down and authoritative; the populist style tends to be more egalitarian, bottom-up, people-oriented, decentralised, participatory, and anti-state; the neo-liberal style represents an economic approach to the environment where individuals are seen as rational utility maximisers. Environmental costs of any activity must be identified and internalised and policy seeks to eliminate subsidies and promote clear property rights. The classical and neo-liberal concepts have to date not been successful in addressing environmental degradation and political marginalisation. This fact seems to call for more populist, i.e. people-centred, policy approaches.

Among the mountain scholars there is a general consensus that mountain people and communities need to be made central to the planning of the future of the mountains. Certainly, many hurdles have to be taken since this change in development planning involves a partial retreat of powerful political elites and the hegemonies of the national economies. It involves the strengthening and empowerment of mountain peoples in order to make their experiences with and abilities to adapt to the harsh conditions of the ecologically sensitive mountain environments an integral part of mountain development planning. There is a call for more stakeholder participation and participatory approaches to make policy and planning more responsive to local conditions and needs.

Therefore, the challenge is to include the mountain voices in the policy debates. This requires, however, a shift in economic and political attitudes towards marginalised and poor groups. As Ives *et al.* (1997a:455) point out, it seems to be exactly the minority and

marginalised status of many mountain peoples in the developing world that bears part of the explanation for the historical and 20th century neglect of mountain regions. For a long time they have been patronised and dominated by self-confident political elites in the urban centres and the lowlands.

3.4.3 Democratisation and decentralisation

Another layer of rhetoric and conceptual challenges is added to the sustainable mountain development agenda by the concepts of governance and decentralisation and their emphases on empowerment and democratic participation (Funnell and Parish, 2001). The debate reflects recent assumptions that the change of the relationship of lowland areas towards uplands and mountain populations involves not only technical measures but particularly a change of policy-making style and political culture. The current mountain development debate suggests a popular stance and puts communities and mountain peoples centre stage. A certain degree of self-determination, the consideration of specific socio-cultural contexts, and the cautious assessment and application of development models are seen as elements of the way forward in mountain development. There is furthermore a call for more political autonomy for mountain peoples and the redistribution of power in decision-making in order to deal with contemporary problems in environmental management (Ives et al., 1997a).

The proceedings of the World Mountain Symposium 2001 include, for example, the following two proposals:

"[In terms of policy and governance the following instruments were discussed:] campaigns for raising public awareness, international cooperation, conventions, networks, action plans and legislation. Finding mechanisms to turn intent into action is a general problem with all of these instruments. [...] However, governments have the opportunity to promote peace by replacing conflict with negotiation and multiple relationships. Moreover, governments could lay the foundation for democratic participation, thereby providing a platform for decision-making on social, economic and ecological issues and offer an opportunity to link opposing needs." (World Mountain Symposium, 2002b:2)

"Mountain people must be given voice to express their opinions and needs, and must therefore be integrated into mainstream political processes. In the political sphere, decentralisation is the proper instrument for achieving this aim. The principle of subsidiarity, which covers the broad sphere encompassing political and economic issues, is one of the most important instruments for helping to bridge the gap between the central lowlands and marginal highlands." (World Mountain Symposium, 2002a:2)

By bringing the issues of democratic participation and decentralisation on the agenda, the mountain development debate takes up elements from the wider debate on democracy's values discussed in section 2.2.3. It reflects the widespread belief that democratisation and decentralisation create generic benefits in the social, economic, political and ecological realms. The debate herewith attempts to act against the often top-down directives of environmental and development policies in mountain areas which largely fail to engage the trust and compliance of local people (Dupar and Badenoch, 2002). It also reflects recent trends in political economy and political discourse concerning the natural resource sectors which include moves toward more decentralised forms of decision-making and management over natural resources.

The commonest argument for recent decentralisation efforts is that decentralisation by definition involves bringing government closer to the governed in both the spatial and institutional senses. The government will be more knowledgeable about and hence more responsive to the needs of the people (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). Almaric (1999:6)

points out that the lesson learnt from the last 50 years is that the central state cannot be expected, alone, to protect and be respectful of the rights of local communities over their natural resources. There are calls that political and decision-making powers need to be distributed among governmental and non-governmental organisations. Since the 1980s, decentralisation has been promoted as solution to many of the problems of administration and governance constraining local and national development, and a means of improving performance in poverty reduction. The benefits of decentralisation include improved efficiency of public service provision, more appropriate services, better governance, and the empowerment of local citizens (James et al., 2002).

In recent years, the concepts of decentralisation and democratisation are issues that frequently appear in the literature on natural resource management, sustainable livelihoods, and development in rural or mountain areas (Mehta et al., 1999; Dasgupta and Maskin, 1999; Manor, 2000; Newell, 2000; Badenoch and Dupar, 2001). With the increasingly rapid social and economic integration into nation-states and the wider world, mountain areas have become the subject of exploitation and competition among different local and non-local stakeholders. Ronnås (2001:2) argues that the problems of environmental degradation and social marginalisation are aggravated by weak and poorly enforced legislation and by the absence of clear-cut and universally respected property rights. In the attempt to improve the management of fragile natural resources in mountain regions a number of governments have resorted to a range of institutional measures at both the national and local level. Increasingly, these include attempts at different forms of administrative, fiscal, and political decentralisation. The question remains, however, whether the policy shift towards decentralisation enables environmental governance that is more responsive to the needs and concerns of local resource users in the mountain areas.

Funnell (2002:2) argues that whenever there is a debate about the nature of governance, there is an implicit map of the territories involved, linked with assumptions about the way they interact. This debate is predicated upon either an accepted geography around which governance structures must be created, or a demand to reformulate the map to fit the prevailing political, economic, or social pressures. Funnell introduces the principle of subsidiarity into the sustainable mountain development debate. He notes that it may play a critical role in thinking about institutions of governance for mountain areas. Subsidiarity refers to the idea that wherever possible political and decision-making powers are given to the least aggregated level of government (McLean, 1996). Only when a particular task cannot be undertaken adequately by a low level of government it will be handed up to a higher level. Policy is then carried out within that context which is the smallest viable one in which the objective can successfully be attained. The principle of subsidiarity adopted for sustainable mountain development means that decision-making and policy formulation is self-determined and autonomous at the level, where resources are directly used and where their management involves both day-to-day and long-term visions. It builds on the idea that low-level institutions and patterns of social organisation are capable of creating policy frameworks that are responsive to the particularities and diversity of natural environments and societies. On the other hand, the principle is connected to the nature of the wider political structure. Subsidiarity is a regulative concept that has been adopted in states with decentralised, federalist structures that build on the long established distribution of political power between different levels of competences, such as the Bundesländer in Germany or the cantons and communes in Switzerland. It strengthens and prioritises the influence of the sub-national levels (Nohlen et al., 1998).

Therefore, subsidiarity implies a vision that the local development context is best managed by local governance structures that have a strong stance in deciding about the local development path. As meaningful as this sounds, the principle of subsidiarity is not applicable to every local government context. It requires considerable local capacity and a

wider political framework that allows appropriate recognition of the role local communities can play (Funnell, 2002). In mountain areas, where decentralised or democratic structures tend to be weak altogether, the principle of subsidiarity may therefore not yet suit without major efforts in introducing political and administrative reforms and strengthening local capacities. Again, this implies a shift in structures of governance and political cultures of greater magnitude.

The way forward with democratisation and decentralisation for mountain areas, as advocated by the sustainable mountain development agenda, therefore can be criticised as being overly naïve while touching politically highly sensitive ground. It appears to operate with a specific understanding of the values of democracy and decentralisation that is influenced by the histories of Western democracies. However, other versions of democracy prevail that are shaped by non-Western histories and ideologies. The mountain development debate shows deficiencies in taking into account the impact of these ideational and political systems on the development path in mountain areas. It risks simply adding another layer of rhetoric to the mountain development agenda that directly mirrors the currently popular concepts in development politics and policy.

I am going to discuss the meaning and impacts of these concepts in Vietnam's mountain areas in more detail in chapter six. There, a discussion about democracy is linked with the findings of the political ecological analysis of Vietnam's mountain problematique. The chapter analyses how enabling or constraining Vietnam's political setting is for decentralised, democratic decision-making in mountain communes.

3.5 A Critique of the Problematique

The previous sections have shown that the case of mountains and the problems commonly associated with mountain development are subjects of discussion in an international mountain development debate. There is a commonly shared view that development and environmental protection in mountain areas are vital but problematic. This perspective creates a legitimate arena for researchers, government agencies, and development organisations to think over the future of the world's mountains. The recent debate has largely moved away from the previous notion of the super-crisis in the world's mountains towards more qualified understandings. A great number of research and development programmes have contributed to this change and have increased the body of knowledge about mountain problems. However, the current international mountain development discourse consists of many overlapping and contradictory ideas and rationales. Some of them still show traits of essentialising mountains. They explain mountain problems as consequences of mountain specificities and see them as confined to mountain areas alone. This leads some policy actors to suggest, for example, more responsibility, rights and participation for mountain peoples in environmental management and socio-economic development. Others advocate more for control over them to come to terms with issues such as progressing environmental degradation.

There is no doubt, that the shared view of problematic mountain development has created a platform for discussion and debate. However, by overly focussing on specific problems, such as poverty or environmental degradation in mountain areas, there is the risk of losing the crucial interlinkages of mountains with the lowlands, national political and economic frameworks, and a globalised economy out of sight. This thesis challenges and enhances the mountain development discourse by insights into the complex relationships between mountain peoples and lowlanders and the contested meanings of mountains. It criticises that mountain development today is not necessarily about the development of a distinctive geographical landscape unit but that it is essentially about the contest of different ideational frameworks of conservation, economic development and political

change. It critiques the international mountain development agenda on exactly this ground, pointing out that the demonstrated political commitment to come to terms with mountain development is but a means to push through agendas of wider political magnitudes, such as to set in place market economic structures as well as political frameworks promoting Western types of democracy.

The international mountain development debate is currently most powerful in formulating policy frameworks towards mountain areas. My stance emphasises, however, that there is no single solution to the mountain development problems because no single version of a mountain problematique exists. It claims that there are always a number of versions of the problematique identified in the world's mountain regions and in national mountain areas. This viewpoint attempts to enhance the body of knowledge about mountains by deconstructing different understandings of mountain development. It reveals the discursive nature of mountains and the mountain problematique that helps scrutinising the relationships between different groups of populations and policy actors as well as the interlinkages between different geographical regions, systems of value and economic orientations. The many versions of the mountain problematique are constructed according to a variety of different perspectives and concepts developed in the face of continuous exploitation and degradation of as well as social marginalisation in mountain areas. Most of them are constructed by non-mountain people situated in the lowlands that do not share the same political economic and historical backgrounds as the mountain peoples. The idea of various versions of the mountain problematique includes the complexities of cultural and economic life in the mountain areas of the world and emphasises the ethnic and ecological diversity and heterogeneity of mountain societies and ecosystems. It suggests that mountain development problems cannot be addressed with general policy frameworks but with specific approaches to changing the underlying structures of the problems, such as, for example, the economic and political frameworks or the attitudes by the mostly lowland policy-makers towards the mountain peoples.

In sum, the various versions of the mountain problematique are shaped by many different perceptions and constructions of mountains and mountain problems. Their institutionalisation in the international mountain development debate may act as temporally shared ideas among mountain scholars, governments, development agencies, and mountain peoples. This may help finding better approaches to mountain development. Nevertheless, the concepts promoted in the sustainable mountain development agenda need to be carefully considered in each individual mountain region. Moreover, one must be aware of the self-amplifying rhetoric of such development agendas elaborated in the international policy arena. Due to various interests in the sustainable mountain development agenda, it risks to remain politically unconditional.

3.6 Mountain Development, Policy and Politics in this Thesis

The various versions of the mountain problematique are the analytical focus of this thesis' investigation of the politically, historically, socially and economically complex interlinkages between actors interested in the mountain regions and the natural characteristics of this geographical unit. The mountain development agenda, on the other hand, provides the operational reference for 'better' policy frameworks for mountain areas. The empirical chapters of this thesis will question its validity and feasibility in the context of Vietnam's mountain problematique.

During the last decades the mountain scholarship has become more integrative, including social science perspectives into the previously mostly technological and physical investigations of the mountain environments. The social science perspective on mountains and communities enables me to work with the conceptualisation of mountain environments

and resources as highly politicised objects. As has been shown in the previous sections, mountain environments are frequently strongly contested areas, whether for their geopolitical significance, their natural resource potential, or their ecosystemic interlinkages with the lowlands (water reservoirs, natural hazards). Many nation-states with a considerable share of mountainous territory have therefore developed specific ideas or constructions of, demands on and hegemonies over the mountain areas.

With the integration of social science approaches into the field of mountain studies it was possible to put these phenomena on the mountain research agenda. This thesis contributes to the recent strand of mountain studies. It endeavours to shed light on both the mountains as contested geographical landscapes as well as on mountain peoples and communities as actors often marginalised in the wider politico-economic arenas of the national and global economy. It is interested in the double reflexivity of mountain peoples and the political and policy frameworks. Mountain peoples are both takers as well as shapers of the political systems. Usually they take more than they can effect.

The thesis emphasises the diversity, heterogeneity, and uncertainty factors of societal and economic life in the mountain areas today, as it points at the cohabitation of numerous ethnic groups, the shared natural environment, and the many institutional arrangements and diverse policy responses. Moreover, it investigates how the communities are represented and whether the mountain peoples' voices get heard at the policy-making levels. The study works both with a disaggregated view of the community and diverse mountain environment in questions of livelihoods and resource use, as well as with a more generalised conception of community, people, and mountain areas in questions of political representation, power, and participation.

The problem complexes associated with mountain development are discussed in the national context of Vietnam from a predominantly social and political science perspective. Vietnam's mountain problematique is, firstly, analysed in its historical dimension, or to put it differently, a historical narrative explores the roots of Vietnam's mountain problematique. This analysis points at the underlying structures of today's mountain problematique that were set in place and are being reproduced since Vietnam's independence.

Regarding the policy frameworks concerning mountain development and environmental problems the thesis provides a policy document and policy process analysis to find out how policies get established, how they are formulated and how they are being implemented. The political analysis of competing policy actor interests in the case study locality of *Ba Be* district gives insights into the contested policy arena of the politicised mountain areas.

The third thematic analysis concerning mountain development explores the political framework in which Vietnam's mountain problematique emerges. The thesis here ventures into an analysis of the political organisation of Vietnam's nation-state, the power-sharing between the different political actors and the nature of the political culture. These aspects do not only provide the institutional and structural background for any political and economic decision in mountain areas but for politics in Vietnam in general. This thesis argues that the investigation of the political setting is important to find out where opportunities for political participation for mountain peoples exist and where they are circumvented. The organisational analysis of Vietnam's political framework is set against the claims made in the international mountain agenda, such as the calls for democratisation and decentralisation. In the recent policy discussions about the future of the world's mountains, the complexities and difficulties of sustainable mountain development seem to induce the mountain policy actors to elaborate on policy frameworks that increasingly become overloaded with ideas and concepts. The concepts of decentralisation or subsidiarity, for example, have been added to the agenda without actually reflecting

according to which notions they get applied in the individual nation-states. The way how these different understandings of concepts and problems affect policy-making towards mountains requires systematic discussion.

Chapter 4

Development and Change in Vietnam's Northern Mountain Region

4.1 Mountain Development in Vietnam

In 1998, Jamieson *et al.* (1998) published a study on development in Vietnam's uplands that differed in some respects greatly from previous reports on the socio-cultural, economic and environmental problems in the mountain areas. Their analysis of the so-called 'development crisis' in the uplands of Vietnam set in at two levels. Firstly, the five interrelated variables of population growth, environmental degradation, poverty, social, cultural and economic marginalisation, and dependence on non-local systems were identified as factors responsible for serious problems for mountain development. The authors explained, similar to the previously discussed Himalayan Environmental Degradation Theory, that the interaction of these factors form self-amplifying systems in which worsening of any one variable generates a worsening of the others. While this first level of analysis did not represent a novelty in mountain research the second level was rather innovative. Jamieson *et al.*'s study focused on the structural determinants of the 'development crisis'. The authors argued that the development process was powerfully shaped by at least four underlying factors, such as the structures of knowledge, the power relations between the elite and common people, the social and political organisation, and Vietnam's socialist economy. They found that the investigation of this second level was important because it may provide answers to why the problems in Vietnam's uplands are so persistent. They argued that within these underlying structures lied the keys to understand, why the many development interventions in mountain areas have only shown very modest results despite the high level of investment. With this focus their study touched on politically sensitive issues such as power relations, policy-making, the political attitudes towards the mountain population, and conflicting world views and ideologies. To date, this second level of development problems in mountain areas is under-researched, both in Vietnam and elsewhere. Jamieson *et al.* (1998:28) therefore concluded their study with the call for a fundamental reorientation and more analytical scrutiny in research, planning, implementation, and monitoring of upland development.

This thesis adds to Jamieson *et al.*'s analysis. Although it does not share Jamieson *et al.*'s notion of a development crisis and self-amplifying systems of mountain degradation in Vietnam's uplands, it acknowledges that population growth, environmental degradation, poverty, marginalisation and dependence on non-local markets and political systems are factors that undeniably contribute to the difficulties of mountain development in Vietnam. It argues, however, that these difficulties are not only triggered by the mountain conditions alone but by upland-lowland relations. Therefore, closed self-amplifying systems do not adequately represent the many different influences and causes of the problems in the mountain areas. Secondly, and as the previous critique of the crisis narrative has shown,

the notion of a crisis does not substantially contribute to enhancing our understanding of the complex of problems associated with mountain development. Therefore, the thesis prefers to work with a perspective of several interlinked levels of influence and to keep a differentiated view of the ethnic and socio-economic situation in the mountain localities.

With a discursive political ecological analysis it adds foremost to the second level of Jamieson *et al.*'s study regarding the underlying structures of the problems. This chapter, for example, starts with the analysis of Vietnam's mountain problematique by exploring the history of upland-lowland relations. It discusses, secondly, the changing political-economic conditions and their influence on social and environmental change in mountain areas during the last five decades. The chapter combines empirical evidence from *Ba Be* district in *Bac Kan* province, gathered in anthropological-style field research, with a political-economic structural analysis. It gives a first glimpse of Vietnam's mountain problematique and its historical roots. The chapter provides the basis for the thesis' further in-depth analysis of policies and politics in the mountain areas of Vietnam. Its focus subsequently lies on the structures of knowledge and political agendas, on which grounds mountain problems are identified and constructed in the national context of Vietnam.

4.2 A History of Lowland-Upland Relations

4.2.1 Common struggles

For many centuries and until the late 19th century Vietnam was a feudal state ruled by dynasties such as the *Ly*, *Tran*, *Le* and *Nguyen*. The Vietnamese emperors had their courts in the old centres of Hanoi, Hue, and Saigon (today called Ho Chi Minh city, see Map 4-1). All of these cities lie in the lowland areas of northern, central and southern Vietnam. The Vietnamese or *Kinh* people had a preference for the deltas and the lowlands where irrigated rice-growing and settlement in compact, densely populated, and sedentary villages was possible and permitted an active political and religious life. At that time, the *Kinh* considered the mountain areas as relatively uninteresting places difficult to access and to live in. They rarely settled in the mountains surrounding the Red River delta (see Map 4-2), leaving them instead to the highland peoples with different cultural traditions and origins. As a result of the settlement pattern, Vietnamese imperial power was traditionally strongest in the lowlands and weakest in the highlands. The relations between the lowlands and the uplands were characterised by antipathy (McLeod, 1999).

The old political order in Vietnam had an end when France decided to accelerate the colonisation of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. In the late 19th century the last *Nguyen* emperor established closer relationships with France and delegated all authority to a viceroy, who was accountable to the emperor and the French governors. Initially, the French hegemonies were still actively fought by the *Kinh* people but the French forces were stronger. The highlanders played an in-between role in this process of power change. Firstly, they were little integrated into the lowland-based administrative-political system of the *Kinh* and did not feel obliged to fight for its continued existence. And secondly, the relationships between them and the lowlanders were characterised by antipathy and animosity. The mountain peoples therefore often refused to get involved in the *Kinh* struggles against the colonisers.



Map 4-1: Political map of Vietnam (after Jamieson et al., 1998)



Map 4-2: Vietnam's northern mountain region (after Jamieson et al., 1998)

The French officials learnt quickly how to make use of the animosities between the *Kinh* and the mountain ethnic groups and were able to make some of them their allies. The force and logistics of the French troops and colonialists eventually led to the establishment of the colonial regime in 1897 (Nguyen Khac Vien, 1999). Hanoi became the capital of French Indochina. Laos, Cambodia, and three regions of Vietnam were controlled by five French governors, heading an administration funded by land and head taxes. The French Indochina Union Government took over and standardised public services, such as civil affairs, education, health, public works, and communication, funded by the revenue of state monopolies, including opium primarily cultivated in the northern mountain region (Tarling, 2001).

The colonial period from 1897 to 1945 was characterised by resource and human exploitation, the impoverishment of the peasantry and the emergence of a class society with a large working class and a small bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. French policy ensured the predominance of the cash economy with concentrating land in the hands of a few landlords (Popkin, 1979). The poor were adversely affected by the introduction of the monetary taxation (Luttrell, 2001a). McLeod (1999:362) notes that the mountain peoples' feelings toward the colonial regime were ambivalent, some seeing it at just another form of lowlander domination, others viewing it as a necessary bulwark against *Kinh* penetration.

However, the Vietnamese struggle for independence was strong. Between 1924 and 1940 Ho Chi Minh prepared the founding of the Indochina Communist Party and led the Vietnamese revolution (The Gioi Publishers, 1999). During the struggles of the Second World War, when Vietnam was doubly occupied by the French and the Japanese, the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to accelerate armed revolts and to strengthen guerrilla and self-defence units. On this basis the League for the Vietnamese

Independence, the *Viet Minh*, was established. It was also the Indochina Communist Party with its 'Programme of Action' that finally gained the mountain peoples' confidence to fight on the Vietnamese side. It promised them the right of citizenship and of 'self-determination' in an independent Indochina and tried to persuade them of *Viet Minh*'s sincerity. The League for Vietnamese Independence eventually found almost nation-wide support and the August Revolution of 1945 made a preliminary end to French colonialism and Japanese hegemony. Nguyen Khac Vien (1999:247) recollects that the Revolution was characterised by an intelligent combination of political and armed fight. Its result was the creation of a strong national unity on the basis of firm alliances between workers and peasants. It succeeded in winning the masses and giving them self-confidence and determination for further steps towards independence.

Between 1945 and 1975 Vietnam led and won two wars to consolidate independence and national unification. The first Indochina war against the French lasted from 1945 to 1954. After nine years of independence war the French had to surrender in the northern mountain province of *Lai Chau*, where they lost their last fortress *Dien Bien Phu*. The war was officially over when the Geneva accords were signed. Vietnam was divided into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north and South Vietnam. The general intention was that South Vietnam received a provisional administration during two years and that the country would be reunified after the elections in 1956. However, the U.S.A. began to set up a neo-colonialist regime in South Vietnam to fight against the revolutionary, Communist movement of the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam, where socialism was firmly being established between 1954 and 1975. The Vietnamese military forces of North Vietnam fought continuously against the U.S. neo-imperialism and remainders of French capitalism in the south (Nguyen Khac Vien, 1970). After years of one of the most devastating wars Vietnam finally defeated the U.S. on 30th April 1975.

In their articles written towards the end of the 'American War', La Van Lo (1975) and Be Viet Dang (1975) both emphasise the historic unification of all Vietnamese citizens, i.e. *Kinh* and the ethnic groups, during the common struggle in the wars against the foreign colonisers and intruders. Be Viet Dang (1975:65) reports that "whole hamlets and villages of *Dao*, out of a sense of community as well as patriotism, joined the *Viet Minh* League to fight for national liberation". Also the *Tay*, who have been influenced by the culture of the *Kinh* for many centuries, joined the resistance movement. However, some of the ethnic groups in both the northern mountain region and the central highlands continued to fight on the side of the foreign intruders. Many of them got involved in their crusade against Vietnamese nationalism and Communism. Christie (1996:105) notes that the ethnic mountain population of central Vietnam is a classic and an exceptionally tragic example of a people in a peripheral region in the pre-colonial order of things who were ruthlessly exploited in the era of decolonisation and the subsequent era of Cold War confrontation (see also section 5.3.2).

4.2.2 Vietnamisation

Despite the important role of the mountain peoples of northern Vietnam in the Vietnamese struggle for independence the relationship between the lowlanders and uplanders remained tense. The subsequent incorporation of the mountain areas into the newly established Democratic Republic of Vietnam and its socialist economy was a period of confrontation, paternalism, disrespect, and exploitation. McLeod (1999) summarises it as follows:

"[Ethnic peoples all over the world are] threatened with extinction by political, economic, and cultural forces controlled by the dominant groups of the states in which they live. (...) In Vietnam, indigenous peoples have faced the traumas of a revolution that spawned two international conflicts. In the course of these upheavals, Vietnam's indigenous peoples, particularly the highlanders of the northern and central mountains

and plains, were forced to see their homelands serve as battlegrounds between the forces whose goals had little relationship to their concerns." (McLeod, 1999:353)

His position reflects a critical, politicised view of the relationships between the highlanders and the lowlanders, that problematises issues of control and dominations. The integration of ethnic groups of the northern mountain region into the *Kinh*-governed nation-state made them first of all a minority population. However, the process of incorporation was also accompanied by several amendments of the Vietnamese Constitution. An article on the status of ethnic groups in the Vietnamese nation-state appears in the first Constitution of 1946. Article No. 8 states that "besides equality in rights, national minorities receive help in all areas in order to keep pace with the general level of the country" (Internet Information of the Communist Party of Vietnam; http://www.cpv.org.vn/vietnam_en/constitution/1946/index.htm). Article No. 3 of the Constitution of 1959 is more explicit. It states:

"The Democratic Republic of Vietnam is a single multi-national State.

All the nationalities living on Vietnamese territory are equal in rights and duties. The State has the duty to maintain and develop the solidarity between the various nationalities. All acts of discrimination against, or oppression of any nationality, all actions which undermine the unity of the nationalities, are strictly prohibited.

All nationalities have the right to preserve or reform their own customs and habits, to use their spoken and written languages, and to develop their own national culture.

Autonomous zones may be established in areas where people of national minorities live in compact communities. Such autonomous zones are inalienable parts of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The State strives to help the national minorities to make rapid progress and to keep pace with the general economic and cultural advance."

(Internet Information of the Communist Party of Vietnam; http://www.cpv.org.vn/vietnam_en/constitution/1959/index.htm)

However, the promise of self-determination in an independent Indochina that actually brought the ethnic groups of northern Vietnam to fight side by side with the *Kinh* against the intruders was not fulfilled. Although autonomous zones were being established the Party's promise of self-determination was quietly dropped for a vaguer policy of 'autonomy'. The *Thai-Meo* and *Viet-Bac* autonomous subdivisions were officially founded in 1955 and 1956 respectively. They were termed 'the zones' and described as "an echelon of local administration placed under the direct control of the central government" (McLeod, 1999:369). The two zones were located in north-western and north-eastern Vietnam along the China-Vietnam and Vietnam-Laos borders and covered a large part of the total territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. They were populated by almost two million people, members of more than 20 ethnic groups. Freedom of belief was guaranteed as was the right to keep or change customs – provided that such changes responded to the majority opinion within the zone and were approved by the zone's 'competent authorities' who were mainly ethnic *Kinh*. Despite the formality of the autonomous zones the relations of the lowlanders with the highlanders were dominated by the former's civilising project, which Harrell (1997) describes as follows:

"A kind of interaction between peoples, in which one group, the civilizing center, interacts with other groups (the peripheral peoples) in terms of a particular kind of

inequality. In this interaction, the inequality between the civilizing center and the peripheral peoples has its ideological basis in the center's claim to a superior degree of civilization, along with a commitment to raise the peripheral peoples' civilization to the level of the center, or at least closer to that level (...) The civilizing center draws its ideological rationale from the belief that the process of domination is one of helping the dominated to attain or at least to approach the superior cultural, religious, and moral qualities characteristic of the center itself." (Harrell, 1997:4)

McLeod (1999:370) reveals that the Party continued to discuss the highlands primarily in terms of their economic potential for the nation as a whole. It sharply criticised the ethnic minorities for their backwardness, ignorance, stagnation and superstition which could only be improved via increased contacts with *Kinh* people. Paternalism and the desire to exercise control over the resources and the people of the northern mountain region nurtured the 'Vietnamisation' projects. Be Viet Dang's monograph (1975) of the *Dao* people gives an example of the attitude of the *Kinh* towards the ethnic peoples during the 1970s. He states:

"The semi-nomadic way of life, bound up with shifting cultivation and cause of social stagnation, has greatly diminished thanks to the campaign for sedentarisation (...) Superstitions have been successfully fought through the spread of education and health services; good traditions, deeply rooted in social life are piously preserved, especially those which are related to community spirit. The *Zao* cultural legacy, rich and diverse, has been given a new value and has taken its place in the cultural treasury of the Vietnamese nation beside those of other ethnic groups. Over the last 20 years, *Zao* society like all other minority societies has known a clear metamorphosis." (Be Viet Dang, 1975:77-78)

Political and to some extent cultural assimilation took place via the strategy of socialist indoctrination which transformed the social organisation in the mountains and other peripheral regions. The Party ideology was disseminated and reproduced in even the remotest parts of the country. Economic and political decisions, formerly made according to customs and regulated by traditional village institutions, were now subject to Party policy. Socialist political structures were established down to the commune level throughout the country. The cooperatives became the managers of the localities. Unlike other Communist regimes, which placed outsiders in the administrative bodies of the political system at the lower levels, the Vietnamese political leadership made use of local leaders to implement economic plans and to unify the socio-culturally heterogeneous nation (Chaliand, 1969; Heberer, 1987).

The history of the relationship between lowlands and uplands is a history of political struggle and control both against the foreign intruders and for the unification of the ethnically and culturally heterogeneous Vietnamese society. The processes of integration of mountain areas into the emerging nation-state after independence made the mountain peoples a minority ethnic population dominated by the *Kinh* majority. Although they were given equal rights of citizenship and the freedom to maintain their traditions and cultures, they were in fact made subject to assimilation and civilising projects. The *Kinh*'s attacks on their cultural values regarding their subsistence economy, lifestyle and traditions moreover nurtured feelings of inferiority and loss of self-esteem. Many of the mountain peoples have begun to see themselves as 'backward losers' (Jamieson et al., 1998; Le Trong Cuc and Rambo, 2001).

With the penetration of the uplands with political institutions and Party ideology the mountain peoples also lost their previous relative independence of social and political life in the uplands. The political authority of the central state over the remote areas was firmly consolidated. The history of relationships between lowlands and uplands in the north of Vietnam reflects some of the strands of marginalisation processes in mountain areas all

over the world, discussed in section 3.2.3 (Funnell and Parish, 2001). The *Kinh's* socio-cultural and political forces of assimilation and control as well as little opportunity for equal political representation have increasingly placed the mountain regions at a severe disadvantage to the non-mountain regions. The changing political-economic conditions of the early independence and the subsequent war economies and reforms have furthermore added difficulties and uncertainties to life in the mountain areas during nation-state building and the wars.

4.3 Changing Political-Economic Conditions

4.3.1 Socialist projects

The plan for the establishment of the autonomous zones did not prevent the ethnic groups of northern Vietnam from getting integrated into further national experiments following independence after 1954. The biggest one was certainly the establishment of a Marxist economy. In the agricultural sector, the political leadership had grand visions to dismantle the land regime left by the French and to create a new one in line with the Party's socialist ideals. Arable land was redistributed equally and all farming households in a village or clusters of villages had to combine their fields and other resources to farm collectively. All means of production were collectivised and labour was organised in working brigades, cooperatives and collectives according to complex working points and redistribution systems.

Between 1955 and 1958, a number of experimental agricultural cooperatives were launched. Early joiners frequently expected cooperatives to better assure their subsistence. Kerkvliet (1999:60) reports that some hungry peasants, who had already sold their land because they were in such a desperate state, joined the cooperative to have a way of making a living. Others joined because they trusted the Party and the government. A study on the experimental cooperatives concluded, however, in 1957 that the "consciousness and acceptance of socialism among peasants remain very weak whereas their orientation for individual production and private property remains very strong" (Kerkvliet, 1999:62-63). Despite considerable debate among the political leaders the cooperative movement was accelerated by the year 1958. The aim was to create high level or second order cooperatives, i.e. the collectivisation of labour and land resources of entire communes with several thousand people, until the year 1961 (Ngo Thi Meh, 1995). The Party wanted to have a socialist, planned economy by 1961 and agricultural cooperatives were vital to this goal.

Cooperativisation was initially planned as a gradual approach where different steps were to be taken. First of all, peasants should experience collective labour in work exchange groups to get used to the idea of working together. At a later stage the work exchange groups were to be transformed into mostly village-based cooperatives which after a while were extended to high-level cooperatives or collectives of 150-200 households each. This included the majority of households of a commune at that time. However, due to the acceleration, the first step was mostly skipped. Peasants had no time to get used to the idea but were pressed to join the cooperatives. Coercion to join was rarely violent but social pressure and intimidating tactics were used for those who had not signed up yet (Kerkvliet, 1999). Between 1958 and 1960 cooperatives were consequently established within a matter of weeks, even days, following a Communist Party recommendation of 15 to 20 days. These procedures provide evidence that the foundations of the cooperatives were unstable and weak. In the end of the year 1960 2.4 million families, accounting for 85% of the total farming population and 76% of the cultivated area, were organised in 40,420 cooperatives, 8,190 of them located in the northern

mountain region of North Vietnam (Kerkvliet, 1999; Watts, 1998). However, forms of resistance by farmers who preferred individual farming and who were being overrun by the local authorities created a lot of difficulties for the collectivisation project of the Party and the government (Pelzer White, 1986).

By the mid 1970s it became increasingly clear that the project would fail. But mobilisation for collectivisation and mobilisation for the war were still interwoven and villagers realised that outright opposition to collective farming could be interpreted as unpatriotic (Kerkvliet and Selden, 1998). Whereas the farmers kept on working for the cooperatives in a patriotic effort during the war against the U.S., a continuation after the reunification of North and South Vietnam became obsolete. Yet, the political leadership was not ready to abandon this economic strategy so abruptly. Although the model did not stimulate production and held peasants' creativeness back, it was pursued for another four years (Bui Quang Toan, 2000). Consequently, hunger was prevalent and the indifference of cooperative members for agricultural production rose (Ngo Thi Meh, 1995).

4.3.2 Reforms

The era after the long wars for national unification was characterised by a number of chronological turning points (see Figure 4-1). The years between 1975 and 1978 were dedicated to political and administrative reunification and economic reorganisation. Vietnam experienced a worsening of the economic situation. A further armed conflict was carried out between China and Vietnam from 1978 to 1979. Vietnam's economy was in severe crisis, the moral of the population was low. Initial reforms were introduced but the policies were unpopular. Only the launch of *doi moi*, the economic renovation, in 1986 brought the economy truly back on track. Gradual economic and political liberalisation set in, processes that have opened Vietnam towards the world market and have guided it out of its long-lasting political and economic isolation (Duiker, 1995; Nguyen Khac Vien, 1999).

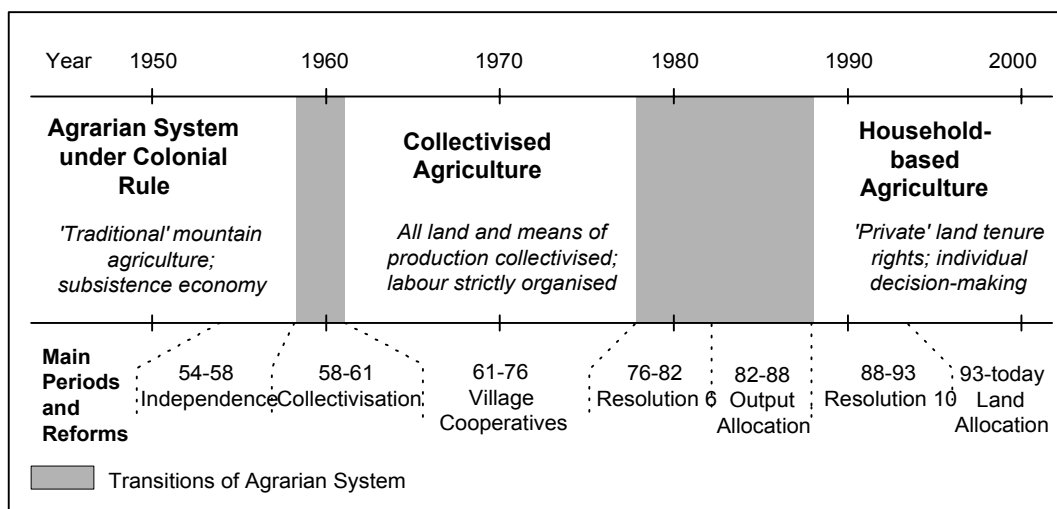


Figure 4-1: Chronology of main periods and reforms in the agricultural sector in Vietnam (after Sadoulet et al., 2000)

Agricultural reforms were initiated with Resolution No. 6, issued in the Sixth Party Plenum held in August 1979 (Ngo Thi Meh, 1995; Watts, 1998). Regulations for a piecework contract were formulated which allowed the members of the cooperatives to work on individually allocated land and to keep the surplus of their production for their own benefit. In 1981, the output contract was formalised in Directive No. 100 by the Prime Minister. Five years later the Sixth Party Congress decided to launch *doi moi*, a

comprehensive economic renovation programme, which contributed to rapid economic growth thanks to the gradual liberalisation of Vietnam's planned economy.

In 1988, the agricultural sector was further reformed with Resolution No. 10 which finally acknowledged the farming households as autonomous economic units. Land was redistributed and the agricultural sector experienced rapid diversification and growth. The land law of 1993 (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1993a) entitled the farming households to cultivate the land for their own purposes or to lend or rent it out. Private property of land in Vietnam still does not exist. It is part of the general political ideology to see the land as belonging to 'the entire people' whereas the nation-state has the responsibility for managing it (Kerkvliet and Selden, 1998). Land tenure certificates, so-called 'red books', merely guarantee private rights on land for a period of 20 to 50 years. According to the new land law, tenure rights are nowadays transferable and are considered as security to receive mortgages.

These changing political and economic conditions have placed Vietnamese citizens, and farmers in particular, in situations of great uncertainty (Fforde, 1990). For at least three decades the population in rural and mountain areas has been subject to distant and arbitrary policy changes of the centre. People frequently developed a fatalist stance towards central policy-making. They have become used to being uncertain as to whether policy will move in any particular direction which might require another change of rural social and economic organisation. Such uncertainties are reflected in today's resource use patterns (see also section 4.4).

The changing political-economic conditions of the socialist and economic transitions of Vietnam have affected mountain areas in different intensities. The mountain areas closer to the economic and political centres or areas with easier accessibility were fully integrated into the collectivised economy. Areas with difficult accessibility and communes with relatively little contact to the state administration and political organs were not fully incorporated. The subsistence economy of some ethnic groups was moreover not interesting for the state economy. However, there were efforts to convince them to establish sedentary villages and to start growing irrigated rice. But to reach all of them, who lived very dispersedly over the vast region, was impossible. Therefore, generalisation of experiences with development and change in mountains during the changing political-economic circumstances of the last five decades is difficult. The establishment of the cooperatives clearly influenced and undermined some of the mountain peoples' knowledge systems and changed the attitude towards the natural resources. Some of them were able to adapt quickly to the changes and to gain from the altered conditions after decollectivisation. Others, however, are losers of the "dismantled revolution" (Liljeström et al., 1998:247) and were left with little choice and opportunities after the decollectivisation in the agricultural sector. They make up for a large share of poor and very poor households among the mountain population which nowadays is between 35 and 80% (Government-Donor-NGO Working Group, 1999).

The following sections are going to take a closer look at the social and livelihood changes in the local development context of *Ba Be* district. They shed light on the effects which the two structural determinants of upland-lowland relations and socialist economy have had on mountain development in the ethnically and ecologically diverse mountain development context of *Ba Be* district in *Bac Kan* province. They explore whether the history of unequal ethnic relations and the influence of the changing political-economic conditions have had similar effects in the locality as it has been described for the national context.

4.4 Mountainous Livelihoods in Ba Be District

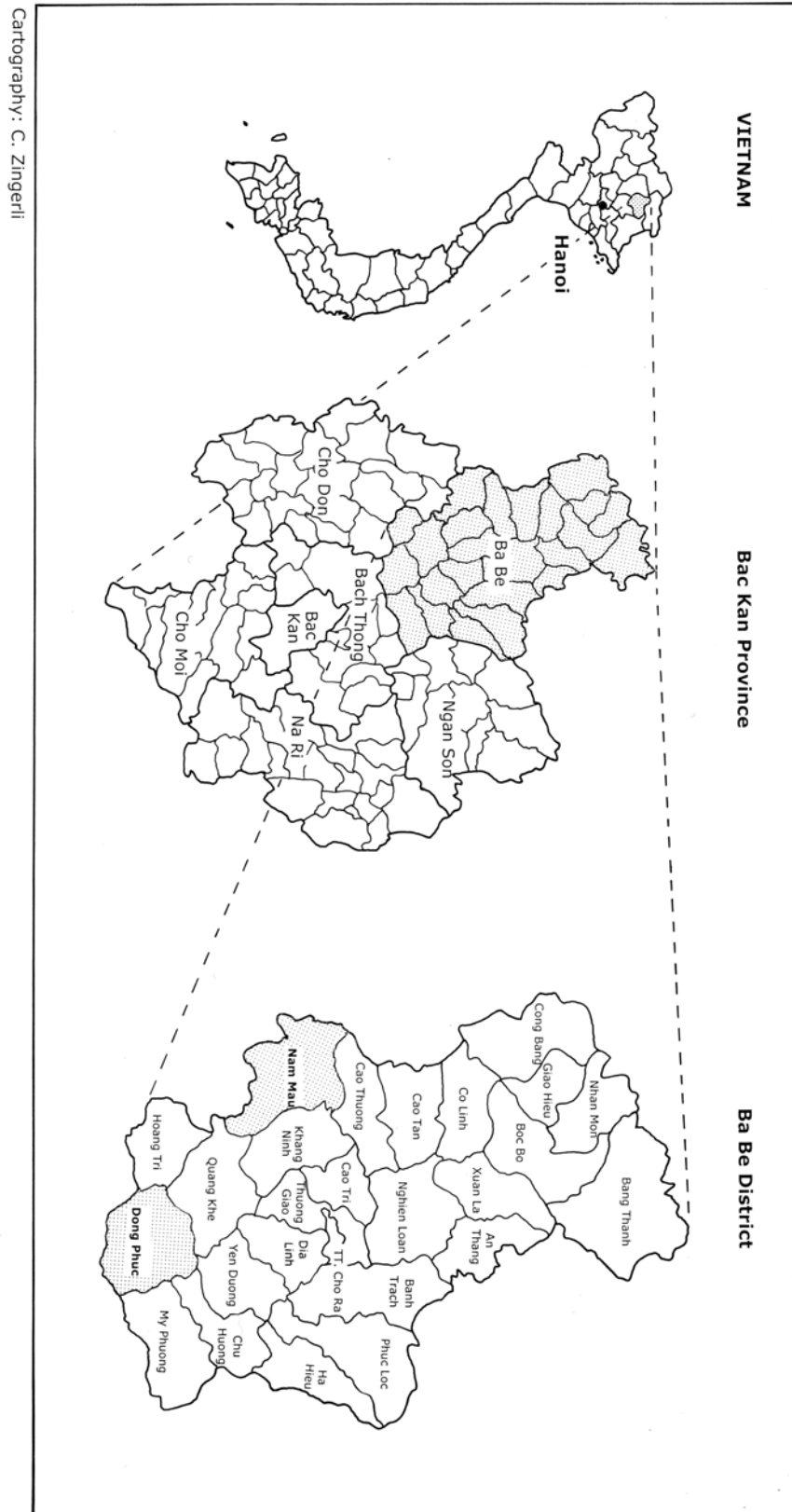
4.4.1 The setting: three mountain village communities

The location

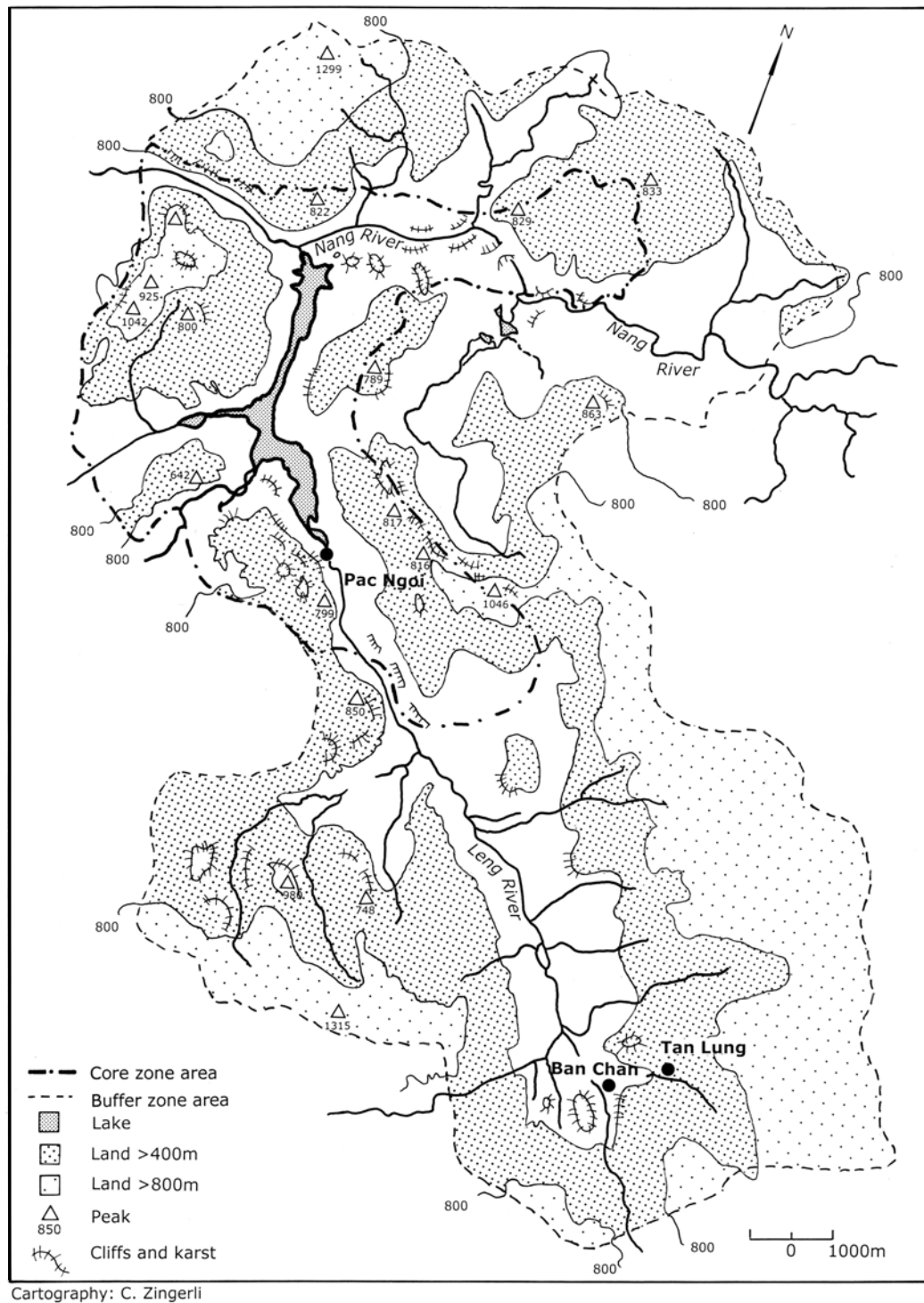
Empirical data for this study was gathered primarily in three mountain villages of *Ba Be* district in *Bac Kan* province. The province lies in the north-eastern part of northern Vietnam, about 280km from Hanoi (see Map 4-2 and Map 4-3). It was created in 1997 when the northern districts of *Thai Nguyen* province (formerly *Bac Thai*) and the southern districts of *Cao Bang* province were merged. *Ba Be* district lies in the north-west of the province, bordering *Cao Bang* and *Tuyen Quang* province in the north and west and *Cho Don*, *Bac Thon*, and *Ngan Son* district in the south, south-east and east. It has a total area of 115,173ha and is inhabited by 68,780 people (Statistical Office of Ba Be District, 2000), mostly belonging to the ethnic groups of *Tay*, *Dao*, *H'mong* and *Kinh*. *Ba Be* district hosts the only natural mountain lake of Vietnam, a spectacular natural feature embedded between steep limestone mountains covered with old grown forests (see Photo III-1 in Appendix III). In 1977, the area around the lake was declared a protected area which was upgraded to the status of a National Park in 1992 (Prime Minister of the Government of Vietnam, 1993). *Ba Be* district is today well accessible by road.

The three villages belong to the two communes of *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* (Map 4-3). There is no consistent use of the terms 'village' and 'commune' in the literature on rural Vietnam (Phan Huy Le et al., 1993; Pham Quang Hoan, 1999; Kleinen, 1999). They are both used as synonyms and as two terms with two different meanings. The village as a synonym for commune refers to the smallest administrative unit of the state administration. However, a rural commune is often made up of a number of different 'hamlets' or 'villages' which can lie very dispersedly within the commune jurisdiction. In mountain areas the communes' inhabitants moreover often belong to a number of different ethnic groups who frequently live in separate village communities. In this study, I prefer the term 'village' to refer to a village community of around 350 people and to the 'commune' as the administrative body. This allows me to adopt a disaggregated view on the village communities and consider the commune as a heterogeneous political unit with internal discrepancies.

The three case study sites are located south and south-east of lake *Ba Be* (Map 4-4). They were selected with respect to ethnicity, locality and livelihoods and represent a sample of the ethnic, socio-economic and ecological diversity typical of mountain regions in Vietnam. Their location in the two communes of *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* also implies different natural resource management regulations. *Nam Mau* commune is the core zone of *Ba Be* National Park where natural resource use is strictly confined to the valley area and fishery. *Dong Phuc* commune lies in the buffer zone area of *Ba Be* National Park where the regulations have not yet been defined. The two communes are both recipients of foreign development assistance, but the projects work according to different policies and objectives. The presence of international donor agencies make the locality an example of the local-national-global interfaces of mountain development policy. This is going to be discussed in chapter five.



Map 4-3: Nam Mau and Dong Phuc commune in Ba Be district, Bac Kan province, Vietnam



Map 4-4: Geomorphologic map of Ba Be National Park area and location of the research sites Pac Ngoi, Ban Chan and Tan Lung (after Hill et al., 1997)

The people

Two of the research sites, *Pac Ngoi* and *Ban Chan*, are predominantly inhabited by *Tay* people who populate the valley floors. There are a few people of *Kinh* origin who got married to *Tay*. The third site named *Tan Lung* is a pure *Dao* village, situated on the hill face. Table 4-1 gives an overview of basic village data and features.

Village	<i>Pac Ngoi</i>	<i>Ban Chan</i>	<i>Tan Lung</i>
Ethnic group	<i>Tay</i>	<i>Tay</i>	<i>Dao</i>
Commune	<i>Nam Mau</i>	<i>Dong Phuc</i>	<i>Dong Phuc</i>
Village population	348	344	160
Number of households¹⁾	60 (63)	61 (63)	19 (21)
Establishment	Early 20th century	Early 20th century	1965
Location	Alluvial plain, hill foot	Valley floor	Hill slope
Accessibility	By boat; road under construction	By bicycle or motorbike; road under construction	Footpath
Area of commune	6,444 ha	5,824 ha	5,824 ha
Number of villages in commune²⁾	10 (5)	12 (4)	12 (4)
Total population of commune	2,824	2,575	2,575

1) Number of households in September 2000; in brackets: number of households in May 2001

2) In brackets: number of upland villages (*Dao* and *H'mong* communities)

Table 4-1: Village data of the three research sites (Source: Statistical Office Ba Be District 1998, 2000; Field data 2000, 2001)

The *Tay* and *Dao* are the two biggest ethnic groups in *Ba Be* district. They have different geographical origins and ethno-linguistic roots. The *Tay* belong to the *Thai-Tay* ethno-linguistic group. They have populated the north-east of Vietnam and the southern Chinese provinces for many centuries. They are the biggest ethnic group next to the *Kinh* people and account for a population of about 1,200,000 people (Dang Nghiem Van et al., 2000). They have been living in close relationship with the *Kinh* for a long time and have considerably been influenced by their culture (La Van Lo, 1975; Hoang Be et al., 1992). *Tay* people populate the mountain valleys and have developed diversified mountain agricultural production systems. They cultivate paddy rice in the valley floors. Maize and subsidiary crops are cultivated in upland fields under a system of shifting cultivation. Orchards and gardens around the houses or close to the villages are common (see also Photo III-2 in Appendix III). The *Tay* are also engaged in animal husbandry and poultry and fish rearing. In 1975, La Van Lo (1975:15) reported that the *Tay* combine their traditional, fairly diversified subsistence economy with the commercial economy of a socialist character. Today, most *Tay* people are actively participating in the emerging market economy. Their close relationships to the *Kinh* have provided them with economic and political advantages in comparison to other ethnic groups. There are nevertheless clear distinctions to the *Kinh* in terms of economy and social and cultural life. The *Tay* are, for example, less involved in money-making and combine Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism with Animism.

The *Tay* and *Dao* in the two studied communes live in close relation with each other. Their common language is *Tay*. Inter-marriage is frequent but the cultural traditions remain distinct, such as the cult of ancestors and shamanism. The *Dao* belong to the *H'mong-Dao* ethno-linguistic family and migrated from China to Vietnam between the 13th and 19th

century. The *Dao* population counts about 500,000 people (Dang Nghiem Van et al., 2000). They live scattered over a vast region extending from the Chinese to the Laotian border. They mostly live on the middle altitudes between 400 and 600 metres (Be Viet Dang, 1975). Before the socialist transition *Dao* people practiced two mountain agricultural systems. Some of them led a semi-nomadic life determined by a system of shifting cultivation. Some of them were sedentary and cultivated irrigated rice terraces as well as upland fields under shifting cultivation. During the collective period many *Dao* communities were sedentarised. Animal rearing is well established in the *Dao* economy. Many families have dozens of large animals, such as buffaloes, horses and cattle. They also successfully breed pigs and goats.

The *Dao* people have been less involved with the *Kinh* in terms of economic or cultural relations. They were, however, often target groups for the *Kinh*'s settlement and agricultural intensification policies. But their settlements are usually at longer distances from the commune centre and sometimes difficult to reach. Due to their less favourable living conditions at higher altitudes they sometimes enjoy tax exemption and more opportunities to keep their cultural traditions alive. Nevertheless, both the *Tay* and the *Dao* in *Ba Be* district see themselves as Vietnamese citizens with the same rights and obligations like the *Kinh*. In political practice, they are both and especially the *Dao* still relatively under-represented in the provincial government in comparison to the *Kinh*.

In this thesis the emphasis of ethnic differences is meaningful in two respects. The ethnic differences between the *Tay* and *Dao* are of importance for getting insights into differences in livelihoods, policy responses, and political representation. This aspect is supported by the anthropological-style field research carried out in the three mountain village communities. In a subsequent step, the empirical data collected in the communities is linked with the analysis of the political-economic structural analysis. The emphasis of ethnic differences shifts to the divide between majority and minority population. Here the relationships between the *Kinh* and the mountain ethnic groups, such as the *Tay* and *Dao*, are important elements for the analysis of upland-lowland relations that get translated and reproduced in policy frameworks and the political system.

The livelihoods

The livelihoods in all three research sites are based on mountain agriculture. *Pac Ngoi*'s location at the shore of the lake and at the wide alluvial plain is both favourable for agriculture and fishing as well as disadvantageous because of annual floods which often destroy food crops. All households in *Pac Ngoi* are engaged in agriculture. Some of them have additional sources of non-farm income. Boat driving, the running of tourist guesthouses, and jobs in the commune administration provide some of the families with a daily or monthly cash income.

Because of its favourable location in the wide valley floor *Ban Chan* has developed to become the most prosperous village of *Dong Phuc* commune, surrounded by paddy fields and a range of forested mountains (watershed area). Non-farm occupations are found in carpentry, teaching positions (both school and farmers' field school), and the commune administration.

Tan Lung lies on sloping land with three areas of terraced rice fields. The *Dao* people have a long tradition of upland cultivation on which they considerably depend up until today. Non-farm income is limited. Some people produce baskets from bamboo and rattan. Two shamans perform ceremonies at funerals and death anniversaries and healing rituals in cases of illness or weakness, for which they are paid in money and kind.

For the majority of households in *Ba Be* district mountain agriculture is the only source of income and sustenance. It has been adapted to the mountain conditions and has simultaneously adapted the mountain environment to the livelihood requirements as new

fields were opened in the forests, hill faces were terraced, fruit and forest tree plantations established and so on. The mountain agricultural system of the *Tay* and *Dao* in *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* commune is depicted in Figure 4-2. The mountain environment has experienced a two way adaptation process discussed in section 3.2.2. Jodha (1997:313) explains that the biophysical factors influence the pace and the pattern of resource use while the human-made factors determine the intensity and extraction rates of resource use. He points out that the human-made factors tend to be insensitive to the imperatives of mountain conditions, tend to promote rapid resource depletion and seem to be inherently unsustainable. This proves to be true for the environmental change in *Ba Be* district. Population growth and the establishment of the agricultural cooperatives in *Ba Be* district has changed the intensity and resource use pattern of mountain agriculture. The once relatively well-adapted, traditional forms of mountain agriculture at low resource-extraction rates have been transformed by a growing population and the increasing demands of the national economy. With the collectivisation of resources and the organisation of labour in production brigades local knowledge and traditional practice were moreover undermined (Jamieson et al., 1998). The state-owned resources were exploited to contribute to the national and war economies during the 1960s and 1970s. Agricultural and forestry activities went beyond the sustainable rate of resource extraction, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

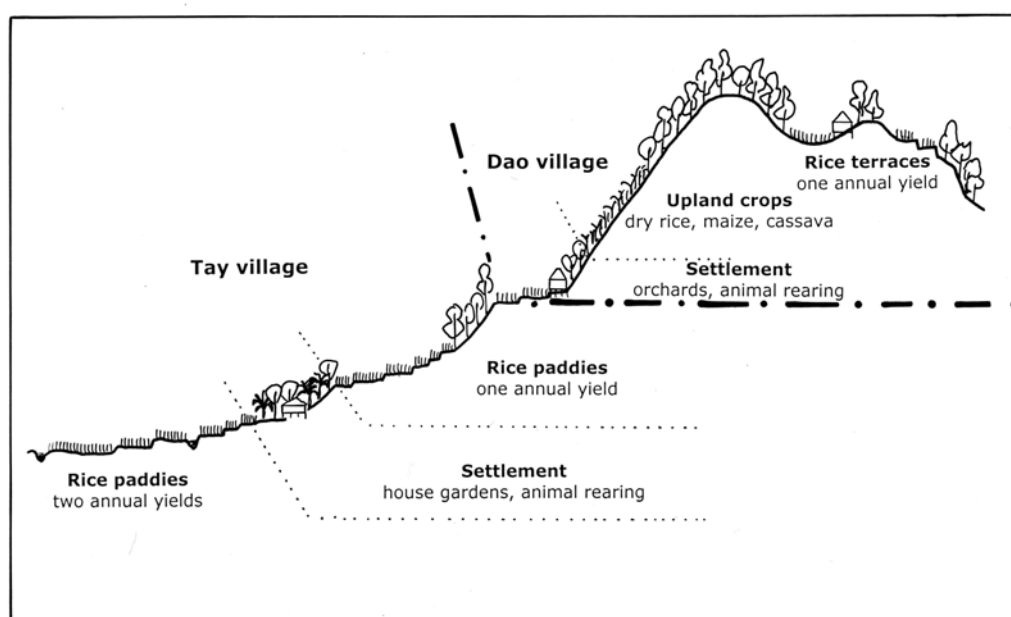


Figure 4-2: The mountain agricultural system of the *Tay* and *Dao* in *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* commune (Source: Field research, February 2001)

Also in recent times, resource use in *Ba Be* district and many other mountain localities in the north of Vietnam goes beyond subsistence needs as it feeds into the growing non-local market demand. The experiences of the Green Revolution in Vietnam's mountain areas have shown, however, that the expectations must be adjusted in mountain agriculture. The hybrid rice varieties, for example, are not as productive in the mountain regions as in the plain areas. Average production of rice is today 9t/ha in the plains, whereas the maximum production of paddy in the mountain valleys is 6t/ha. The output of 400 to 600kg of upland rice per hectare is a tenth of what is produced in the valley floors (Jamieson et al., 1998; Dao The Tuan, 1999; Pham Xuan Nam et al., 1999). As in other

regions, the introduction of hybrid rice and maize varieties in *Ba Be* district has created new dependencies as the seeds have to be bought. Weak and unreliable market structures as well as lack of adequate monetary resources of some families tend to limit the use of hybrid varieties in spite of considerable government price subsidies. Some of the *Tay* and *Dao* families in the research sites continue to use traditional rice seeds to maintain a certain degree of self-sufficiency. Moreover, only households well endowed with labour force, access to land, social networks and means of transportation are able to actively participate in these economic processes. Villages close to the district town or to the main road benefit relatively more from rapidly emerging market and trading facilities. The set-in of the market economy increased the social differentiation between the geographical regions as well as within and among the mountain communities. Not only are the uplands generally poorer than the lowlands, within the uplands of *Ba Be* district the *Kinh* are generally better off than the *Tay* who themselves are better off than the *Dao* and the *H'mong*.

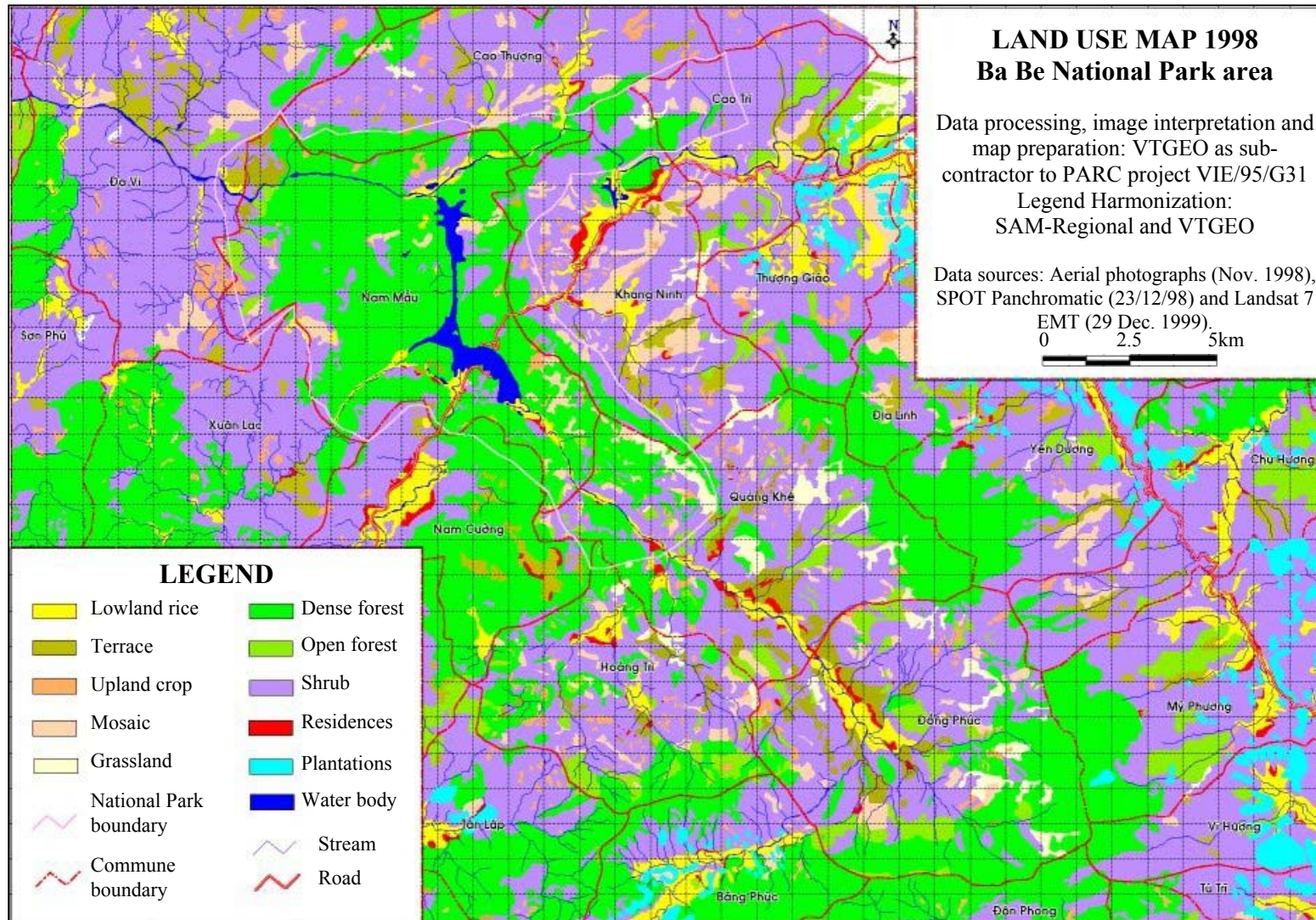
4.4.2 The diverse mountain environment in *Ba Be* district

The three village communities of *Ba Be* district provide a meaningful example for a mountain development context as two premises underline its diversity and sensitivity. Firstly, the biophysical factors of the mountain environment have encouraged the *Tay*, *Dao*, *H'mong*, and *Kinh* people to adopt multiple livelihood strategies and a variety of different agricultural production methods to ensure subsistence. Secondly, the ethnic variety within commune boundaries as well as socio-economic differentiations within and among village communities create a diverse social environment on a very small scale. These local specificities experience rapid transformation when relations between the uplands and the lowlands change.

The state of the natural environment in 1998 is presented in the land use map of the *Ba Be* National Park area in which the three research sites are situated (Map 4-5). The map shows a mountain environment that is both intensively and extensively used today. The map is derived from aerial photographs and satellite images, interpreted by agricultural scientists and Geographical Information System specialists of the Mountain Agrarian Systems Project in *Bac Kan*. It illustrates that although there is still a lot of old grown forest in *Ba Be* district, it is scattered into a number of islands covering the hill and mountain tops and steep slopes (green). Where the forest was cleared for upland cultivation or timber extraction shrub and secondary forest (purple) are about to regreen the hills. Within the area of shrub and secondary forest more intensive cultivation in upland fields (orange) and mosaics of crops and fruit trees (light orange) are identified. Along the streams and in the valleys, where the bigger settlements are located (red), irrigated rice cultivation (yellow) dominates the land use pattern. The market structures of a more liberalised economy has moreover promoted the production of cash crops and industrial plantations (blue). Land use maps series which illustrate the environmental change in *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* commune will be discussed in relation to changing policies at the end of this chapter and in chapter five.

Next page:

Map 4-5: Land use map of Ba Be National Park area (Source: Aerial photographs of December 1998; interpreted by SAM 2001)



The natural mountain environment and its biophysical factors, such as steep slopes, narrow valley floors, mosaic of deep and shallow soil, and rocky surface, puts significant limitations to agricultural development in *Ba Be* district. Consequently, mountainous livelihood systems, especially under subsistence, are highly diversified (Jodha, 1997). Cultivation in the valley floors (paddy, maize), upland farming (dry rice, maize, beans, fruits, cotton, cassava, sweet potato), animal husbandry, fish rearing, and forestry are the pillars of mountain agriculture of mountain peoples such as *Tay* and *Dao*. Such a diversified agro-ecosystem at the interface between agriculture and forestry offer survival advantages in a sensitive and productivity-limited natural environment, which cannot be outweighed by high yield crops (Donovan, 1997; Rambo et al., 1997).

The mountain conditions put the mountain communities of Vietnam's northern mountain region in relatively disadvantaged position in comparison to the lowland delta areas. But not only the biophysical also the socio-economic and political factors have contributed to the economic marginalisation of mountain peoples. Unequal terms of trade, changing political-economic conditions and policies have contributed to the progressive widening of the gap between the prosperous lowlands and the peripheral uplands. The following sections will now outline how livelihood realities have changed during the economic and political transformation processes of the last fifty years and analyse the implications of the processes primarily with regard to the socio-economic situation in *Ba Be* district. It will show how the forces of the emerging socialist nation-state and economy have penetrated the economic and socio-political life of ethnic groups in the northern mountain region of Vietnam.

4.4.3 The collective period in *Ba Be* district

Collective work and production

The collective period in *Ba Be* district lasted from 1957 until the late 1980s. The two communes *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* joined the cooperativisation movement around 1957. There is evidence that the *Tay* and *Dao* people of *Pac Ngoi*, *Ban Chan*, and *Tan Lung* joined the movement because they trusted the Party and the government. Village elders and local leaders refer to the confidence they had in the country's leader Ho Chi Minh and that his ideology convinced them. From 1957 until 1964 only *Tay* people who inhabited the valley floors participated in the cooperatives. Their labour was organised in a number of working brigades. For reasons to be discussed later in this section, *Dao* people joined the cooperatives later or, like in the case of *Nam Mau* commune, not at all.

An old woman recalls the collective period in the following words:

"When the cooperative was set up people worked well during the first three years. But then they were completely exhausted and lacked food." [BC#00331]

Agricultural productivity in *Ba Be* district was generally low during the cooperative period. Summer rice production in *Nam Mau* commune fluctuated around 2t/ha in the 1960s but dropped to 1t/ha in the 1970s. The statistics for maize production show output variations between 0.8t/ha and 2t/ha. Summer rice production in *Dong Phuc* varied between 1.3t/ha and 2.1t/ha. Data on maize production per hectare show outputs of 0.8t to 1.8t for the 1980s. Like today, rice yields during the collective period were considerably higher in the lowlands than in the mountain areas. In the communes of *Bac Ninh* province in the Red River delta, for example, rice yields reached 3.3t/ha in the beginning of agricultural collectivisation but dropped to 2.2t/ha during high level cooperativisation (Grossheim, 1999).

Nutrition needs for the local population could hardly be met. The allocation of sufficient food shares to the cooperative members and their families could therefore not be

guaranteed. The collective memory of village elders of this period in time reveals painful experiences with prevalent hunger, daunting working point systems, inequalities between the cooperative leaders and the members, exhaustion and resistance. According to the village elders of *Ban Chan* all resources were common property. This included lowland and upland fields as well as livestock. From other regions it is reported that each farming household had a share of 5% of the collectivised land which was cultivated for family consumption only. It was often instrumental for the families' survival (Scott, 2000; Kerkvliet, 1999; Ngo Thi Meh, 1995). This was never mentioned in the research sites. On the contrary, it was reported that working for private consumption was prohibited. Labour was strictly organised and controlled according to a rigid working hour and working point system. For example, during transplantation time labour was classified into three groups according to which working points were allocated referring to actual effort. The fast transplanters received more points than slow workers and children.

In *Pac Ngoi*, on the other hand, only the lowland fields were collectivised and people were free to cultivate the upland fields, depending on the labour force endowment of each household. Another form of individual food production or income generation lied in animal husbandry as not all animals were collectivised. Pigs could be exchanged in the cooperative store for rice or other commodities. The working brigade of *Pac Ngoi* mainly contributed maize to the cooperative of the commune as the sandy soils of the alluvial plain and the lack of water pumps did not allow paddy rice cultivation in the lowland fields. In their individually cleared and cultivated upland field plots the farmers were producing dry rice. "Thanks to growing rice in the upland fields we had food", an old woman in *Pac Ngoi* recalled [PN#00333]. She continued by telling us that everybody had been equally poor and that rice was being mixed with maize, peanut or cassava. She said that "during the cooperative period it was very hard, and we lacked much food. At that time, for a working day, we received only 100g of rice." Figures and dates are inherently difficult to recall exactly both from local people's memories and official statistics. Cross-checking with Grossheim (1999) supports this account with similar figures. He reports that the amount of rice given per working day was 3kg in a village in the Red River delta region in the early cooperative period (Grossheim, 1999:93). During the further stages of collectivisation the cooperative members received less and less until they received a minimum of 300g per working day in 1971.

The establishment of cooperatives in *Ba Be* district had an enormous influence on the conditions of livelihoods and the natural environment in *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau*. Access to and control over resources were now solely regulated by the management board of the cooperatives. *Tay* labour force was re-organised, not allowing or limiting labour allocation for private cultivation. Local people were firstly deprived of their traditional farming land and faced, secondly, a nutrition deficit due to the contribution of the cooperative to the war economy. On the other hand, the low productivity and the withholding of labour force by the cooperative members seem to have prevented excessive over-exploitation of resources. As one of the village elders of *Ban Chan* reported, work was carried out only three to four hours per day. She recalled that "in the morning we worked only for two hours, we went to the fields but, in fact, we mainly chatted (...) and ate bananas. So how could we have had enough food?" [BC#00329].

The experience of hunger and deprivation influences local people's resource behaviour until today. The main goals of each family are to achieve food security and to improve living conditions. Most of them try to diversify their agricultural production systems and to improve household management. Attitudes towards the natural resources tend to exploit them beyond sustainable limits, especially when they are still formally state-owned (see also Jodha, 1997). The farmers talk about a situation of uncertainty concerning the central policies. Whenever the government changes its economic strategy

the natural resources might be reclaimed again by the state authorities. Local resource users reproduce the social processes and practices of centralist planning into the future and continue to consider the central state as provider of models and services which do not require or allow individual decision-making or initiative. The experiences with centralist interventions in the past created a relative passivity of the Vietnamese citizenry. The cooperative experience also undermined local knowledge systems and the relationship with productive resources that ensured resource protection for long-term use. The integration of mountain areas into the national economy and the exchange with lowlanders have moreover altered expectation profiles. Consumer goods such as TVs and motorbikes are symbols for better and modern living standards. All families also invest in the formal education of their children and hope that one day they will be able to get a job in the cities. On the other hand, there are villages and entrepreneurial communities that have re-established the links with their pre-given resources according to the meaning, moral and power of the traditional arrangements. In the process of *doi moi* social and economic networks for collective action according to customary law have re-emerged (Endres, 1999a). Customary law is effectively used to deal with a wide range of matters such as the village history, the village boundary, the village and commune management apparatus and interests of the local officials, the rights and obligations of village commoners, regulations on commendations, rewards and penalties regarding ownership right and so on (Ngo Duc Thinh, 1999). These aspects of local social and political organisation are found to be inspiring for the formulation of village conventions in matters concerning natural resource management and environmental protection or village development (to be taken up again in sections 5.4.3 and 6.5.3).

The social environment

During the cooperative movement two other policies were implemented which primarily altered the social pattern of the two communes. Firstly, a national resettlement programme intended to stimulate migration to 'sparsely populated territories' such as the northern mountain areas (Mellac, 2000). Ethnic people who had moved earlier to the lowlands, but were mostly landless there, were encouraged to return to their homelands and to reclaim their ancestral land. Furthermore, *Kinh* migrants from the delta area came to join newly established state farms and forest enterprises (Scott, 2000). This led to an inflow of outsiders who began to work side by side with *Tay* people. Most of the migrants, however, left the mountain areas again after the cooperatives dissolved in the late 1980s. Only a few ethnic *Kinh* people stayed in the remoter villages.

A formerly landless *Tay* family returned from the delta area to *Pac Ngoi* during the resettlement policy in order to work on their homeland. The old mother, originally *Kinh*, recalled this as follows:

"In the plain area there were many people but few fields, so the Party and the commune had to solve this. Then there was a policy on reclamation. And my husband came from the mountain areas so we came back to his homeland. (...) In 1962, I came from the plain area with three children. At that time there was no road from *Bac Kan* town to *Ba Be* and no cars. I had to carry everything by myself. Yes, the Party convinced us to come here." [PN#00333]

Secondly, from 1958 onwards there was a national programme on the sedentarisation of ethnic minorities (McLeod, 1999; Sadoulet et al., 2000). Its purpose was to settle the 'nomadic highlanders' in fixed villages in order to exercise administrative and political control over them. Most ethnic groups who used to live in the higher parts of the hills and mountains had been practising shifting cultivation for many centuries and led a semi-nomadic life. They abandoned their settlements after a period of two to ten years,

depending on the quality of soil and abundance of suitable land (Be Viet Dang, 1975; Kunstadter et al., 1978; Nguyen Van Thang, 1995; Mellac, 2000). This lifestyle was generally seen as a threat to both environmental and political conditions. Another reason for sedentarisation concerned labour organisation in cooperatives. As mentioned earlier, in *Nam Mau* commune only *Tay* and a few *Kinh* people were working in the cooperative. *Dao* and *H'mong* people lived too dispersedly in the uplands which made their organisation in working brigades impossible. In *Dong Phuc*, however, *Dao* people were integrated into the cooperative movement by the implementation of this policy.

The *Dao* village *Tan Lung* was founded in the process of the sedentarisation policy. In 1962, the local authorities already made some efforts to sedentarise the *Dao* but the new village on sloping land, in approximately two kilometres distance from *Ban Chan*, was not formally established until the year 1965. The former village headman recalls the foundation of the village as follows:

"At the end of 1963, beginning of 1964, I worked as a village headman. (...) And then the commune People's Committee and People's Council said that the people in the upland should not live in the mountains, we should move down and settle. If we still cleared and cultivated in the upland fields day by day, from generation to generation, it would be hard forever, we would never reach good conditions. And they convinced the people to move down and settle here and find some lowland to make a living, not to lead the nomadic life anymore." [TL#00335]

The authorities were able to convince the *Dao* to settle down in a permanent village at lower altitude by providing them access to the collectivised lowland fields which were previously owned and cultivated by the *Tay* people of *Ban Chan*. The *Dao* worked for the commune cooperative but they had their own working brigade, managed by the village headman. The collective period enabled the *Dao* to improve their living conditions. They gained access to lowland fields to produce paddy rice and they received food shares according to their working efforts. They started to construct big and permanent houses and became successful animal breeders. However, they never stopped cultivating in the upland fields which are until today instrumental for their well-being. The close neighbourhood with *Tay* people and the permanent settlement in the commune jurisdiction led to their integration into the state administration, education, and health system. Despite some degrees of assimilation, both ethnic groups stress their ethnic differences and particular identities. *Dao* people refused to settle together with the *Tay* when in the 1970s the commune launched the second-order cooperatives. They did not want to be mixed with *Tay* and other ethnic groups and stayed in their village where they still had uncontrolled access to the forests and their former upland fields.

The second-order or high-level cooperatives, which involved the collectivisation of labour and land resources of entire communes, was considered necessary to pursue socialist large-scale production in agriculture (Ngo Thi Meh, 1995). With this attempt the socialist project or the 'Vietnamisation' reached its utmost uniformity. In favour of an overall economic interest any difference of ethnicity or ecological condition in different geographical regions was ignored. During the second-order cooperative in *Dong Phuc* food shortage became very serious. The strategy to upscale the village cooperatives to bigger conglomerates was actively opposed by the cooperative members referring to their ethnic roots.

Although many informants recall that during the collective time they were equally poor and suffered a lot, socio-economic differences between the villages as well as within the village communities existed. It was mentioned that a big difference existed between the members of the steering board of the cooperative and the members of the cooperative itself. The managers of the cooperative allocated food and other goods unfairly among

themselves and the cooperative members. Their position allowed them to arbitrarily punish uncooperative members or to favour relatives and supporters.

Socio-economic differentiation also went along the lines of labour force endowment of each household. During war time male labour force was often not available for farming and work was largely carried out by women who were mothers of many children. During the 1960s and 1970s the government propagated large families. Young mothers were given 20kg of rice per birth but in order to earn working points they had to take their infants to the fields. In the mountain areas population grew at a high rate during that time and up to the 1990s. Until today the population in the mountain areas grows faster than in the lowlands where the *Kinh* majority had to adopt a two-child policy (see also Grossheim and Endres, 1999). One adult could consequently not earn enough working points to feed a whole family. Therefore, many families had to borrow from the cooperative store and became heavily indebted. A village elder, mother of eight children, talked about the socio-economic differentiation and her indebtedness by telling the following story:

"Those who worked for the Steering Board of the cooperative could have enough food. The members of the cooperative never had enough food. After harvesting was finished and after the working points were summed up, the ones who worked for the Steering Board could get this amount of rice [she points at a sack of rice], the members of the cooperative had to take the early rice, the wet rice, the bad rice. But we had to take it, otherwise we would have had nothing to eat and we could not have worked. Because we took rice in advance we did not get any rice after the working points were summed up. (...) The poor were poorer. They lacked more food. If we lacked food, we could take from the store but we had to borrow. We had to borrow for the whole of our lives. The store was full but we could not take because we did not have working points so we had to borrow. (...) We borrowed and refunded at harvesting time. And when we refunded we borrowed again. This year we took our part of next year. And then the next year, we had to borrow again. (...) If we had not borrowed we would have had nothing to eat."
[BC#00329]

The turning point

The turning point in agricultural production and well-being in *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* commune came with the year 1979 when the Sixth Party Plenum issued Resolution No. 6. People of *Pac Ngoi*, *Ban Chan* and *Tan Lung* associate many different things with this policy change. In *Pac Ngoi* they said that it had encouraged an expansion of lowland fields and had provided better access to high yield crop varieties. In *Ban Chan* people reported that access to forest and forestland had been opened which had allowed them to reclaim inherited land and to appropriate new upland fields for individual cultivation. This changed their lives completely and led to rapid improvement of living conditions. They were able to produce more food and fodder crops. Additionally, the fact that tax payments could now be settled in money instead of kind provided the farming households for the first time after a long time of suffering with enough rice.

Formally, Resolution No. 6 was issued as a reaction to the problems of income distribution within the cooperatives and the farmers' discouragement and declining enthusiasm to work for the cooperatives. The existing paradox that peasants were underemployed, living poorly and hungry because of food shortage while large areas of cooperative land laid idle was eliminated (Ngo Thi Meh, 1995). Resolution No. 6 facilitated the process of output contracting and contributed substantially to the launch of further agricultural reforms and the economic renovation process in general.

The dissolving of the cooperatives in *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* began in the early 1980s. The working brigade leader of *Tan Lung* recalled this time as follows:

"The cooperative, in general, had positive and negative things. Some people worked very slowly, some showed their envy of other people, and sometimes some people came earlier and some came later. They had to wait for other people for too long and (...) so they could not work well. And finally I [decided]: we could not do this step. Finally I said (...) we should move to a different step. (...) The land was allocated to the whole village according to Decision No. 10 [*sic.* Directive No. 100]. And the villagers said that it was extremely great and that I had done a good job. And in terms of Decision No. 10 [*sic.* Directive No. 100] the villagers said that they agreed with me to do so. They could do as they wished. Finally, the productivity was higher and the yield was higher." [TL#00335]

Directive No. 100 was implemented in 1981 and land was contracted out by the cooperative to its members. Land was distributed to households according to their size. It was allocated by using a lottery system that secured fair play in the allocation process. The output contract was a system that obliged farming households to still contribute certain amounts of their crop output to the cooperative. However, the contracted amount was typically based upon average yield over the previous few years when reported harvests had been poor because of weather conditions and resource diversion (Fforde, 1990). It was therefore quite easy to fulfil the contract and to have substantial surplus for subsistence needs or to sell it in the emerging market places.

The cooperatives in *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau* commune finally dissolved between 1987 and 1990 and the families reclaimed the land they had owned in the time before cooperativisation.

4.4.4 After decollectivisation

Social differentiation

Directive No. 100 (1981) and Resolution No. 10 (1988) restored the direct link between the peasant households and the land (Bergeret, 1995). The agricultural production subsequently experienced a tremendous boost. Within a few years Vietnam developed from a rice-importing country to one of the world's biggest rice producers (Kerkvliet and Porter, 1995; Thayer, 1995; World Bank et al., 2000). In their investigation on the impact of economic reforms and agricultural decollectivisation in mountain communes of north-eastern Vietnam Liljeström *et al.* (1998:237) refer, however, to "winners and losers of a dismantled revolution". The stepwise deconstruction of the collectivistic, state-controlled model of modernisation, and simultaneous introduction of a market model of economic development did not work for all in the same way. Processes of increasing social differentiation set in and enhanced the vulnerability of those households which could not count on state and family networks as providers for social support. The northern mountain communes are in the overall country context very poor and mountain people generally live far below the official poverty line (Rambo, 1997; Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1998a). The poverty situation in the mountain areas has, however, many facets and considerable socio-economic differences exist both within and among mountain villages (Sikor, 1999).

Well-being ranking exercises with 23 individuals of different age and socio-economic background have shown that the living conditions in the three research sites can be classified in the four groups 'good', 'average', 'poor' and 'very poor'. Although well-being ranking exercises generate only relative results, thus what is classified in one community as 'good' might not be 'good' in another, the ranking criteria used in the three village communities were largely the same. The sum of the exercises provided an overview of the well-being situation of the households in the three village communities. The findings were merged and resulted in a household typology presented in Table 4-2.

The main difference between the four well-being groups is their ability and capacity to achieve rice sufficiency. The households ranked as 'good' and 'average' generally achieve food (rice) sufficiency and have variable amounts of rice to sell in the market. They generally have good, permanent houses, agricultural tools, buffaloes and cattle, and many durable consumer goods. 'Good' and 'average' households differ only in the sense that 'average' living conditions are less stable than 'good' conditions and occasional hardship may occur (groups A and B). The households ranked as 'poor' and 'very poor' do not achieve rice sufficiency (groups C and D). They lack of rice for several months per year, live in temporary houses and have few durable consumer goods. Many newly established households start in this category but are likely to improve their living conditions over the years of the family cycle. Some of the poor and very poor households are caught in inherited or age-related poverty traps. A number of them are illiterate and little integrated into the village communities.

It was generally said that the rank of each household was much the same before and after decollectivisation. That means that the pattern of social differentiation existed before decollectivisation and was not substantially changed by it. However, from a qualitative viewpoint the situation of social differentiation has changed. The better-off do much better now, whereas the poor and poorest have fewer and more limited opportunities. It was said that the living conditions do not depend on the land and labour endowment of each household only. Social networks, managerial skills, innovative attitude and hard work are judged more important than the initial resource endowment before and after decollectivisation. However, it may be argued that labour endowment was critical for well-being at certain points in time, such as during collective farming or after Resolution No. 6 was issued. In these periods household labour endowment decided about the amount of rice and other goods that could be earned by more working points. When the upland fields and forestland were reclaimed and appropriated freely after Resolution No. 6, adult labour force was again crucial and the investment of work into land decided essentially about the position from which the household started off into the decollectivisation period. Also Sikor (1999:337) concludes that decollectivisation did not change the patterns of differentiation among households within a village community. He finds that it was rather the family cycle that continued to differentiate households because of the ways in which households gained control over productive resources and disposed of production surplus.

Type	Indicators	Description
Group A: Good living conditions - rice excess		
	good houses ¹⁾ , durable consumer goods ²⁾ , inherited capital and land of good quality, abundant labour force	stable economy and cash income, innovative attitude, experience and high skills in agricultural production, good labour force management, good knowledge of state policies
A1	on-farm income only	diversified agricultural production, successful in fruit production, livestock and poultry raising
A2	on-farm and off-farm income	local officials receiving allowances, regular monetary income from boat driving and pensions, diversified household economy realised in intensified agricultural production
Group B: Average living conditions - rice sufficiency		
	durable houses ¹⁾ , some durable consumer goods ²⁾ , constraints in cultivated land area, agricultural technology, and labour force, little or no inherited property	little involved in market economy, consumption and labour force management not optimal, animal husbandry
B1	abundant labour force	established families, low land/capita ratio
B2	lack of labour force	young families, agricultural production system not optimal or limited due to lack of labour force, plantation not at the right time, few subsidiary crops
Group C: Poor living conditions - rice insufficiency		
	temporary houses ³⁾ , few durable consumer goods, lack of lowland and labour force, lack of rice during one to seven months per year	early or late stage of the family cycle, health problems, low knowledge, lack of experience in carrying out economic activities, animal husbandry risky, work for other people
C1	lack of labour force	newly established households, many small children, little lowland, lack of labour force constrains cultivation in upland fields
C2	old-aged	poor health and weaknesses, deterioration of wealth, poverty trap
Group D: Very poor living conditions - severe rice insufficiency		
	temporary houses ³⁾ , no durable consumer goods, no lowland fields, no buffalo, lack of labour force, lack of rice during four to eight (to twelve) months per year	newly established or households caught in a inherited poverty trap, utilisation of common-property resources, work for other people, little knowledge or illiteracy, poor consumption management, animal husbandry too risky, some of them recipients of government subsidies and rice support

1) House on stilts or ground (with concrete floor), tiled roof, timber or brick walls.

2) TV, good furniture, bicycle, motorbike, hand-tractor, husker, water pump, boat.

3) House on ground (no concrete floor), thatched roof, bamboo walls.

Table 4-2: Household typology (Source: Field data, November 2000)

Today, in the two studied *Tay* villages 20% of the households live in good conditions, 45% in average conditions. In *Ban Chan* 20% live in poor conditions and 15% live in very poor conditions. *Pac Ngoi* has shares of 23% poor households and 12% very poor households. In the studied *Dao* village 5% live in good conditions, 69% in average conditions, 16% in poor conditions and 10% in very poor conditions (see Figure 4-3).

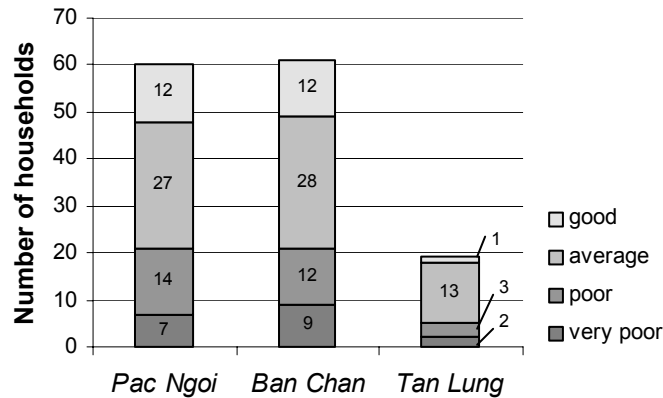


Figure 4-3: Social differentiation in the three case study sites (Source: Field data, November 2000)

Differences in well-being do not only occur within but also between the two *Tay* villages, although the data show a rather congruent picture. In *Pac Ngoi*, socio-economic differences between the better-off households and the very poor are very pronounced. The gap arises from off-farm income opportunities of businesses such as boat transportation and tourist guesthouses or jobs in the commune administration. This provides families with regular cash income that is much higher than the revenues from the marketing of agricultural produce. Landlessness, i.e. no tenure rights for lowland fields, is frequent among the poor households in *Pac Ngoi*. It is common that they sell labour force to work in other people's fields for which they get paid in money or rice. A number of the poor and very poor households primarily rely on the cultivation in marginal upland fields on the steep and rocky slopes.

Ban Chan shows almost the same picture concerning socio-economic differentiation but the inequalities are less pronounced than in *Pac Ngoi*. All households have access to lowland and upland fields. The village leaders emphasise the close kinship relations and the socialist ideology which contribute to the well-being of the community which is being considered as a "big family" [BC#00160]. As will be shown later, this network and social customs help the poorer households to achieve relative livelihood security by providing access to fields owned by other families.

With the well-being ranking exercises social differentiation between the villages of different ethnic groups became apparent. The village *Tan Lung* therefore represents a different socio-economic situation than *Ban Chan* and *Pac Ngoi*. *Tan Lung* is poorer than the *Tay* villages in terms of lowland and off-farm income but the living conditions among the *Dao* are more equal. Most of the households share the same living and working conditions. They have permanent houses and even the poorest household owns pigs, cattle or a buffalo. One of the households in *Tan Lung* is the most successful of the whole commune. The household head is a very innovative person and likes to experiment with new technologies and production scales. He has managed to acquire two hectares of rice paddy terraces and grows fruit trees in an area of 16ha in the uplands. He has now become the head of the Farmer's Association, one of the mass organisations in the commune, and

will act as advisor in agriculture and forestry and as intermediary between the commune People's Committee and the villages. Two other households of *Tan Lung*, on the other hand, are extremely poor, illiterate and not well integrated in the village community and the commune.

During the well-being exercises some people referred to their situation in comparison to the *Kinh* majority and the lifestyle in the lowlands. In such situations the inequalities between the ethnic mountain peoples and the *Kinh* were commented and always measured according to the conditions in the lowlands. An informant from *Pac Ngoi*, for example, noted:

"This house is not good at all compared with houses in the plain areas. In the plain areas my house would look like a pig stall. But it is fine here." [PN#00332]

Feelings of inferiority were frequently expressed, especially regarding housing and future opportunities. Some informants called themselves 'backward' in terms of economy and aspirations and that their lack of economic and managerial knowledge hinders them in improving their living conditions. Another informant showed more self-confidence by saying that "we [the *Dao* people of *Tan Lung*] had been very backward but we are not backward anymore" [TL#00179].

From the well-being ranking exercises and the assessment of the past and present situation of the households in the local context can be concluded that the pattern of differentiation within the village communities have largely remained the same. After decollectivisation differentiation occurred primarily among the villages (Sikor, 1999). One of the explanations lies in the land reallocation process after decollectivisation. While the *Tay* reclaimed all their lowland and terraced fields owned before collectivisation, the *Dao* lost most of the access to these areas which they gained only with collectivisation. In the post-collective period the reallocation and reclamation of lowland fields and the reduction of state control over forestland forced or encouraged the village communities to concentrate on different kinds of land for agricultural production and income opportunities outside the agricultural sector.

Land claims

The issue of land tenure is vital in the discussion about well-being in and development prospects of the rural and mountain areas in the reform era. After the breakdown of the cooperatives, paddy land used to be distributed uniformly to each citizen in many places of Vietnam (Le Trong Cuc et al., 1996). Depending on the availability of land, Grossheim (Grossheim, 1999:103-105) reports that each inhabitant of the lowland villages he studied was allocated between 288m² and 1,500m². In their comparative analysis of socio-economic differentiation in rural China and northern Vietnam Luong Van Hy and Unger (1998:67) conclude that the distribution of land among the farming households was equivalent to an egalitarian land reform. Among the households within the same village a lower degree of economic differentiation is found than in most of the developing world. Kerkvliet and Selden (1998:53) argue, however, that even though equal land distribution has assured subsistence it has not contributed to significantly higher standards of living in both China and Vietnam. The equal distribution of land shares of different quality often resulted in very scattered patterns of land tenure. Farming households report that small fields hamper mechanisation and intensification of agricultural production.

Whereas land was theoretically redistributed according to plans of equity, the land allocation process in the mountain communes of *Ba Be* district looked somewhat different. Immediately after the collapse of the cooperatives the *Tay* people of *Pac Ngoi* and *Ban Chan* reclaimed the land they used to own before collectivisation. This meant that the *Dao* people of *Tan Lung* as well as the few *Kinh* migrants lost their legitimate access to lowland

which was formerly enabled and secured by the cooperatives. *Kinh* people tended to return to the plain areas or to the district town while *Dao* people stayed in their permanent settlements. However, they began to rely again more on the cultivation in the uplands. This land allocation and reclamation practice and its consequences are also reported from other districts of *Bac Kan* and *Thai Nguyen* province (Scott, 2000). The initial resource endowments of each household after decollectivisation changed, therefore, not only along the lines of former land tenure but was also associated with ethnic belonging.

Some of the *Tay* people of *Pac Ngoi* and *Ban Chan* had more land after reclamation than they were actually able to cultivate. They immediately started to rent or sell some of their fields. However, many landless households experienced financial and livelihood difficulties at that time and were not able to purchase land from their fellow villagers. As a consequence, they began to rely more on the upland resources. Up to now, the majority of the villagers considers the upland fields as resources which have the potential to contribute profits to buying lowland fields. However, this attitude towards the upland resources has had adverse effects on the forest cover. An informant from *Ban Chan* recalled that the *Dao* people had destroyed a lot of forest during the decollectivisation period. She explained it with their livelihood struggles and the urgency to feed big families. However, the inhabitants of the upland villages in *Dong Phuc* commune do not only depend on upland fields. Most of them have access to terraced paddy fields. Situated on steep slopes this paddy land is small and produces only one crop per year due to seasonal lack of water. The difficult situation of the *Dao* people in *Tan Lung* can be summarised in the following words of a village elder:

"Tay people said that they gave us these fields but when the cooperative collapsed they took all the fields back and now we do not have fields to cultivate. (...) We do not know what to do. Now we do not have enough lowland fields." [TL#00334]

Inequalities in control over land are not restricted to the paddy fields in the valley floors but have recently also been extended to sloping land. Conflicts between the villages *Ban Chan* and *Tan Lung* currently emerge because of modified village boundaries. *Dao* people feel deprived of the forestland around their former settlement in close vicinity to *Tan Lung*. The altered village boundaries interfere with some of the families' plans to establish a small hamlet on these old foundations in the near future. Some of the commune officials with residence in *Ban Chan*, however, stress that this area lies within the jurisdiction of their village and that they do not approve such settlement expansion. Kerkvliet (1995:75) points out that boundaries and rights to fields and water have become controversial after decollectivisation which causes frictions between communes and villages. During the collective period communes and cooperatives had managed to blur or make the boundaries between the villages irrelevant. However, villagers apparently have not forgotten where those boundaries should be. It is possible that the *Dao* refer to the boundaries drawn during the cooperative time as only then they received access to these parts of the commune. The *Tay*, on the other hand, seem to refer to the pre-cooperative boundaries which might have been drawn at higher altitude. In the beginning of every agricultural cycle such conflicts cause intense debate and reflect the different histories of the two ethnic groups as well as the inequalities in access to and control of land resources.

4.4.5 Environmental changes

Land is still one of the crucial factors for well-being and livelihood security in mountain communities. With decollectivisation in *Ba Be* district all households in the three village communities have diversified their land use system. The better-off combine lowland agriculture with upland cultivation and derive surplus and subsidiary crops from the upland

fields. However, the poor and very poor households of the *Tay* villages and all households of the *Dao* village depend for their sustenance almost entirely on rice and maize cultivation in the upland fields. The resource use strategies of individual households and entire communities reflect the situation and pattern of social differentiation within and between the village communities. As will be shown in chapter five, the responses to land tenure and environmental policies and whether they support or object policy implementation is also linked with the households' ranks and opportunities.

Upland cultivation on sloping land is resource-intensive. It requires a lot of forestland to be transferred into arable fields. If soil conditions are suitable and when appropriate cultivation technologies, soil erosion preventions, mulching and fertilising are applied these fields can be cropped for a long time. However, with the current techniques and under the actual intensity, upland farming does not characterise a sustainable form of mountain agriculture anymore. It rather represents a threat to the remaining watershed forests, the hydrological cycle and the biodiversity resources (see also Photo III-3 in Appendix III).

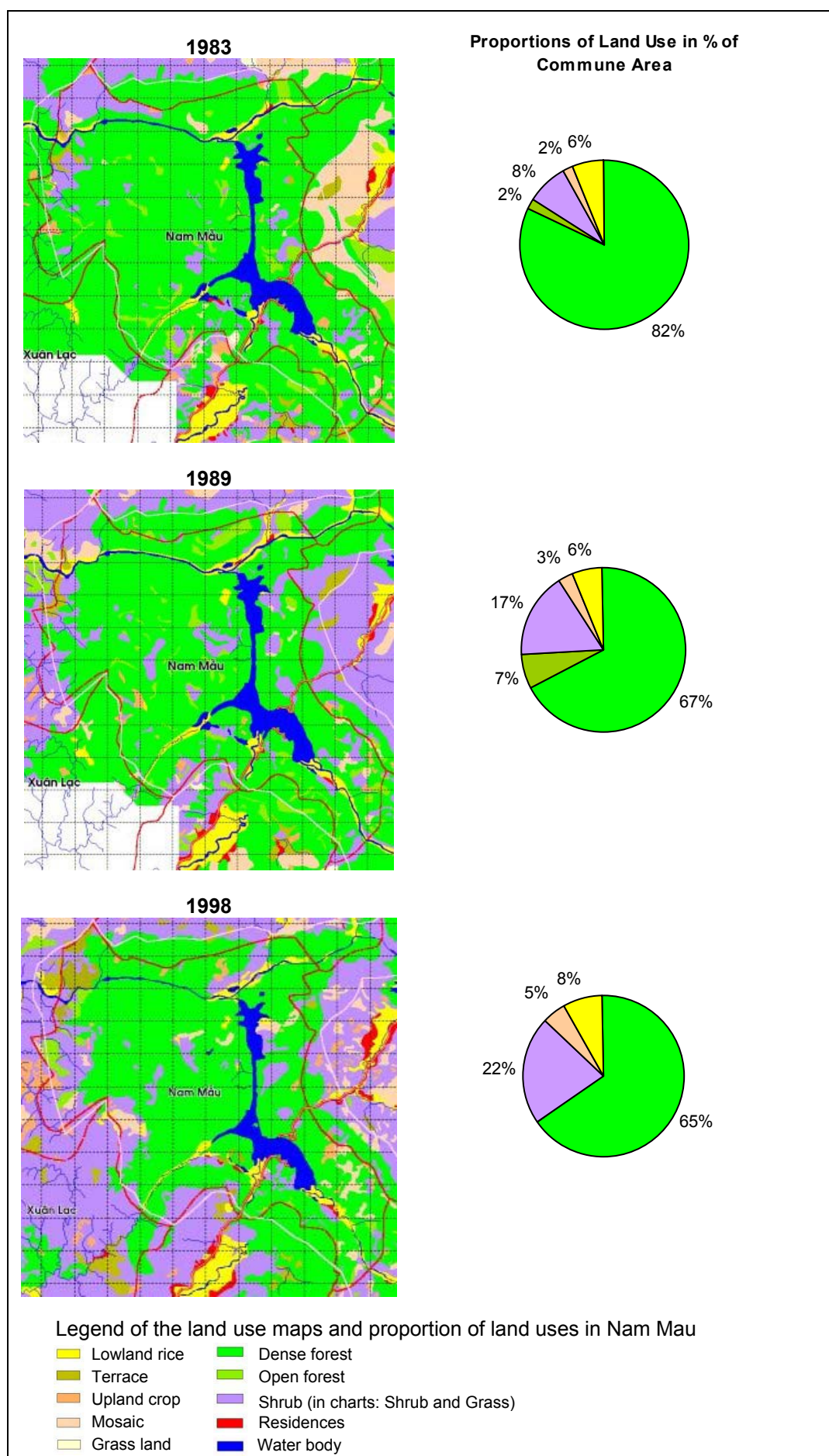
The land use maps series for *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* commune illustrate the land use changes during and after decollectivisation (Map 4-6 and Map 4-7). They are derived from aerial photographs taken in November 1983 and 1989 and December 1998. The maps show that heavy encroachment on the forest took place in both communes. In *Nam Mau*, the encroachment originated largely from the neighbouring communes and moved towards the core zone of *Ba Be* National Park. Dense and open forest (dark and light green) diminished from 84% in 1983, to 74% in 1989, and to 65% in 1998. Secondary forest, shrub and grassland (purple) increased from 8% in 1983 to 22% in 1998. This land use class represents the succession of vegetation re-growth at various stages after upland fields have been abandoned. The area of cropped upland fields, intercropping of maize and fruit trees and orchards (orange and light orange) increased from 2% in 1983 to 5% in 1998. Rice paddy and terraced fields increased by 2% from 6% in 1983 to 8% in 1998.

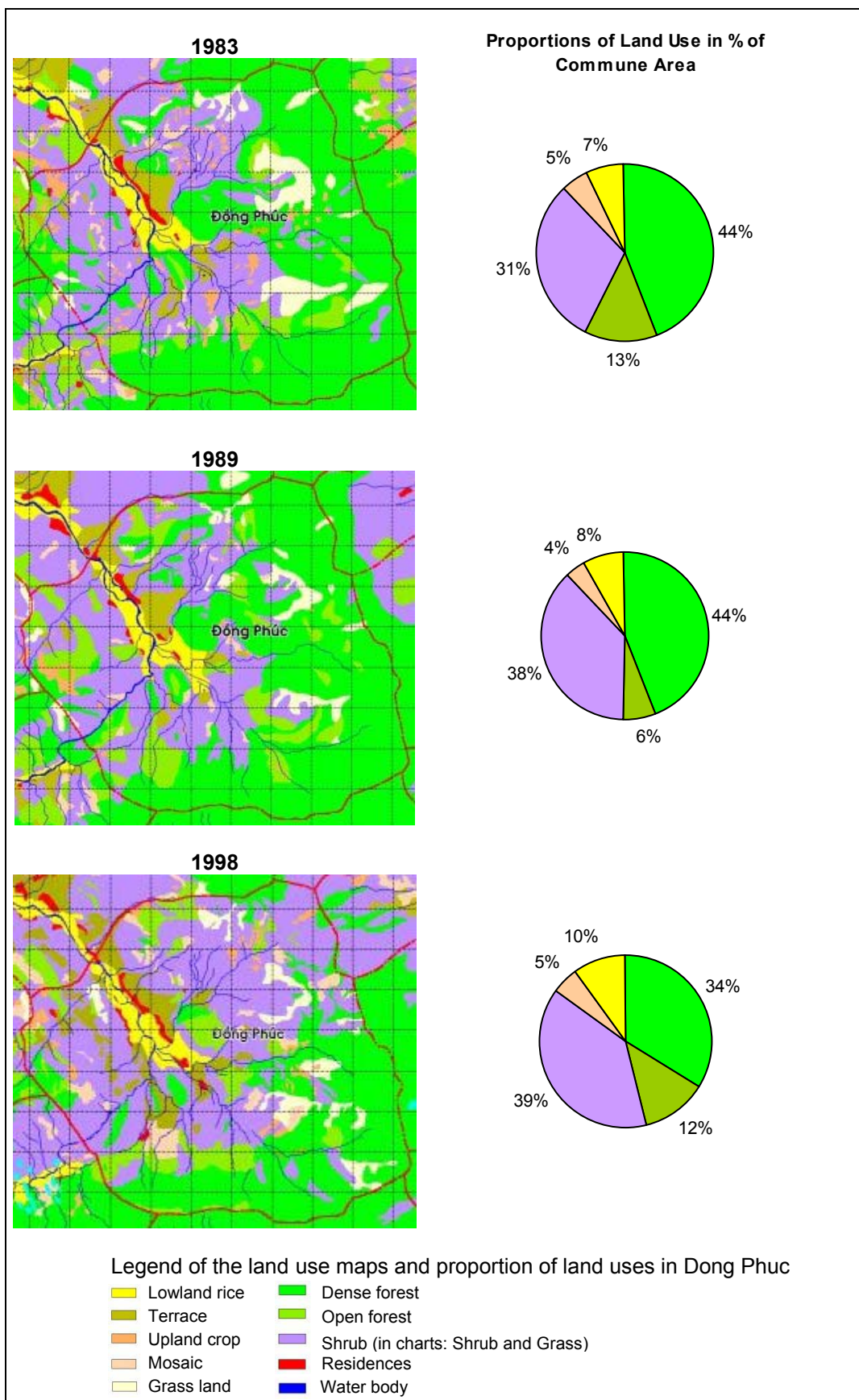
In *Dong Phuc* commune forest cover loss was not as high as in *Nam Mau* but substantial. Some hill tops were completely deforested. Encroachment on the forest took place from the commune centre towards its periphery. Dense and open forest (green and light green) was reduced from 57% in 1983 to 46% in 1998. Secondary forest, shrub and grassland (purple) increased from 31% in 1983 to 39% in 1998. The area of cropped upland fields remained at around 5% on all three photographs. Rice paddy and terraced fields increased from 7% in 1983 to 10% in 1998.

Next two pages:

Map 4-6: Land use map series of Nam Mau commune (Source: Aerial photographs of November 1983, 1989, and December 1998; interpreted by Mountain Agrarian Systems Project, Bac Kan Province and VTGeo, 2001)

Map 4-7: Land use map series of Dong Phuc commune (Source: Aerial photographs of November 1983, 1989, and December 1998; interpreted by Mountain Agrarian Systems Project, Bac Kan Province and VTGeo, 2001)





A first qualitative look at the forest gives an impression of the environmental changes during and after decollectivisation. In *Ba Be* district, these were largely due to the expansion of agricultural production areas to higher altitudes as access to forests was free and livelihood systems experienced diversification after the collective period. These environmental changes are of great importance for the perception of Vietnam's mountain problematique today. They represent the rapid degradation process of mountain resources during the last 15 years. Chapter five is going to look at these environmental transformation from a policy point of view. It discusses the environmental changes with regard to natural resource behaviour, policy changes and the establishment of *Ba Be* National Park.

4.5 Historical Roots of Vietnam's Mountain Problematique

This chapter gave an account of the history of lowland-upland relations and changing political-economic conditions in Vietnam's socialist and economic transitions. It drew on the local experiences made in the northern mountain district of *Ba Be*. The historical perspective on the mountain areas allowed insights into the integration processes of peripheral regions and ethnic peoples into larger economic systems and political entities. The chapter showed that during the struggle for independence the mountain peoples had been important allies for the *Kinh* majority, who depended on their support to win the wars. However, despite this crucial alliance the attitude of the *Kinh* towards the mountain population remained prejudiced against the traditions and customs of the culturally distinct ethnic groups. The identified need for civilising them and making them citizens with equal rights and opportunities was accompanied with lowland hegemonies over mountain resources and control over people and environment. Despite the promised rights for self-determination and autonomy the mountain peoples received little opportunities for representing their interests in the administrative and political centres in the lowlands.

They experienced a twofold marginalisation process. Firstly, with independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam they became a minority population within the newly created political entity. Secondly, they came under social and economic control dominated by the *Kinh* and directed from the lowland centres of political and economic power. These processes largely correspond with the problems identified in other mountain regions of the world where mountain peoples were increasingly marginalised by unequal social and economic relations between the lowlands and uplands (Ives et al., 1997b; Funnell and Parish, 2001). In Vietnam, the marginalisation process was shaped by the history of a newly created nation-state that went through a socialist transition. It was influenced by a centralisation and concentration of political and economic power in the lowland centres and the Communist Party. In many places, the natural resource endowment of the mountain periphery was heavily mined, not so much by agricultural cooperatives but by state-owned forest and mining enterprises (Mellac, 2000; Scott 2000).

The focus on the development context of *Ba Be* district illustrates how these changes influenced the local cultural setting and socio-economic and environmental conditions. The testimonies of local informants show how livelihoods have changed in *Ba Be* district as a consequence of the major events of the socialist and economic transitions. With the establishment of the socialist nation-state the inhabitants of *Ba Be* district were integrated into the cooperativisation movement. Despite the thorough penetration of the northern mountain region by the Marxist economy cooperative control nevertheless seemed to be less strict than in the lowlands. This left some of the village communities of *Ba Be* district with more freedom and opportunities. Some ethnic groups, like the *H'mong* or some *Dao* communities, were never reached by the movement. Others had access to upland fields for private cultivation. In the case of *Tan Lung*, the *Dao* people gained access to better land

and their livelihoods improved with cooperativisation. They settled down in permanent villages and started to combine collective lowland farming with upland cultivation. The experiences with collectivisation are therefore rather diverse. Although some of the informants recalled painful experiences with collectivisation, that had its origin in the ideologies of the political leaders in the lowland centres, the relations between *Kinh*, *Tay* and *Dao* in *Ba Be* district were not as disrupted as one would expect from the reports of the national Vietnamisation and assimilation projects.

The historical processes of collectivisation and reorganisation of labour and settlement patterns have shown their effects primarily after decollectivisation. They contribute substantially to the problem complex associated with mountain development today. While the *Tay* gained from reclaiming their fields and establishing close market relations with the *Kinh*, the *Dao* lost their access to lowland fields and had to rely on the upland fields again for livelihood security. Access to and control over different kinds of resources caused the emergence of significant social differentiations between ethnic groups and village communities. Most mountain communities re-established their subsistence economy characterised by the combination of lowland and upland cultivation. The *Tay* communities in *Ba Be* district intensified lowland agriculture and diversified their household economies with upland farming. *Dao* people, on the other hand, expanded their agricultural activities in the uplands and forests to achieve livelihood and food security. The sedentarisation policy of the collective period has largely integrated the *Dao* into the local administration, school and health care system. They have established social networks and permanent settlements. To return to a semi-nomadic lifestyle determined by an agricultural production system of shifting cultivation is not possible anymore. However, their dependence on the forest resources is still strong and shifting cultivation is still widely practiced. The historical attempts to control both the *Tay* and the *Dao* and their way of life have caused dysfunctional outcomes. After decollectivisation shifting cultivation practices by both the *Tay* and *Dao* people have accelerated deforestation, especially around the settlements, and leaves them as the villains.

This thesis' historical perspective on development and change and the combination of local empirical data with an analysis of the political-economic structures establishes one of several versions of Vietnam's mountain problematique. This version claims that many of the problems associated with mountain development today have their roots in the historical events of the last century, in the attitudes of the lowlanders towards the uplanders, and in changing economic strategies during the transition from planned economy to a market economy under state management. It identifies the following factors as crucial components of Vietnam's mountain problematique, representing a view from inside the mountain areas:

- historical legacies of deprivation and social change during collectivisation and decollectivisation,
- lack of political representation of mountain areas and peoples due to marginalisation processes,
- high incidence of poverty,
- dependence on marginal resources, and
- progressive encroachment on forests causing extensive deforestation and environmental degradation.

However, Vietnam's mountain problematique today is still largely conceptualised as a closed system of problems confined to mountain areas alone. The next chapter will examine how knowledge claims and different versions of the mountain problematique get translated into policies for the mountain areas of Vietnam. It is going to shed light on the various interfaces of contested representations between local, national, and global levels and policy actors.

Chapter 5

Contesting Policies in Vietnam's Mountain Areas

5.1 Policies for Vietnam's Uplands

Vietnam's mountain areas face development and environmental problems. And as mountains make up two thirds of Vietnam's territory these problems are of major concern to the political leadership. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the roots of the mountain problematique in Vietnam lie in the history of conflicting lowland-upland relations, changing socio-economic conditions, and local livelihood pressures that go beyond the sustainable level of mountain resource use. Therefore, one of the burning questions is: what can be done against the development and environmental problems in the mountain areas? A possible answer lies in the formulation of better policies.

During the last decade at least four policy programmes with a special impact on mountain areas were launched. The infrastructure development programme and the national poverty alleviation programme help poor communes, not only in the mountain areas but all over the country. They provide funds for the construction of roads and the set-up of electricity networks. They improve livelihood conditions through funds for agricultural intensification and for the enhancement of health care and education systems. These programmes have largely shown positive effects on the socio-economic situation of poor communes. However, they were only successful to limited degrees in taking pressure from the mountain environment. The construction and improvement of roads, for example, may also have the effect of intensifying the pressure on productive mountain resources, such as forests or mineral resources. Better education systems and the creation of non-farm income opportunities, on the other hand, may reduce the pressure by a sectoral transformation towards non-farm employment.

Two other policy programmes respond more directly to the environmental difficulties in the mountain regions. The Five Million Hectares Afforestation Programme and the biodiversity conservation policy primarily aim at resource rehabilitation and protection of the mountain resources. For the analysis of people-environment relations in the northern mountain region these two policy frameworks are going to be discussed in detail in this chapter. They are of importance to the objectives of this thesis as they link the mountain localities with the national and international policy levels and reveal how different representations of the mountain areas are translated into the formulation of policy agendas. Their analysis allows the investigation of both direct and indirect people-environment relations by examining local resource use practices embedded in a web of different policy rationales and objectives.

The chapter is going to ask how these policy frameworks get established, what their rationales are, what results they produce, and how they are debated in the mountain localities. It critically assesses whether the current policies are 'better' policies to address

Vietnam's mountain problematique. A policy document analysis and a discursive analysis of policy objectives and policy stakes are used to identify diverse problem perceptions and to examine policy implementation processes. The chapter reveals that the two policy frameworks create a number of conflicts. They emerge, firstly, between official policy intentions and local practices, needs and aspirations and, secondly, between the policy agendas of different strategising actors interested in Vietnam's mountain environment for various purposes. By drawing on empirical evidence from *Ba Be* district the chapter shows how national policy frameworks can collide with the mountain peoples' customs and resource use practices, and how they may adversely affect the social and environmental conditions in the mountain localities.

5.2 The Environmental Policy Process in Vietnam

5.2.1 Policy actors

Before examining the two environmental policy frameworks in detail it seems important to introduce the predominant type of the policy process and the strategising policy actors in Vietnam. The single-party centralist governance of the Communist Party suggests a largely top-down, decision-oriented, linear model of the policy process. It assumes rational actions in the policy implementation process according to classic technocratic policy planning (Lindblom, 1980; Sutton, 1999). Party and government pursue two overarching policy discourses which subordinate all other debates and policies. These are the industrialisation and modernisation of the socialist nation-state and the economic renovation required to achieve this target. The priority for economic development usually places environmental programmes second. How environmental development is addressed is outlined in the Politburo's Directive No. 36/1998/CP-TW (Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998a). It states:

"[The Party] considers the environmental protection work as the work of the whole party, people and army; as a basic and inseparable item in the line, stand and socio-economic development plan of all levels and sectors; as an important basis ensuring sustainable development and successful implementation of the industrialisation and modernisation of the nation." (Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998a:n.p.)

The formulation of this directive leaves many questions open. Although natural resource protection is considered as a national obligation it is not at all clear how to go about the environmental agenda. The Ministry of Science Technology and Environment (MoSTE), which was founded in 1997, states in its National Strategy for Environmental Protection 2001-2010 that "macro-economic reforms undertaken over the last decade have resulted in increased national income, but clear policies for sustainable development have not been adopted so far." It reveals that "the need for environmental protection is usually included as part of the overall strategy of dealing with other social and economic problems" and claims that "environmental protection activities must be taken into consideration at the very first stage of taking socio-economic development decisions at the central level" (Ministry of Science Technology and Environment and National Environmental Agency, 2000:n.p.).

Whereas MoSTE is still struggling to come up with a national environmental strategy, longer established and better equipped ministries such as the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) have long since been pursuing development policies with environmental components. According to the idea of the Green Revolution agricultural intensification of lowland production in mountain valleys has been promoted

since the late 1970s. The construction of irrigation schemes and the use of high yield varieties, for example, aim at both the increase of agricultural productivity in the lowland and at taking pressure from the forests (see also Photo III-4 in Appendix III). Regreening barren hills with fruit and forest tree plantations and the promotion of agroforestry models are other strategies pursued to rehabilitate the environment resources under pressure. The provision of land tenure rights for lowland and forestland according to the new land law of 1993 obliges direct resource users to adopt protective measures in natural resource use.

The economic renovation in Vietnam did not only alter the policy context, it also opened the national policy arena for external advisors of international organisations, development agencies and research institutes. MARD, for example, receives considerable assistance from a number of bilateral development agencies which provide expertise and considerable financial means for environmental planning, such as land use planning and the allocation of forestland (see for example Vu Van Me, 2001). MARD has also acted as a national counterpart for many conservation organisations in the multi- and bilateral as well as in the non-governmental sector, especially because protected areas and National Parks are under its management authority. The business with biodiversity conservation has flourished during the last decade. Both the near extinction of endemic primates as well as the recent discovery of 'new' species (see also section 5.5.1) have mobilised the community of conservationists to get active in Vietnam. Additionally, the international donor agencies have increased the pressure on Vietnam to fulfil the signed international treaties and environmental programmes such as the law on environmental protection (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1993b) and the Biodiversity Action Plan (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1995). Many donor agencies demand environmental conditionality before they disburse their funds. Through their expertise, analyses, and organisational policies the donors contribute substantially to the promotion of certain agendas in the current policy context of Vietnam.

In summary, the policy actors with agenda-setting and decision-making powers are situated at the central level of the state administration where national strategies, laws and programmes are elaborated by the Party and governmental ministries. Ministries are often assisted by multi- and bilateral organisations in terms of expertise and funding. After policy formulation, the policy frameworks are disseminated to the provincial, district and commune levels where they get implemented by the executive bodies, the People's Committees. Lower-level administrative bodies and the citizenry typically have little or no influence on agenda-setting and decision-making in (environmental) policy-making. However, they can influence the policy implementation process by contesting policy rationales and contents and by debating policy mechanisms and instruments. In this process of negotiation policies may get objected, accepted, rigidly imposed, or partially implemented only. Therefore, a locality-specific perspective focusing more on implementation, as applied in this chapter, will reveal divergences from the linear model of the policy process, where 'better' policies are supposed to produce 'better' outcomes. It suggests to examine different policy positions held by social and political actors who share diverse assumptions and worldviews of environmental and development problems.

5.2.2 Discourses and norms

The literature on policy analysis and policy process analysis and the discussion in chapter three point at the social constructions of mountains and development problems. They are based on various interpretations of scientific facts and reflect the discourses and political interests of policy actors that play significant roles in policy-making and implementation (Hannigan, 1995; Apthorpe and Gasper, 1996; Mehta et al., 1999; Steins, 2000). Policies are seen here as almost always multiple and overlapping, pointing at the agency of different actors as they cross multiple 'interfaces' of different and often incompatible social

worlds (Long and Van der Ploeg, 1989; Long, 1992). Through the power of expertise, certain assumptions of policy problems are normalised and subsequently internalised by individuals (Shore and Wright, 1997). In the context of environmental policies, where scientific expertise plays a major role in framing policy debates, Keeley and Scoones (1999:5) argue that "conceptions of the world which become dominant in policy discussions are a reflection of the norms through which people are governed".

Three discourses around which policy debate evolves in Vietnam can be identified. These are a rural development discourse, including sustainable livelihood and tourism development, an environmental rehabilitation discourse, and a biodiversity conservation discourse. Keeley and Scoones (2000:90) point out that such discourses start from different premises and can provoke serious conflicts over policy in terms of decisions, laws, programmes and actual implementation practice.

The following sections will shed light on formulation and implementation processes of forest management and biodiversity conservation policies. The analytical concept of political ecology will help analysing and illuminating the conflicting policy objectives and policy stakes in *Ba Be* district. As most of the forestland and most of the biodiversity hotspots lie in the mountain areas these two policy frameworks are considered as important means to address some of the problems of mountain development and environmental protection in Vietnam's uplands.

5.3 Planning Reforestation and Forest Protection

5.3.1 Official forest policy

The land use maps series in section 4.4.5 (Map 4-6 and Map 4-7) indicated that the mountain environment experienced rapid change during the last fifteen years. The area of dense forest decreased by 13% in *Dong Phuc* commune and by 17% in *Nam Mau* commune. The transformation of the environment in the national context of Vietnam shows similar figures. Forest cover maps developed by the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI) and IUCN of the years 1943, 1983 and 1997 show that the forested area declined from 14 million hectares in 1943 to 9.3 million hectares in 1997 (IUCN, 1999). In relation to the total land area of Vietnam, forest cover experienced a reduction by about 13%, it was 42.2% in 1943 and 29% in 1997 (Ministry of Science Technology and Environment and National Environmental Agency, 1999). According to the official land use plans of the government agencies, land designated as forest area is more than 17.6 million hectares or 54% of the country. FIPI defines all land above 25 degree slope as forestland, even if it is currently not forested. Therefore, Vietnam's actual forest cover diverges significantly from the intended land cover.

Forest policy in Vietnam is legally established through government decisions, decrees, and programmes such as the greening of barren hills or forestland allocation. The problem of rapid and progressive deforestation was identified early. Official policy guidelines in forestry which deal with issues such as ownership, utilisation, conservation and development of forest resources were first issued by the Council of Ministers in 1968. Decision No. 179-CP outlined plans "for reforestation, protection of forest, and the allocation of agricultural and forestland to cooperatives for management and exploitation" (Council of Ministers, 1968; Forest Inspection Branch, 1997:1). However, during the collective period the greatest part of forestry production was under state control and a great number of state-owned forest enterprises were established. They usually pursued a resource-intensive production strategy.

Gilmour and Ngyuen Van San (1999:13) report that between 1954 and 1976 the function of the forest in Vietnam was to "serve as a basis for the development of

agriculture". Forest policy during the collective period had primarily the objective to contribute to agricultural and industrial production by increasing the production of timber and non-timber products as well as to provide employment opportunities. In 1976, the Ministry of Forestry was established and directed forestry production in the period from 1976 until it was integrated in the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development in the early 1990s. In the decade from 1976 to 1986 Vietnam's forestry was characterised by substantial over-exploitation due to production quotas set based on state needs rather than on the productive capacity of the forests (Gilmour and Nguyen Van San, 1999). Protection and conservation activities fell far behind the economic objectives.

In the early period of agricultural reform in the 1980s, the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to formalise the process of forestland allocation. Cooperatives, communes, state enterprises and other collective units were provided with the management authority of forestland areas. Similar to the output allocation of lowland, the cooperatives subsequently contracted the forestland out to individuals. Official guidelines accompanied the contracts and involved obligations for reforestation and sustainable production methods for natural or planted forests. Forest policy at that time aimed at a strengthened forest development to fight against the widespread slash-and-burn practice in old grown forests (Nguyen Thuong Luu et al., 1995). By the year 1993, it became clear that the policies did not show the expected results (Nguyen Cat Giao and Vu Van Me, 1998). From the 1960s to the 1980s, forest policy for resource protection and sustainable forest management was a history of policy failure. In the 1990s, forest policy underwent another set of reforms.

5.3.2 Regreening barren hills

The changes in forest policy of the 1990s were largely realised through Programme 327, the Regreening of Barren Hills Programme, and its successor the Five Million Hectares Afforestation National Programme (Nguyen Vanh et al., 1995; Prime Minister of the Government of Vietnam, 1998). The overall aim of these two programmes is to increase the area covered with forests from 9.3 million to 14 million hectares until the year 2010.

Programme 327 ran from 1993 to 1996. It was concerned with the use of bare land, denuded hills, forests, alluvial soils and water bodies. Planned activities under Programme 327 included afforestation, protection, enrichment and regeneration of forests. Sixty per cent of its budget was used for infrastructure, scientific and technical facilities, public welfare, afforestation of protection forest and special-use forestland, national seed strands, and temporary support to new settlers. The remaining 40% were used for loans without interest to individual households engaged in forestry (Morrison and Dubois, 1998).

The objectives of Programme 327 are specified as follows:

"To protect remaining forests in areas where ethnic people have either a nomadic or sedentary life but still practice shifting cultivation; to protect and manage other forests the State uses with other methods such as forest rangers and financial resources; to reforest barren lands and hills with indigenous tree species and cash crops, which have long-term protection effects through agroforestry approaches; to link forest protection, reforestation of barren lands and hills with a solution for shifting cultivation as practiced by ethnic people through attracting labour power locally available or from delta provinces to new economic zones which will contribute to the readjustment of population densities among regions." (Nguyen Vanh et al., 1995:6)

Programme 327 linked forest policy objectives with infrastructure development and land settlement issues. Forest development and resettlement policies, however, did not go together. In the central highlands of Vietnam, an area which was officially classed as 'unused' land and hence suitable for opening up to the masses of lowland *Kinh* farmers, land was in fact already extensively used by several other ethnic groups (Salemink, 2000;

Corlin, 2001). Instead of increasing the area covered by forest, the great number of new settlers primarily transformed forested and barren hills into large-scale cash crop plantations of coffee promoted by the government and the World Bank (Gabriel-Schneider and Aiolfi, 2002). On the one hand, this increased the pressure on the natural resources and incidences of soil erosion caused progressive environmental degradation processes. On the other hand, severe conflicts between the autochthonous peoples and the *Kinh* settlers emerged. These conflicts are still unresolved and the social and political situation in the central highland region is very tense. The area is currently declared a risk to the country's political stability. In the beginning of 2001, the presence of the army in the region was increased to enhance the level of control in this southern part of Vietnam's mountain regions (Human Rights Watch, 2002; remember also Ives, 1987 for similar incidences in Nepal).

Programme 327 was terminated because it caused more conflicts than expected results. It represents another major failure in Vietnam's forest policy (Dupar and Badenoch, 2002). However, the programme was not completely abandoned. It was modified, separated from the resettlement programme, and re-oriented towards reforestation and resource rehabilitation. The vision of its successor, the Five Million Hectares Afforestation National Programme, is to create and more effectively protect special-use forests and watershed protection forests, to expand forests to meet domestic consumption and export needs of the wood products industry, and to effectively develop the communes with bare lands to create more employment, improve incomes and reduce the pressure on forests (Government-Donor-NGO Partnership Group, 2000). This last point of the objectives transports again the message for more control and re-education of mountain resource users. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development states:

"[The programme's objective is to] contribute to job creation for the increase of income for local residences in order to make hunters and shifting cultivators the major players in afforestation. Forest protection has the goal to develop production for better living standards, and to meet defence and security purposes." (1998:3)

The reforestation programmes started both from a problem definition of deforestation that primarily blame mountain people and ethnic communities for their livelihood practices. Shifting cultivation is considered as the major destructive force. The perception of the ethnic groups and their resource use practices as the villains of deforestation reflects a highly biased understanding of the heavy forest cover loss of the last decades. It remains silent about the resource-intensive strategies of the state-forest enterprises, which deforested vast areas of hill and mountain landscape. Schliesinger (1997:41) estimates that circa 50% of deforestation today is caused by commercial timber exploitation, other 25% by forest fires and storms, and 25% by shifting cultivation. The policy rationales of the Regreening of Barren Hills and the Five Million Hectares Afforestation Programmes reflect a version of Vietnam's mountain problematique that identifies the problems in mountain areas as confined to mountain peoples alone. It does not make the connection with upland-lowland relations, such as the massive *Kinh* immigration into the central highlands. The resource-intensive strategies of the forest enterprises are also ignored.

The official way to deal with deforestation and social unrest is to enhance control and influence over the mountain people to make them change from resource destroyers to resource protectors (see last quote "to make hunters and shifting cultivators the major players in afforestation"). These programmes still show traits of a 'Vietnamisation' project. Dupar and Badenoch (2002:20) raise another shortcoming of the forest policy programmes. They claim that the reforestation programmes rarely consider the diverse biophysical resources, social customs, and pre-existing forms of natural resource management. The forestry planners and technocrats define which tree species are used for reforestation

without considering the environmental suitability of ecologically diverse mountain environments, and the social acceptance amongst them who are supposed to plant them. These central-level decisions and technocratic measures have increased the insecurity of livelihoods in the mountains. The two forest policy programmes and their policy rationales have foremost caused more control, the reallocation of mountain resources from ethnic mountain peoples to *Kinh* settlers, and the devolution of protection responsibilities to those who struggle for their subsistence in the increasingly crowded and contested mountain areas.

5.3.3 Forest classifications

In the process of forest policy reform another largely technocratic exercise was carried out in the government agencies at the central level. It is the forest classification of 1994, which classifies all forestland according to three types of forest. It distinguishes between 1) special-use forest, 2) protection forest, and 3) production forest. Together with the policy guidelines stated in Decree No. 02/1994/CP and Decree No. 163/1999/ND-CP the classification is used for the forestland allocation process. They stipulate to whom and under which land use planning concept forestland is allocated or contracted (see Table 5-1) (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1994; 1999).

Classification	Type of forest	Management purposes	Management authority	Institutional arrangement
Special-use forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Park forest • Nature Reserve forest • forest having cultural, historical, environmental significance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • biodiversity conservation • provision of entertainment and tourism services • samples of national forest ecosystems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Park management board • Forest Protection Unit or Department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protection contract
Protection forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • watershed forest • forest to serve as wind break or against sand • forest to prevent sea tidal waves • forest to protect the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partial or full protection due to environmental significance to protect water resources, prevent erosion, reduce natural disasters etc. • building landscape tourism plots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organisations • households • individuals • management board of protection forest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protection contract
Production forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other forest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plantations for commercial purposes • agroforestry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • state forest enterprises • organisations • households • individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contract/lease • land use certificate • land tenure certificate

Table 5-1: Forest classification and related aspects on management, responsibility and institutional arrangement (Source: Decree No. 02/1994/CP; Decree No. 163/1999/ND-CP; Tran Dan Dinh, 1998)

Forest classified as production forest is allocated to households and individuals directly involved in agroforestry production, which provides them with main sources of

income and are certified by the commune People's Committee in areas where forestland is provided. Land use and land tenure rights for up to 50 years are distributed. If land is reforested with forest trees of a life cycle of more than 50 years, the land users have land reallocated from the state for the next utilisation period. Production forest is also allocated to state forest enterprises, forestry nurseries, vocational schools, private enterprises, and units of the army to use the land in combination with national defence operations (articles 4, 8 and 14 of Decree No. 163).

Land classified as protection forest is allocated to management boards of protection forests to run the management, protection and development activities according to the approved plans and projections. Protection forest classified as medium critical and less critical watershed forest is allocated to organisations, households and individual to run activities of management, protection and replantation on the land according to the guidelines of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to promote agroforestry production. Protection forest gets allocated to organisations, households and individuals with the obligation to fully exercise legal regulation on land use, forest protection and development. Protection contracts between the households and the Forest Protection Units are issued (articles 3, 8, and 15 of Decree No. 163).

Land classified as special-use forest is set aside from agricultural and forestry production. Its function is to protect natural resources, to protect floral and faunal genetic resources, thus to represent samples of national forest ecosystems. It moreover preserves historical and cultural relics and landscapes, and provides entertainment and tourism development potentials. Special-use forestland is directly managed by the Forest Protection Units or National Park management boards and tenure rights are not available for farming households. Households residing in protected areas and National Parks are supposed to develop reforestation and protection activities according to specific protection contracts (article 7 of Decree No. 163).

The target figures for each forest class look as follows (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1998):

- Special-use forest: about 2.1 million hectares or 11% of the total target area of 14 million hectares.
- Protection forest: about 6.8 million hectares or 39% of the total planned forest cover, of which 3.3 million hectares need to be reforested.
- Production forest: the remaining 8.7 million hectares or 50% of the total planned forest cover, of which 3.8 million hectares need to be reforested.

The forest classification process was another central-level planning exercise, which was purely based on calculations and technocratic top-down decision-making in land use planning and forestland allocation. Once the land is classified it is solely restricted to forestry (Sikor, 2001). The planning exercises of the central agencies, such as the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI) and the General Department for Land Administration (GDLA), typically neglect local realities and disregard particularities in land tenure among mountain communities. Long-established production areas on sloping land come to lie in zones newly delineated as special-use or protection forests. This causes conflicts in management and control over these areas when it comes to policy implementation (see section 5.4).

5.3.4 Forestland allocation

The provision of forestland tenure rights to individuals, households and organisations is, as already mentioned in the above sections, another mechanism applied to improve forest rehabilitation and protection and to increase the national forest cover. According to the

land law of 1993, forestland began to be allocated to households, individuals, and organisations in 1994. With this reform the rights to forest experienced a strong shift from the state-run forest enterprises to the local resource users. The political leadership of Vietnam realised that centralised forest management through state-run institutions had failed and its attention shifted to the local communities living in or near forest areas. Again, the mountain peoples were found to be in key positions to effectively implement forest management (Pham Xuan Phuong, 2000). Land use and land tenure certificates for forestland were issued. They are the official, legally binding contracts signed by the chairman of the district People's Committee and the head of the household receiving the land. The land manager obtains long-term rights to use the forestland up to 50 years in compliance with official land use plans. The policy reforms in land tenure have to some extent reduced the uncertainty of access to and control over forestland among local resource users.

Morrison and Dubois (1998:20) point out that among the many policy responses to forest loss in Vietnam since 1968 the forestland allocation policy is the only one which relates management authority directly to local people and their livelihood needs. They therefore speak of a transition towards 'people's forestry' where primary resource users become decision-makers and simultaneously get tied to obligations and duties to reforest and to protect the forests. Besides its environmental objectives, the policy also aims at improving local people's livelihoods. The allocation of forestland to farming households, for example, allows them to share benefits from forest management and protection (Pham Xuan Phuong, 2000). It is generally assumed that farmers value trees much more if they 'own' them and that their control over forest resources leads to sustainable forest and forestland management (Morrison and Dubois, 1998).

The provision of land tenure rights for forestland is part of the long transformation process from collective to individual land rights of the economic transition period. Although the ownership of all natural resources is vested in the state the land allocation policies distribute rights to land which work like private property rights for individuals and households. This institutional arrangement grants exclusive, transferable rights to certain land plots and usually provides incentives to regulate resource use in a manner consistent with private objectives (Berkes, 1996). For special-use and protection forests, such as critical watersheds, the state property regime is still in practice. The management of these forests is carried out by the government agencies and the army, which devolve the management responsibility down to the People's Committee in the districts and the communes. Common-property rights are not considered in the forestland allocation process, although many mountain communities like the studied village communities in *Ba Be* district, still organise natural resource management according to such regimes. A number of authors state that it is wrong to promote 'private' and state property rights only and that blueprint policies miss out on other resource beneficiary institutional arrangements (Pham Quang Hoan, 1999; Corlin, 2001; Dupar and Badenoch, 2002). Forest policy in many mountain communities is again prone to fail because of limited opportunities and flexibility with policy regulations.

In summary, the national forest policy has shown diverse effects. With Programme 327 and the Five Million Hectares Afforestation Programme forest policy contributed to enhance state control in the mountain areas and to re-educate mountain resource users from resource destroyers to resource protectors. Forest policy was planned in a technocratic manner, neglecting the fact that the way taken is highly political. It caused severe conflicts when applied in the localities and increases the uncertainty of mountainous livelihoods. The forestland allocation policy, on the other hand, worked more in the interest of the people. However, its emphasis on resource rehabilitation and protection make many local resource users sceptical about their benefits. The forestland allocation process also caused

conflicts over access to and control of land. It moreover experienced local reinterpretations and has not yet unfolded its expected resource-beneficiary effects. Therefore, policy planning in forestry in the mountain localities in Vietnam has been prone to policy failure as it is little responsive to local concerns and is based on incomplete problem definitions. It has largely worked for the two representations of mountains, that see mountains as important resource provider for the future and as problem areas of socio-economic development and cultural innovation.

In the next sections, the official forest policy is again investigated in the context of the two case study communes of *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau*. Forest policy regulates the use of an important resource base for livelihood security in the three communities. Conflicts in policy implementation occur at three levels: at the interface between the central and the local; at the interface between the different socio-economic groups in the villages; and at the interface between production- and protection-oriented objectives.

5.4 Forest Policy in Mountain Communes

5.4.1 The struggle for forestland

The forestland allocation policy of 1994 reached the two case study communes *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* in the year 1997. In *Nam Mau*, which is the core zone of *Ba Be* National Park (see Map 4-4), the management authority for forestland was not given to the commune but to the National Park management board. Forest in *Nam Mau* commune is classified as special-use forest, which has a function to protect biodiversity resources and to represent typical samples of Vietnam's diverse landscapes. In *Nam Mau*, forest policy is therefore closely linked with the policy of biodiversity conservation, which is going to be more specifically discussed in section 5.5.

In *Dong Phuc* commune, which lies in the bufferzone area of *Ba Be* National Park, forestland is officially also classified as special-use forest which cannot be allocated to farming households. In the locality, however, the forest was always considered as production and protection forest. It was therefore subsequently entrusted to the village communities as well as allocated to the households. Some of the local residents have received long-term land tenure rights for forestland.

Dong Phuc represents an example for the different rationales of forestland use at the centre and in the locality. The plans of the central government agencies, which outline guidelines and overall targets for reforestation and protection, are not entirely implemented in the locality. There is collision between central planning and local aspirations, such as livelihood security and socio-economic development. Moreover, historical and socio-economic factors have contributed to an uneven implementation process and diverse policy responses in the *Tay* and *Dao* villages of *Dong Phuc* commune. For all communities forestland is of vital importance for the mountain agricultural system. As was shown in the previous chapter, the *Dao* have traditionally relied more on the forestland for cultivation in the uplands and more so after decollectivisation. The responses to forest classification and forestland allocation are consequently different. Generally, it is widely acknowledged among the commune leaders and the local residents that the forestland allocation policy does encourage better management practices of forest resources. Some village communities, however, struggle with the idea of equal forestland distribution among all households. Land conflicts emerged and slowed down the distribution of forestland and the implementation of forest protection measures. Finally, the forestland allocation policy was implemented in the *Dao* communities but was opposed by the *Tay*. Forest policy implementation reflects differences along the lines of ethnicity.

Ban Chan

The reasoning to oppose forestland allocation in *Ban Chan*, the studied *Tay* village in *Dong Phuc* commune, goes as follows: Forestland is to be allocated in equal shares to each of the 61 households of the village. Most of the villagers, however, consider these forestland shares as being too small to be productively cultivated. The head of a well-established household with a lot of inherited and previously appropriated forestland reports that "forestland allocation in *Ban Chan* is not possible so far, because the families haven't divided their land among their children yet" [BC#00281]. He thinks that the distribution of small patches of land among his children would hamper their chances for socio-economic development in the long term. In his view, it is better to collectively cultivate the family's forestland by family and other community members. This account reflects the opinion of a well-established household that is not willing to give up the household's control over the forestland. The fact that his land shares would decrease when the forestland allocation policy was implemented made him uncooperative. Together with other households well-endowed with large forestland shares he used his influential stance in the community to oppose the coordination and planning of forestland distribution. When a delegation of the General Department of Land Administration visited the village to assess the current land situation this group of rich households delayed the discussion so much that the delegation left with unfinished work. For this group of households forestland allocation and protection contracts do not imply a shift of control towards them but have the potential to weaken their control over the resources (see also Sikor and Dao Minh Truong, 2000; Sikor, 2001).

Therefore, the implementation of the forestland allocation policy was not possible in *Ban Chan*. The influential households preferred institutional arrangements based on kinship and social relations to negotiate access to forest resources annually. This corresponds most closely with a communal-property mechanism. For the newly established and poorer households of the village community the social relations secure them access to productive forestland, as everyone can ask for permission to cultivate in someone else's plot. Close social and kinship relations in *Ban Chan* are still reliable and guarantee access to the upland resources for all. The social relations find their expression also in the social organisation of cultivation in upland fields. An area of upland fields is usually cultivated collectively in order to minimise the labour investment. This requires, for example, less clearing work to access the fields and it also helps achieving better protection against wild animals and freely grazing cattle, as everybody is interested in keeping animals out of the area. Field preparation, sowing and harvesting in the upland fields are carried out in small groups. This arrangement secures timely cultivation and harvest for the participating families and enhances the socio-economic development process of the whole community.

There is, however, the trend to transform some of the forestland plots into permanent plantations. This trend indicates that the forestland under the communal-property regime gets more and more split up among the households. The communal-property regime is modified into a regime of unofficial private property rights. The transformation of forestland into permanent plantations is particularly applied in the face of the planned resettlement of *H'mong* households from *Nam Mau* commune, who have to leave their settlements in the forests of the National Park core zone. Some *Tay* families of *Ban Chan*, who are well endowed with labour force and capital, have begun to fence their plots. This is a labour-intensive activity that involves digging a ditch around the plot and constructing a dense fence. These land claims are effective although they are not formally approved by official land law. However, they are based on customary law of appropriation of land through agricultural activity and the investment of labour in a subsistence agroforestry system.

The uncertainty still associated with land appropriation under customary law tends to hamper long-term investment in forestland for poorer households in *Ban Chan*. A young

informant emphasised that she would only invest additional labour for the establishment of orchards and plantations in her upland fields when the land would get formally allocated to her. With the current land right situation she had no incentive of putting extra effort in the management of these areas [BC#00300]. The connection between land rights and 'better' resource use practices was also summarised by an informant from *Tan Lung*. He noted that "when the land is allocated to you, of course, you will protect your land well. People of *Tan Lung* protect their land better than before" [TL#00335].

Tan Lung

Tan Lung is one of four *Dao* villages in *Dong Phuc* commune where the forestland allocation policy was successfully implemented. The experiences of the decollectivisation period have influenced the communities' policy response. They had lost their access to lowland after decollectivisation and have increasingly relied on upland areas again. The rapid implementation of the forestland allocation policy secured them land tenure rights, at least for the uplands. Scott (2000:75-76) reports from selected localities in *Thai Nguyen* province that in order to compensate the *Dao* people for their lack of paddy land for growing food crops they received big shares of forestland.

In *Tan Lung* the forestland shares range from four to sixteen hectares. Households received land tenure rights in 1998. Certificates were issued for the production forestland in the village jurisdiction. Conflicts emerged also here, especially regarding the quality and location of the land shares. Under the guidance of the village headman the people of *Tan Lung* eventually found a consensus. It is said that it was for the benefit of the whole village community. It was easier for them to approve the forestland allocation policy as the forestland area was comparatively larger than in *Ban Chan*.

The families have started to gradually transform allocated land covered by regenerating forest or shrubs into fruit tree plantations. While the tree seedlings are still small the fields are intercropped with maize. Farmers in *Dong Phuc* and the neighbouring commune of *Hoang Tri* affirm that this is an option to take pressure from the forests. Cash crops, such as apricots, persimmon, cinnamon, or tea are normally sold at relatively high market prices and provide the families with seasonal cash income. With the improved accessibility of the communes by the government infrastructure development programme (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1998a) traders expand their business networks continuously and create the much desired market structures. Such investment in the land is said to be only possible because long-term access is secured by land tenure rights. Also the construction of terraces for rice cultivation on the slopes are a result of the forestland allocation process. The classification into production and protection forests made it clear that further expansion of agricultural areas into the watershed forest is strictly forbidden as it adversely affects the hydrological cycle and other important ecosystemic functions. Wherever possible, sloping land at lower altitudes has therefore been transformed into terraces for permanent rice and maize production.

Forestland tenure with its incentives for the establishment of plantations and terraced fields to take pressure from the forests does, however, not solve the *Dao* people's struggle for food security. Dry rice and maize cultivation on forestland plots are still necessary to reach a sufficient level of sustenance. Large areas need to be taken under cultivation but the policy guidelines prohibit them to do so. The *Dao* people report that they are struggling with adopting technological innovations. Although their behaviour towards the forest resources had changed since the land had been allocated to them, their limited labour force and capital endowment only enable them to apply low-input production strategies. Shifting cultivation is still the most suitable option for them. An informant from *Tan Lung* said that "we could mulch or plant fodder plants but the effort which goes into these activities would lack for the cultivation of our food crops" [TL#00179].

Therefore, new upland fields still get opened in the protection forest at higher altitudes, in places hidden from sight. The villagers refer to their customary law which provides them with the legitimacy to do so. Forest rangers and village headmen are suspended in the same web of rules and beliefs and they will usually not act rigidly against their fellow villagers. Their authority in forest policing is therefore curtailed by the social control mechanisms of the communities they belong to. Only in places where outsiders come in to carry out the jobs as forest rangers the forest policing methods are applied more consistently. But so far, this is not the case in *Ban Chan* and *Tan Lung*.

The institutional situation in *Tan Lung*, in the immediate neighbourhood of *Ban Chan*, looks therefore different. It combines official property rights with customary law. The management authority over allocated forestland has created incentives to better manage the resources for long-term cultivation but for subsistence needs resource use practice still relies on traditional rights and customs.

Forest protection

Concerning the protection aspect linked with forestland allocation policy, local practice therefore seems to deviate in both villages much from the official policy objective. Forestland and forest resources are crucial for the local livelihoods of mountain communities. They provide safety nets to fall back on when the lowland resources are not accessible or do not satisfy the food demands. This resource perception is common among the farming households. A village elder in *Ban Chan* explained it as follows:

"If they [the landless and poor households] work hard they can clear the sloping land and grow rice and maize". [BC#00088]

Successful upland farming enables to accumulate capital in form of cash or cattle. The eventual surplus from selling produce and animals in the market places can be transferred to buy land titles for paddy fields. The upland resources provide not only for the poorer segment of the village communities a certain amount of livelihood security. They are important for all households as they reduce the vulnerability of the exposure to natural risks such as annual floods, like in *Pac Ngoi*.

Although the significance of land rights for the protection of forests is widely acknowledged, protection mechanisms are difficult to enforce. The village headmen, who are currently in charge of the management of protection forests, pointed out that "it would be easy to protect the [watershed] forest with the community of the villagers only. But it is difficult when outsiders come in to exploit the forest resources" [DP#00036; BC#00165]. As the above discussion shows, this is not entirely true. Also villagers from the community with protection mandates for watershed forests open up new fields at higher altitudes. The quote indicates, however, the strong pressure on the forest not only by the village community itself but also by neighbouring villagers. They come to the forests to hunt and to collect firewood and timber for house constructions.

The forest policy of the 1980s and 1990s could not prevent the encroachment problem on the forest in *Dong Phuc* commune (see also Map 4-7). Yet, it sometimes increased the insecurity of the mountainous livelihoods. For instance, after the land classification system was developed at the central level some recently terraced fields came to lie in the protection forest zone. An informant of *Tan Lung* recalled that "first the government told us to terrace all suitable forestland for agricultural intensification, but now, with the new forest zonation, production in this area is not allowed anymore; we will fight to continue to cultivate there" [TL#00334]. The changing policy context creates a conflicting history of local entitlements which are contested by both the central state and the local communities. A sustainable trade-off between protection of forests and production on forestland in the mountain areas has not been found yet.

The conflict between food demand and protection is summarised in the following account of a village elder:

"In the hills, the *Dao* people continue to clear and destroy the forests. The [forest] rangers, like my son, do not allow them to do so. [But] they said to him: 'you do not let me clear forests for agricultural land, but can the government support us with food for the whole year? If the government can, we will be happy to stop clearing and destroying the forests for upland fields. We agree with the government's prohibition and we would not clear the forests if our families had enough food.' And then my son said: 'I am a government officer. Please do what I tell you because it is stipulated in the government policy. I tell you to stop clearing the forests, but concerning your difficulties I do not know what to answer.' My son had to go to the villages and [when people broke the rules] he confiscated their property [work tools] in order to prevent them from cutting trees. (...) My son said, however, that he could not do this job here anymore because they were our neighbours and we meet them everyday. And so he moved to work in *Na Nong*." [BC#00329]

The village elder's account of the (*Dao*) people's livelihood struggles also points at another important aspect in the policy implementation process at the local level. It is the role of government officials and local leaders. Firstly, their intermediary function in policy implementation is crucial. The chairman of the commune People's Committee of *Dong Phuc* recalled that "forest land allocation depends a lot on how it [the policy] is explained to the villagers" [DP#00216]. Secondly, the local officials' discretionary power is central to enforce the policy guidelines and rules. Despite their obligation to report violations of forest protection and the threat to be fined themselves, they frequently do not inform the Forest Protection Unit of new fields opened in the protection forests for food crop cultivation. Village solidarity as well as a certain degree of social pressure from kinship and other social networks are often stronger than the central state's reach and enhance the discrepancy between policy and local practice (Sikor, 2001). At the interface between the central and the local state, their role is therefore of great importance (to be discussed in chapter six).

The above story of the forest ranger shows that it is very difficult to enforce central policies in localities where livelihood security is not guaranteed. His being part of the communities where he was supposed to carry out forest policing hindered him to do his work. He moved to another place where the social relations between him and the communities were less strong but eventually gave up the job. He attended a training course in Hanoi but came back to his community after a short while. He is now working as a farmer who relies also on the forest resources to make a living.

5.4.2 Forest management in *Nam Mau* commune

In the third research site *Pac Ngoi*, the implementation of forestland allocation policy has taken yet another way. *Pac Ngoi* lies in the core zone of *Ba Be* National Park and the forest there is classified as special-use forest, strictly protected for biodiversity conservation and the preservation of historical and cultural relics for tourism and research (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1999; 2001). This classification does not foresee the distribution of forestland tenure rights to households and individuals. The management authority for forestland is given to the National Park management board, composed of central government officials.

The implementation of the new forest policy according to the forest classification brought a clear turn in forestland management in the core zone of the National Park. Previously it was uncoordinated and ineffective. Deforestation was almost impossible to control as there were no clear management rules and the protection staff was too limited to prevent the extensive progression of cultivated areas to ever higher altitudes. Heavy

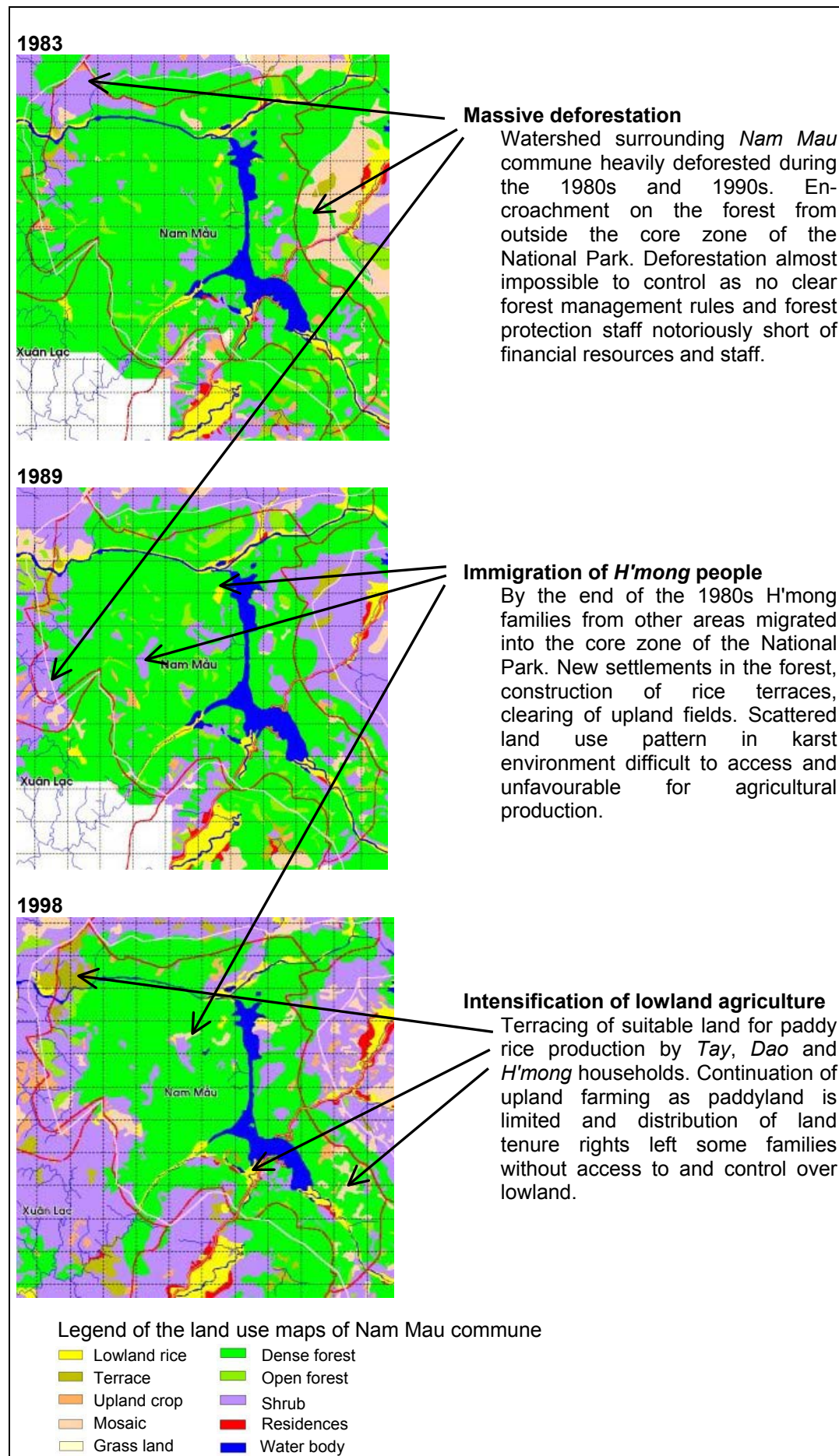
encroachment on the forest took place mainly from the neighbouring communes into the core zone of the National Park between 1983 and 1998 (see Map 5-1). But also inside the core zone transformation of forestland into cultivated areas took place. The immigration of *H'mong* families into the core zone of the National Park resulted, for example, in the construction of terraces and the establishment of upland fields, scattered and difficult to access in this unfavourable, steep and rocky karst landscape.

The upgrading of the protected area into a National Park and the development and conservation assistance by the government and UNDP have altered the policy context and the scope for socio-economic development and conservation. In order to take pressure from the forest lowland agriculture was intensified. Land tenure rights for lowland were granted, but forestland is solely under the management regulation of the National Park management board. It issues protection contracts for the households in *Pac Ngoi*. The villagers are supposed to carry out forest protection services, such as patrolling and reforestation. They are encouraged to abandon their agricultural areas on the hill slopes, where most of them grow maize, cassava, soy bean and other subsidiary crops. The responses of the residents of *Pac Ngoi* to this policy and institutional change are mixed. On the one hand, they acknowledge the importance of forest conservation for a potential benefit through ecotourism in the village. On the other, many people are desperate. They ask themselves how they can make a living and achieve food security without cultivating in upland fields and without collecting non-timber forest products of high market value, such as bamboo shoots, honey, ant hives and so on.

With the current arrangements, forest policy in *Nam Mau* commune has largely devolved protection costs to the local households. Compensation payments for protection services are inadequate. Each household is paid an amount of about 5 US\$ per year only. A member of the National Park management board claims that the National Park gives the local residents a source of income which should keep them from destroying the forests. On the other hand, he admits that the collaboration between the National Park and the local communities is difficult. Local people say that they feel deprived of their former access to forestland resources, which for some of them are crucial for their well-being. They claim that the compensation payments are far too low.

Next page:

Map 5-1: Land use map series of Nam Mau commune with explanations of local environmental changes (Source: Own historical field data 2001, maps based on aerial photographs of 1983, 1989 and 1998, interpreted by the Mountain Agrarian Systems project (SAM))



Despite the altered policy context and the recent enforcement of protection measures, cultivation in their long established upland fields is temporarily tolerated in an area to the north-east of the village. But the pressure on the farming households to plant endogenous forest and fruit tree species and to eventually abandon their fields there increases. There is moreover the problem that once they abandon their fields the *Dao* people from the adjacent commune of *Khang Ninh* access these areas from the other side of the mountain range. Some of them have already started to cultivate in areas restored with secondary forest. The National Park management board therefore gets challenged not only by the local livelihood needs of the residents living within the park boundaries but also their neighbours, living right outside the park. An officer of the Forest Protection Unit of *Ba Be* district notes:

"The people living within the National Park boundaries cannot directly benefit from forest protection; so it is difficult to protect the forest resources. (...) The best way to protect the forests is to involve the communities in the activities. [So far,] forest protection in the National Park is a failure." [BB#00296]

To date, the interplay between local people's effort to achieve food security and the official forestland policy purposes for special-use forests creates major challenges in the core zone of the National Park. Sectoral conflicts between agricultural and environmental policy objectives have emerged and cause tensions. By claiming their long established relationship to the forestland, villagers and especially the landless households justify their disregard for the regulations. In the villagers' perception the current institutional arrangement with protection contracts, which generate an insufficient monetary income only, does not represent an appropriate livelihood alternative. They will continue to ignore the official policy and protection regulations.

5.4.3 Local policy responses

The empirical evidence of *Ba Be* district shows that forest policy gets differently implemented in the socio-economically and ethnically diverse mountain areas. In *Tan Lung* and *Pac Ngoi* the policy was largely implemented according to the official guidelines for production, protection and special-use forests. In *Tan Lung* the local residents accepted the policy procedures and guidelines which provided them with long-term land tenure rights. The residents of *Pac Ngoi*, on the other hand, found themselves in a policy context that restricted their agricultural and agroforestry activities on forestland. The new situation ascribes them the role as forest protectors and forces them to give up their role as forest resource users. The protection contracts bind them to the policy objectives for special-use forest in the National Park which is managed by a government agency as state property.

In *Ban Chan*, the forestland allocation policy implementation process was accompanied with debate and conflict on how the forestland ought to be distributed among the village households. No consensus was found and forestland currently is used and managed according to a communal-property regime. Control lies in the hands of some influential families of the community. They claim that this institutional arrangement guarantees access to the areas for all households as it relies on the traditional net of social relations and shared objectives for village development. However, as the accounts of the poorer households show, forestland allocation and forestland tenure rights would be an incentive for them to invest in plantations and to take pressure from other forest areas.

In summary, the institutional situation concerning land tenure and forestland management mechanisms shows an incongruent picture between official policy and local practice in the three studied village communities. Figure 5-1 presents the forestland rights situation in the three villages. It provides a socially differentiated view on dependence on forestland and desired land rights. The interrupted lines indicate discrepancies between desired and effective land rights.

Only in the *Dao* village *Tan Lung* the effective and officially intended rights corresponds with the people's desired land rights situation. In *Ban Chan*, the average, poor and very poor household would wish to have private land tenure rights for forestland but they have to follow the wealthier families who opt for common-property rights. The policy outcome in forestland allocation is not as intended by the central and district government. In *Pac Ngoi*, the effective rights situation does not correspond at all with the households' desire to hold private land tenure rights for their upland fields. The discrepancy between official policy and local aspirations is biggest in this studied community.

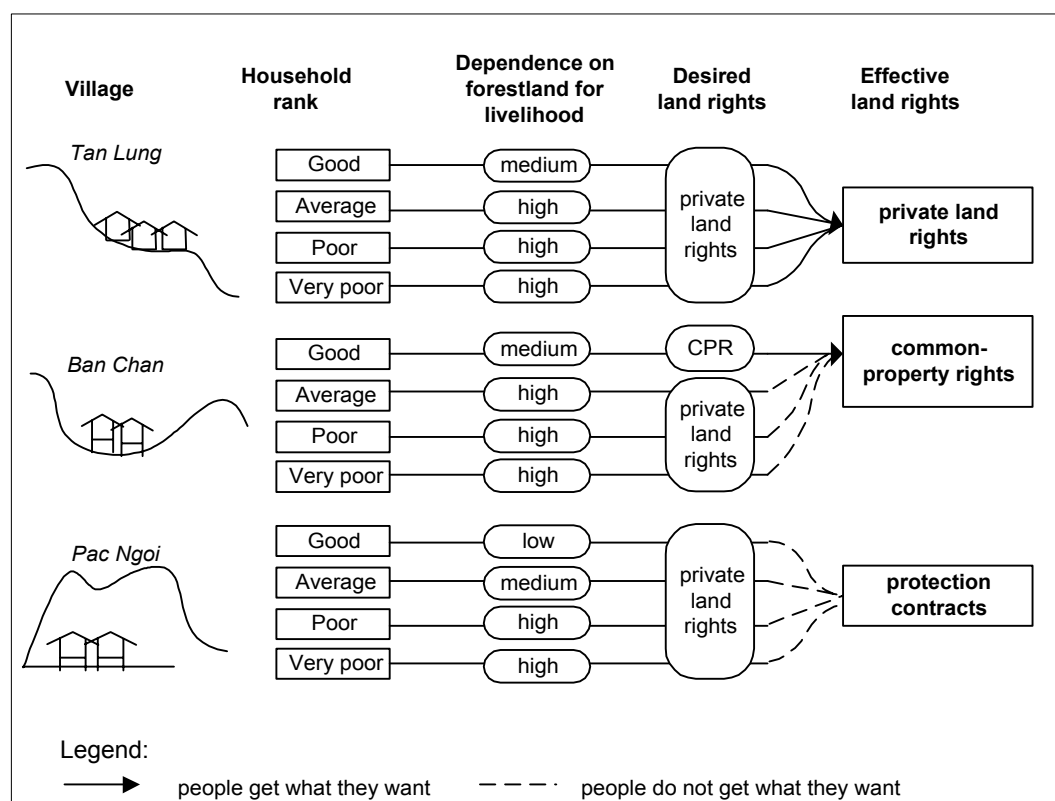


Figure 5-1: Forestland rights situation in the three villages (Source: Field data, 2001)

Although unintended, the policy reforms in forestry has, in the cases of *Ban Chan* and *Tan Lung*, led to the re-interpretation of local customs and rules according to which resource use practice is organised (Pham Quang Hoan, 1999; Ngo Duc Thinh, 1999). The wealthier households in *Ban Chan* argued that forestland use under common-property rule provides access to land to everybody. At the current stage this holds true but as forestland gets transformed into permanent plantations the forestland area open especially to poorer households is reduced due to the resource claims of the better-off households. In *Tan Lung* the land tenure rights increased the incentives to transform forestland into fruit and forest tree plantations. It did not prevent the villagers, however, from claiming their traditional right to open up new upland fields within the boundary of their village.

In the case of *Pac Ngoi*, on the other hand, forest policy changed the entitlements situation. Rights to access to important resources for livelihood security were circumvented thoroughly. *Pac Ngoi* stands as an example where policy disempowered the local communities and contributed to the marginalisation of the mountain population. Even more conflicts emerge in *Nam Mau* as biodiversity conservation policy gets implemented there too. This is going to be discussed in the following sections.

5.4.4 An explanation of forest policy failure

The example of forest policy implementation in the mountain district of *Ba Be* shows that central policies are negotiated and experience modifications in the localities. The policy rationale gets reinterpreted at the local level according to the rationale of livelihood security and socio-economic development. The prescriptive, essentially top-down solutions to forest cover loss, which does not take into account the local rationales, does consequently not result in acceptable solutions neither for the government nor for the local people. Local realities, social customs, livelihood systems, and historical legacies diverge the policy process from its linear schema.

The forest policy with Programme 327 and forestland allocation identified the mountain peoples as the main source of deforestation and made them the target groups for forest protection measures and sustainable forest management. The policy largely works with regulations and rules to be implemented in the localities. It does provide very little incentive mechanisms, such as adequate compensation payments for protection services or clear regulations on the benefit of tree plantations and harvesting. The policy was designed according to an understanding that had not much in common with the local reality. Implementation is therefore difficult and fails as the regulations get reinterpreted or disregarded. Official rationale and local practices and struggles collide in the research sites. Although the local mountain people have no influence on agenda setting and policy formulation they influence the policy process in the implementation stage. There, the webs of power and influence direct the practices of different actor groups and get invested in policy negotiation and contestation (see also Keeley and Scoones, 1999).

Policy actors are suspended in different webs of values, norms, rules, beliefs, and taken-for-granted assumptions which are all at least partially of their own making (Giddens, 1984; Barley and Tolbert, 1997). This is decisive when policies are disseminated, understood, and reinterpreted in the locality. At the interface between the central and the local state the forest policy experienced reinterpretation, opposition, and sometimes failure. Policy actors negotiate their stances at these interfaces of different and sometimes incompatible social worlds (Long, 1992). The official policy and local resource use practice collide in the locality when guiding policy principles do not provide sufficient incentive to change natural resource use towards more protective techniques and mountain agricultural systems.

The recent forest policy reforms introduced a shift towards resource rehabilitation and protection which some mountain communities are not ready or willing to follow. The lack of budgetary resources makes the implementation and enforcement of the policy moreover difficult. Only in the case of *Nam Mau* it is recently rigorously put into force. Principally, Vietnam's current forest policy addresses the environmental concerns in the mountain areas of Vietnam. It stresses the importance of mountain forest resources for economic and ecologic vitality and as an important source for local and national economic growth. Moreover, the forestry remains an important sector that may provide income in the mountain localities, and prevent social and ecological upstream-downstream effects, such as by out-migration to the lowland areas and cities and ecological interlinkages, such as floods and loss of fertile land by soil erosion and sedimentation. There are structural contradictions of the restrictions of livelihoods and the exclusion on forests that are reasons for policy failure, found in many other places of Vietnam and the world.

Another layer of environmental policy has recently been added to the local development context. It relates to the hotspots of biodiversity which are found in the northern mountain region of Vietnam.

5.5 Biodiversity Conservation in Vietnam's Mountain Areas

5.5.1 Vietnam's biodiversity pools

In Vietnam's mountain areas the third representation of mountains, mentioned in chapter three (section 3.3.1) is debated, namely that mountains are hotspots of biodiversity and cultural heritage that need to be preserved for future generations. Indeed, Vietnam's long coastline and wide range of latitude and altitude lead to an unusual diversity of ecosystems, species and genetic resources. It has a variety of marine and coastal habitats, inland lakes and rivers, tropical rainforests, monsoon savannah, sub-alpine scrubland and two important river deltas located in the north and the south of the country, which provide extensive wetland habitats.

These habitats are home to more than 12,000 plant, 5,500 insect, 2,470 fish, 800 bird, 275 mammal, 180 reptile and 80 amphibian species. Ten percent of the world's mammal, bird and fish species are found in Vietnam and over 40% of local plant species are endemic (IUCN, 1999). In recent years three large and two small new species of mammals, such as *sao la ox* (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) and the large muntjac (*Megamuntiacus vuquangensis*), were discovered which reinforced the global significance of Vietnam's biodiversity.

In 1995, the Biodiversity Action Plan (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1995) recommended that the country should be divided into biodiversity regions with defined priorities for action within and between them. IUCN (1999) identified 19 biodiversity regions, of which 10 are terrestrial and 9 coastal and marine. The northern mountain areas are divided into three biodiversity regions. Its north-eastern areas are considered as very rich in flora and fauna with a number of rare endemic species such as musk deer (*Moschus caobanghensis*) and snub-nosed monkey (*Trachypithecus avunculus*). A variety of the latter also populates *Ba Be* National Park and the nearby protected area of *Na Hang* in *Tuyen Quang* province.

The Ministry of Science and Technology, the National Environmental Agency (1999:15) and IUCN (1999:216) emphasise that the maintenance of biodiversity is essential to the well-being of the ecosystems and, therefore, has immediate implications for economic and social well-being. They state that the gene pool is of great economic value and has the potential to make an economic contribution through research and the production of medicines and essential oils derived from plants. The claim of biodiversity conservation is therefore linked with economic objectives of a private sector of research, pharmaceutical and industrial production. However, the case for biodiversity is often contentious, as will be shown in the following sections.

One of the strategies to protect the national biodiversity is to create National Parks and nature reserves. In recent years the number of Vietnam's national protected areas and nature reserves has grown to 167, out of which 13 are National Parks (Vietnam News Agency, 2001). These areas have been set aside to preserve representative examples of almost all ecosystems, biodiversity pools and landscapes of the country. While there have been impressive gains in the number of sites reserved for protection, IUCN (1999:70) stresses that the on-the-ground reality of the protected areas manifests various forms and degrees of human encroachment. All of the protected areas show signs of degradation by activities such as shifting cultivation, uncontrolled migration, the unchecked and illegal harvesting of timber, wildlife and other non-timber forest products as well as uncontrolled fires. It is in these shrinking biodiversity hotspots where conservation has become the leading policy to fight against further loss. Four terrestrial and two coastal and marine biodiversity regions have been selected as pilot areas which receive special support by official international development assistance. Two of them lie in the northern mountain region.

5.5.2 Biodiversity conservation in the *Ba Be* National Park area

Hotspots of biodiversity

Biodiversity conservation as environmental policy strategy has especially been promoted in *Ba Be* district since the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) has taken over the responsibility of the National Park in 1997. Since 1999, the ministry has, moreover, been the recipient of assistance and financial support from an international conservation project on Creating Protected Areas for Resource Conservation (PARC), funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). The PARC project is also assisting in biodiversity conservation in other sites in the south of Vietnam.

Originally, the idea of conservation in *Ba Be* district goes back to the year 1977 when lake *Ba Be* and its surrounding areas were recognised as cultural, historical and environmental reserve to protect its landscape and historical sites. A national protected area was delineated, including the total area of *Nam Mau* and parts of *Cao Thuong*, *Cao Tri*, *Khang Ninh*, *Quang Khe* and *Hoang Tri* commune. Fifteen years later, in 1992, the protected area of *Ba Be* district was upgraded to become the eighth National Park of Vietnam (Prime Minister of the Government of Vietnam, 1993).

It represents an example of the tropical evergreen broadleaf forest on limestone mountain and is one of the few shelters for some of the last populations of two highly endangered species of primates (Tonkin Snub-nosed Monkey (*Rhinopithecus avunculus*) and François Leaf Monkey (*Semnopithecus francoisi*)), and other rare and endangered mammals (Lesser Slow Loris (*Nycticebus pygmaeus*), Owston's Banded Civet (*Hemigalus owstoni*), Sun Bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) and Asiatic Black Bear (*Ursus malayanus*), Asian Golden Cat (*Catopuma temminckii*) and Southern Serow (*Naemorhedus sumatraensis*)) (PARC Ba Be/Na Hang, 1999).

The total area of the core zone of the National Park is 7,610ha. Together with the surrounding buffer zone, including the total areas of the above mentioned communes as well as *Dong Phuc* commune, it has a total area of 23,003ha. Its representative importance for biodiversity conservation is enhanced by the only natural mountain lake of Vietnam. It is 7.5km long, between 200 and 800m wide, and has a maximal depth of 29m (Hill et al., 1997). The lake is fed by the *Leng* river that enters the lake at the southern end and two minor rivers that flow into it from the west. The water drains from the lake into the *Nang* river to the north. During the rainy season the water flow into the lake can cause lake levels to rise as much as eight metres. The villagers of *Pac Ngoi* recalled the worst flood ever that occurred in 1986. The water level was 6m above normal for a period of 10 to 15 days. It caused tremendous damage to the crops. The alluvial plain was transformed by the changing river bed but grew bigger because of sedimentation. The lake is home to about sixty fish species out of which a great number are endemic.

The current director of *Ba Be* National Park recalls that the protected area in *Ba Be* district was established to preserve the forest as well as to counteract the general trend of forest destruction ongoing in Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s. When in 1992 the protected area of *Ba Be* was upgraded to become a National Park the short-term and long-term obligations for the National Park management were the following:

"Short-term obligations:

- Organise well the management and conservation of the natural ecology, gene source of rare and precious animals and plants, and landscape in the National Park's jurisdiction.
- Re-plan, re-organise and settle the residents in accordance with the National Park's protection requirements.
- Recover forests gradually according to the National Park's programs in the eco-recovered area.

Long-term obligations:

- Implement completely functions and obligations according to general regulations on the National Park (issued by the Ministry of Forestry), including the mentioned obligations and obligations of scientific research, tourism, propagation and education of natural protection." (Prime Minister of the Government of Vietnam, 1998)

Main activities of the first phase were specified as constructing the boundary landmark system of the National Park and functional areas, protecting and recovering 4,000ha of forest, improving 22km road and the electric, water and communication system, constructing offices and accommodation for staff, moving illegal immigrants out of the National Park (8 households) and settle legal residents in the National Park. The above plan shows that the integration of the local residents is essential for the National Park management and resource protection.

However, regarding the activities in natural resource management in the *Ba Be* National Park area during 1992 and 1997 not much is known. The villagers of *Pac Ngòi* report that before 1999 the National Park had issued regulations but did not do much to enforce them. They used the resources according to their own management rules, depending on their livelihood needs. The series of land cover maps show that the protected mountain environment was modified through intense agricultural activity between the early 1980s and 1998 (see land use map series of *Nam Mau*, Map 4-6 and Map 5-1). The areas of upland fields, open forests and rice terraces have increased significantly at the expense of the forest cover.

International actors and their agendas

It was only when the PARC project started its activities in collaboration with MARD and its local representatives that a more rigorous management concept was implemented. PARC assessed the situation in the National Park in 1999 as follows:

"Threats to biodiversity at this PARC Project site include agricultural encroachment, particularly through the clearance of forests for agriculture, timber exploitation, wildlife hunting, and the unsustainable harvest of minor forest products. Additionally, the loss of vital forest corridors between the larger forest blocks is threatening the long-term survival of regional fauna by inhibiting the genetic flow between separated plant and animal populations". (PARC Ba Be/Na Hang, 1999:4)

The PARC project's objectives are to develop and pilot feasible methods of protecting Vietnam's unique and highly threatened ecosystems. The project builds on lessons learned from Integrated Conservation and Development Projects and seeks to define and test new conservation strategies and methods. It sets out to "provide for effective biodiversity conservation in Vietnam's anthropogenically-impacted and fragmented habitats, through application of landscape ecology approach to protected area management at the *Ba Be* National Park/*Na Hang* Nature Reserve" (PARC Ba Be/Na Hang, 1999:5). The project specifies two immediate objectives:

- 1) To improve operations capacity in order to efficiently manage and maintain the two areas *Ba Be* and *Na Hang*; and
- 2) to reduce external threats to biodiversity through integrating conservation and development objectives and activities at the local level.

The project activities, listed according to priority, lie in protected area infrastructure development, protected area management, biological and social monitoring, land use planning, environmental awareness and education, ecotourism development, agricultural

development in buffer areas and inside the protected core areas, existing and alternative income generation development, and forestry development.

Conflicts at the national-local interface

The PARC project states that its key focus is to integrate nature conservation and socio-economic development, to address and link the development needs and aspirations of local communities with nature conservation goals. However, one of the project consultants presents a slightly different view. He said:

"Socio-economic development is only a means to the end for PARC project. Only where biodiversity is endangered there is a reason for PARC to take measures for socio-economic development. [...] Socio-economic issues are considered as supporting factors to ensure conservation. Local communities should respect conservation and mitigate negative impacts on conservation measures". [BB#00322]

The PARC project therefore has only an instrumental interest in socio-economic development. Yet, the ongoing project activities in the villages involve both socio-economic development, such as the provision of high-yielding crop varieties and the promotion of animal husbandry and poultry rearing, and educational work and awareness raising for biodiversity conservation. However, the cooperation between the local residents, the National Park management board and the project team has been tense. PARC's much stressed participatory approach appears to be merely lip-service. For instance, villagers are repeatedly invited to attend meetings and trainings in the headquarters of the National Park but the attitude towards them is paternalist and top-down. Participant observation during one of these meetings revealed that government officials typically read rules and regulations to them. This was to inform the villagers about the punishments when they violate forest protection regulations. The local residents' concerns and petitions regarding the imposed restrictions in the villager's resource use were largely left unanswered. The government officials from MARD responded only that it was not in MARD's competence to find solutions to the problems of the local people. He referred to the Prime Minister who decided about such matters and if people wanted to hand in petition, then they should do so directly to the central government. As a consequence, the villagers feel little supported by such behaviour towards them.

The cooperation between the local communities with the project and the National Park staff is therefore difficult. First the villagers of *Pac Ngoi* accepted all project activities because they thought that they could enhance their living conditions. It turned out that the activities for socio-economic development were not well planned and did not emerge from local consultation with the farming community. The introduction of hybrid rice and maize varieties, for example, is not well accepted as the risk to lose the capital-intensive crop during floods is high. Secondly, it creates dependencies on markets and cash income and does not provide the farmers with seeds for the next season. The production of niche cash crops, such as endemic fruit like *Ma* or *Hom Bi*, as promoted by the National Park, is by some considered as not attractive enough. An informant of *Pac Ngoi* points out:

"Local people prefer to produce what suits the marketability within the locality. Otherwise they depended too much on the variable market prices which have negative effects for them. As long as the market structures are so weak people don't want to grow other products in the upland fields as alternatives to maize and dry rice. When they grow rice and maize they at least can eat them." [PN#00185]

Similar problems emerged with the introduction of a duck breed which required special food and intensive care. The introduction of such high yield crop varieties and special animal breeds turned out to benefit the better-off households comparatively more

than the poor households. The latter group of households was consequently little integrated in the project activities as for many of them the risks would have been too high. The activities to intensify lowland agriculture to take pressure from the forest could therefore only be taken up by households living in better conditions, which already rely less on the upland resources and play a minor role in forest degradation.

Another incidence worsened the relationship between the villagers and the National Park. All guns owned by the villagers had to be handed in, in order to put a stop to hunting. The villagers claimed that the compensation payments for the guns were too low and that they feel deprived of their former rights and property. A number of them sold the guns in the nearby market places to people who paid more than they would have received as compensation from the National Park. The guns have in many cases merely crossed the park boundary. However, as the land use map series reveals, the encroachment on the core zone from the surrounding communes is a central factor of deforestation and resource depletion inside the core zone of the National Park. It has been ongoing for decades but it has not been appropriately considered in the conservation plans of the National Park management board.

Collision of ideas at the international-national interface

Biodiversity conservation does not only create conflicts between the national and local actors. Discrepancies in the understanding and objective of biodiversity conservation also emerge at the international-national interface. An informant of the conservation project PARC reveals that an overall natural resource management concept for *Ba Be* National Park does not exist. Similar to other National Parks in Vietnam, it is managed by an investment plan only. The Vietnamese partners of the PARC project act in many regards according to their own understanding and objectives of biodiversity conservation. Management for them means primarily pursuing economic objectives, such as the establishment of a tourism industry and the development of an adequate infrastructure. The greatest share of the annual budget is not spent on protection activities but on the construction of roads and buildings.

An anecdote of conflicting rationales is given by the following occurrence. In the end of 2000, the National Park management board decided to construct a road in the very core zone of the protected area without informing the international donors. Construction works started in the beginning of 2001. In the opinion of the conservationists this is, of course, highly controversial. The difficult accessibility of the area around the lake was largely the reason why wildlife and plants had still populated relatively undisturbed niches of *Ba Be* National Park. The road now cuts through a very steep, rocky, densely forested slope on the eastern shore of the lake, crosses the river on a suspension bridge at *Pac Ngoi*, runs through the village, and continues on the western lake side to join the road to *Cho Don* district. From a development point of view, the road provides the much needed infrastructure for the local communities. It links them with the district town and market places which were previously only accessible by crossing the lake on small steel boats. However, roads generally increase the pressure on resources as access is improved. It is firstly possible to access easily the previously undisturbed forest area and, secondly, the increased traffic on an important road between two market centres will adversely affect the remaining fauna. On the other hand, it is a great attraction for tourism as it provides magnificent views on the lake and sensations of the forest.

It becomes clear that the biodiversity conservation policy as it is implemented in the *Ba Be* National Park area means many things to a number of different local policy actors. This second example of a policy agenda and its implementation in the mountain region of Vietnam shows that policies in the localities are also highly contested at the interface

between the international and national level. Conflicting interests lead to often controversial policy outcomes.

5.6 Rival Policy Objectives and Conflicting Policy Stances

5.6.1 Revaluating the mountain environment

Ba Be district is an example of the complexities of policy implementation in Vietnam. It provides insights into different policy objectives and rationales of the policy players that have always lived in or have reached the local context recently. These policy actors work in the locality according to different perceptions of the mountain environment and social conditions. Each of them may reproduce another version of Vietnam's mountain problematique. The official policy and national policy actors, for example, work with an understanding of problems in the mountains confined to mountain areas and localities alone. They typically see the mountain population as the main actors in deforestation and environmental degradation and blame them for their backward resource use practices, traditional lifestyles and little effort for innovation.

The official policy and the partnership with international donor agencies active in biodiversity conservation also show how the national interest in the mountain environment has changed over the years. During collectivisation the environment served as resource provider for the national economy, regardless of future environmental problems. The environment was heavily exploited. The reforms of the 1980s and 1990s brought a revaluation of the mountain environment. The focus now lies on rehabilitation, protection and sustainable production to preserve the most needed natural resource basis for future development. International and a growing domestic tourism also contributes substantially to a focused revaluation of certain mountain localities. But how do these policy changes interplay with former decisions? And who of the many policy actors are able to push through policy agendas? Are the current policy agendas able to mitigate environmental and development stress in the mountain localities?

5.6.2 Rival policy objectives

Over the last 25 years a number of policy changes have altered the policy context of the mountain areas, especially due to agricultural reforms, the provision of access to formerly restricted areas for agricultural production, forest management reforms, and biodiversity conservation. During this time span, economic and environmental concerns have often stood diametrically opposed to each other. While economic policy has taken a rather progressive turn, environmental policy has largely remained reactive and there are still difficulties to come up with a vision for sustainable development in the ecological realm. Reforms in environmental policy therefore lagged behind the ongoing transformations from a planned to a market economy.

Between many of the contemporary environmental policies sectoral conflicts of policy objectives, priorities and strategies have emerged. In the *Ba Be* National Park area there is, for example, a collision of the objective of agricultural intensification and increase of production outputs with the objective of resource rehabilitation and conservation. This conflict goes back to the policy changes of the late 1970s. At that time, the ratification of Resolution No. 6 was a start signal for household-based decision-making in agriculture. Agricultural expansion, more production output, terracing and cultivation on marginal areas or sloping land were promoted by the government agencies. This policy reform changed the resource use practices and behaviour of the local resource users in the long term. It provided incentives for agricultural production that involved trade-offs between agriculture and forestry. "With Resolution No. 6 we were allowed to reclaim upland fields

freely", residents of *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* commune recalled. The forest resources, for example, were exploited. They played a significant role for the diversification of the production systems and for increasing agricultural output.

These processes stood diametrically opposed to the creation of the nature reserve around lake *Ba Be*. Any protection measures were outweighed by the objectives to stabilise livelihoods and to secure food sufficiency after a long time of war economy, hunger, and deprivation during the collective period. However, what was promoted during the late 1970s and early 1980s is blamed today for its consequences of forest cover loss and deforestation. The local people as local resource and forest users have come under pressure to alter their resource use practices in order to correspond to the new policy context of the 1990s. What is promoted now is agricultural intensification in the lowlands and valleys, forest rehabilitation, and biodiversity conservation. The allocation of forestland to the rural households is a mechanism to bind the mountain people to certain forestland management regulations. They are supposed to reforest with tree and fruit plantations and to rehabilitate and protect the watershed forests. Rural development has still high priority but conservation projects have become popular too.

This historical perspective reveals at least two turning points in environmental and development policy for mountain regions between 1970 and the year 2000. The agendas changed significantly by the emergence of alternative interests, such as in the case of agricultural reform (Resolution No. 6) and the inflow of development assistant funds for Vietnam by a powerful international community of conservationists in the 1990s.

5.6.3 Conflicting policy stances

The sheer number of policy actors in the *Ba Be* National Park area makes clear that the mountain environment has become highly contested. There are government agencies, international development organisations, international conservationists and, of course, the local people who make claims of the mountain environment. Local people and international non-governmental and bilateral organisations share the objectives of achieving livelihood security, rural development and resource rehabilitation. The government agencies, such as MARD and its district agency ARDO, typically aim at rural development, ecotourism development, and biodiversity conservation. On the international conservationists' agenda dominates the objective of biodiversity conservation. Figure 5-2 gives an overview over the many agendas of the numerous policy actors in the *Ba Be* National Park area today. Apart from the local people's agenda of livelihood security and rural development, all other agendas are brought into the local context from outside, thus represent exogenous interests in the locality formulated at the national and international level. The sheer number of these different agendas cause a situation of confusion and coercion. The different agendas all contribute to changes of the rules of the game in the locality. This causes uncertainty and a situation of unfamiliarity of how to respond to the subsequent policy changes associated with these agendas.

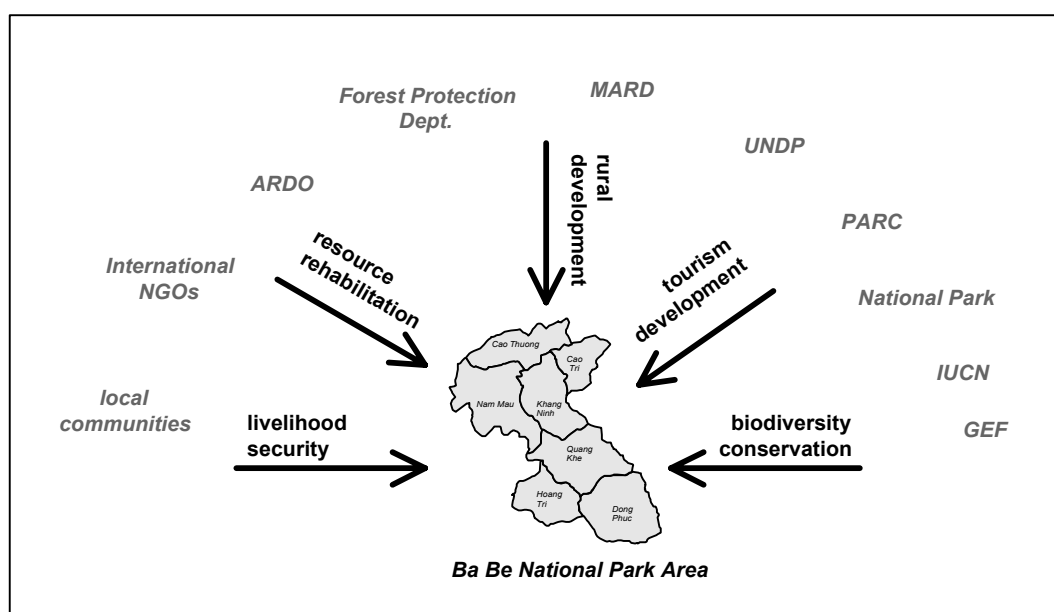


Figure 5-2: Policy actors and agendas in the Ba Be National Park area (core zone and buffer zone communes) (Source: Field data, 2001)

All these actors are currently involved in a veritable fight over influence with respect to environmental management, resource use practice, and conservation scheme. They typically negotiate their stances from different angles. Some of them create alliances to pursue their interests, others disappear and act from behind the scene, evading all official policy regulations. Again others think they are powerful enough to pursue their agenda without assistance, but must realise that their interests finally get cut off. The analytical concept of political ecology is going to help identifying these different stances and strategies. It helps analysing the competing interests and provides a picture of the politicised mountain environment of the *Ba Be* National Park area.

Empirical evidence in *Ba Be* district reveals that the local communities are foremost interested in livelihood security and in socio-economic development. Their strategies lie both in lowland production intensification and upland farming. Their natural resource behaviour and resource use practice is still influenced by past events and policy changes, such as the Resolution No. 6 and the subsequent distribution of land tenure rights. Although the awareness of ecological consequences of deforestation and cultivation on marginal production areas has risen during the last decade, the local resource users claim that their diversified resource use practice (combined upland farming with lowland cultivation) is the only way to reach food security during the whole year. Their objectives conflict with the resource rehabilitation and the conservation agendas. Some of the households and communities also disregard the policy guidelines for forest rehabilitation and protection. They do this for two reasons. Firstly, because they have no alternative other than to cultivate in the uplands, secondly, because they want to maintain control over their set of entitlements of cultivated and uncultivated forestland. Their practice is negotiated both at the commune and at the district level. However, those who disregard the policy guidelines mostly act in silence, protected by the community and the local officials who know about their desperate situation. They passively oppose the attempts to rehabilitate and protect the natural environment.

To some extent the local communities, and especially the poor and poorest households, are supported in their struggle for livelihood security by the government agencies, such as MARD and its district office ARDO. Agricultural intensification and rural development are the immediate objectives of these line agencies. However, the

extension service is notoriously short of budget and capacity and it is difficult for the extension staff to reach the communes and villages far from the district centre. Therefore, a number of NGOs and bilateral and multilateral development agencies have provided funds and technical assistance to the government's rural development and agricultural intensification strategies at the local level. In partnerships they provide assistance to mountain communities, establish farmer field schools, give training courses, and carry out field and planning experiments based on the needs identified by the local farmers (Finland Department of International Development Co-operation, 1999; Vu Van Me, 2001). Many of these international organisations which work on the ground experience the daily struggle of local communities to meet the basic needs and to respect the tightened policy context. In the face of the immediate needs for irrigation schemes and agricultural knowledge in upland farming, conservation is usually of secondary priority for the NGOs' and ARDO's work in the communes. Often, a trade-off between the local resource users' objectives and the environmental policy intentions of resource rehabilitation and conservation has to be made. These trade-offs are, for example, identified in participatory technology development assessments. According to these reports, which both reflect the local people's aspirations and stimulate the discussion of resource rehabilitation and taking pressure from the remaining forests, future village development plans are designed together with the local population (Duong Van Son, 2001). It gives them a legitimate stake and a forum for negotiating the official policy implementation process. This strategy of combining local needs with central policy objectives proved to be effective but requires a lot of human and financial resources.

At the national and international level, the need for local rural development and agricultural intensification is not denied. However, there the focus lies more on the implementation of sustainable natural resource management and integrative conservation schemes, promoted especially by international policy players, such as UNDP and IUCN, and financially supported by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). Giving exclusive value to biodiversity-rich places and attempting to shut them up as nature reserves, however, causes great conflicts in the study area; socio-economic and conservation objectives collide. As shown in the previous discussion, the local people do often not cooperate with the conservation projects. They feel deprived of their customary rights to use the mountain resources without being adequately compensated. Many of them again disregard the conservation regulations. However, they risk to get fined or imprisoned when violating the regulations. The rigorous implementation of the biodiversity conservation objectives marginalises the local communities. This policy agenda is not negotiable in the local context and therefore creates hardship, especially among the poorer households.

However, not only between the local and international players resource use and management objectives collide. Also at the interface between the national and international level conflicts emerge. It was shown, that the conservation objectives of the international players get reinterpreted at the national level. The government and its officials in the National Park management board intend to combine conservation with tourism development. There are various, often incompatible conceptions of how tourism development can contribute to biodiversity conservation efforts. Incongruence also exists with regard to the question of what kind of nature should be preserved for future generations. There, the ideas of conservation by Vietnamese and Western policy players differ substantially, as was shown with the anecdote of the road construction in the very core zone of the National Park. The manager of the PARC project reports that the project does not have any influence on the decision-making by the director of the National Park. The PARC project manager was rather frustrated that not even a financially powerful and multilaterally ratified project is able to implement international, or rather Western, conservation objectives. This incongruence in biodiversity conservation attempts of

Western and Vietnamese policy players also reveals cultural differences in the notions of nature and wilderness. Unfortunately this is still an under-researched topic in Vietnam.

In the *Ba Be* National Park area it is found that which policy agendas are pushed through depends on the power and influence of the policy actors and their ability to create alliances. In the core zone of *Ba Be* National Park, i.e. *Nam Mau* commune, the alliance between MARD, UNDP, and PARC project has dominated the environmental policy context. It has enhanced the control over natural resource use practice and it has enforced the mechanisms to improve environmental protection measures. However, the alliance and its projects lack acceptance in the local communities. The neglect of stakeholder participation inhibits the cooperation between local residents and the project staff. The new policy context determined by a dominant policy actor group, which prioritises conservation objectives before socio-economic development, has marginalised some families in *Nam Mau* commune. Many of them are excluded from the promised benefit of environmental protection through biodiversity conservation and tourism development. They are desperate, show signs of resignation, and lose their self-esteem. Kingsbury (1998:440) claims that due to such processes local people have become "victims of conservation".

Where the powerful alliance for biodiversity conservation between MARD and UNDP has not yet reached the locality, such as in the communes of the buffer zone area, the local communities are more autonomous and have more room for decision-making and for pursuing their agendas of livelihood security and rural development. As has been shown, local customs of resource use sometimes fit and sometimes collide with the environmental policy context. The investigations in *Dong Phuc* commune illustrate, that technical assistance provided by NGOs and ARDO contribute to an innovativeness and creativeness in agricultural and economic activity. Their work has also the potential to strengthen the intention of the communities to improve their livelihood options while respecting the ecological limitations of agricultural production in marginal mountain areas.

Empirical evidence reveals also that at the local level, the relations between the communities and the local state organs as well as the role of the commune and village leaders is important for the well-being of the mountain communities. Sikor and Dao Minh Truong (2000:52) find in their study on community-based development among the Black Thai that "depending on the strength of the village institutions and the nature of the local authorities, policy outcomes reflect more closely either village interest or state policy". Negotiations within communities and among policy actors, social relationships, rules and beliefs, as well as power relations play significant roles in the policy implementation process in the mountain communes.

5.7 Struggles over the Politicised Mountains

This chapter gave an overview and an analysis of policies applied in mountain areas of Vietnam to get to terms with the progressive environmental problems of deforestation and biodiversity degradation. It focused on the forest and biodiversity conservation policies and discussed their impacts both on the socio-economic conditions of mountain communities and on the natural environment. The examination of these two policy frameworks revealed three dominating representations of mountains, which see mountains as resource providers for economic development, hotspots of biodiversity and cultural heritage, and problem zones for socio-economic and environmental development.

The environmental policy processes in Vietnam are predominantly steered by the Communist Party and the governmental ministries. Their aims are twofold. They strive, firstly, for industrialisation and modernisation and, secondly, for biodiversity conservation. The official policy context, therefore, defines mountains as resource providers and, locally, as protected areas of national and regional importance. In both economic development and

biodiversity conservation in mountain areas, the Vietnamese government is assisted by international experts, development agencies and conservation organisations. Despite a re-orientation of development policy in mountain areas the national concern for economic development has still top priority and still reproduces the history of subordination of environmental protection and conservation. Environmental policy gets therefore contested at different fronts.

Ba Be district, which served as the empirical setting, provided an excellent example on how different policy actors compete over policy programmes based on these representations. It was shown that the various environmental policy objectives get reinterpreted by the numerous strategising policy actors at the interfaces between the local, national and international levels. This causes conflicts over meaning and resources and reveals struggles over the politicised mountain environment. The review of forest policy programmes showed that technocratic planning creates highly controversial results. In the central highlands, for example, the autochthonous mountain population was deprived of their former rights to resources and entitlements by state-supported *Kinh* immigrants. Marginalisation also occurred in the *Ba Be* National Park area. The mountain communities increasingly have to compete with financially and politically powerful international and national policy actors who impose rules and regulations more rigidly for the sake of environmental protection. Socio-economic concerns and local complexities are barely recognised in the blueprint policies designed at the central government level. They do not take into account the historical impacts of former policy changes, the diversity and heterogeneity of livelihoods and social life in the mountain areas, and they lack consultation with people on the ground.

Investigating the policy impacts in the locality revealed a picture of great complexity, social inequality and unpredictability. Policy implementation and local policy responses has shown considerable differences along the lines of ethnicity, social differentiation, and entire communes which have come under different policy contents, property and resource management regimes. For example, *Dao* people react differently to forestland allocation than *Tay*, poor households express different needs for land tenure rights than well-established households, and communities located in the core zone of a National Park have their rights to resources curtailed to a greater extent than communities in the buffer zone or outside the park boundaries. Due to the local historical, cultural and socio-economic diversity, policy gets unevenly implemented, resulting in a situation of confusion and uncertainty. Designed as policy blueprints in the governmental agencies in the political centre far from the mountain periphery, these policies have shortcomings in various regards and are therefore prone to fail. For example, they do not anticipate the conflicts that emerge with forestland allocation or altered resource management regimes, they are not able to bridge social worlds of culturally different ethnic groups, and they do not provide a set of alternative, mountain-specific policy mechanisms. In addition, the mechanisms for resource protection and rehabilitation are insufficiently defined. The regulations for the use of forestland for agroforestry as well as how to share benefit from products and take-offs are often absent or not followed up (Nguyen Thuong Luu et al., 1995; Pham Xuan Phuong, 2000). Missing guidelines leave forestland tenants in uncertainty about compensation payments and future benefits from forest planting and harvesting. The uncertainty situation impedes investment in forest production and protection activities. The diverse policy responses, discussed in section 5.4.3, moreover show that the policy guidelines, official law, and private property rights are only one set of rules and guiding principles in local resource use practice. Forest management in the localities is also largely structured according to customary law. The combination of formal and customary law is for many mountain communities a preferred way of regulating resource use. It seems to provide them with some form of autonomy and better

opportunities for development. On the other hand, village solidarity, the collective organisation of labour in upland cultivation, and the common struggle for better living conditions accommodate local practices. For all these reasons, the local resource users are reluctant to agree to the reorientation of official national environmental policy.

In summary, the environmental policy frameworks applied in the mountain localities are not very effective in mitigating environmental pressure on the mountain resources as they tend to place socio-economic development objectives second. The devolution of cost, responsibility and obligation for resource rehabilitation and reforestation increases the stress for local resource users. On the one hand, they get deprived of their former right, and are, on the other, supposed to correct the resource-intensive practices. The policy frameworks may soon result, such as in the case of *Pac Ngoi*, in the criminalisation and further marginalisation of the local residents. Control over them has been increased by investing into the establishment of a strong forest ranger corps.

The versions of the Vietnam's mountain problematique that found entrance into the policy formulation do not much acknowledge the cultural diversity and socio-economic conditions in mountain areas. The problem definitions that guided policy formulation have failed in moving mountain peoples and their relations to the natural resources centre stage. Although they attempt to 'better' address the pressing environmental problems in Vietnam's mountain regions they are shaped by the interests of the many policy actors, situated in both the national and international policy-making arenas. On the whole, Vietnam's central policies are unable to suggest mitigating efforts that are locally accepted and that create cooperative conditions between the mountain peoples and the policy-makers. So far, the policy changes primarily reflect again the hegemonies of a lowland and international political elite that reevaluates Vietnam's mountains for their future resource potential, biodiversity pools, and ecological functions. The policies tend to disregard the fact that the mountains are home to people who are struggling for livelihood security and opportunities for socio-economic development.

It can be concluded that the contemporary forest and biodiversity conservation policies are not well designed for the complex cultural and socio-economic situation in mountain communities and that they are not responsive to local needs. They both show a lack of stakeholder participation in the policy cycle phases of problem definition and policy formulation. However, to call for responsiveness to people on the ground and more participation for local representatives, as it is also claimed in the international mountain development agenda, requires an enabling political framework that allows bottom-up processes of change. The described environmental policy processes in the mountain areas of Vietnam reflect to some extent the political culture and practice prevalent in the politically peripheral and little represented mountain areas. Currently, there is only limited space for more stakeholder participation in the policy process. These policy-related factors therefore play, next to the historical events and changing political-economic conditions, a crucial part in the creation and reproduction of Vietnam's mountain problematique.

And yet, the recent years have brought about reforms in public administration and regarding Vietnam's political structure. The following chapter is going to investigate the scope for participation and local autonomy of mountain communes by an organisational analysis of the state. Roles and responsibilities of low-level cadres, as the intermediaries between the people, the state and the Party, are going to be examined. They are the ones who have to justify the controversies between the official policy framework and local policy responses and are the target group of the government's decentralisation and democratisation projects, launched to enhance the economic and social welfare situation in the rural and peripheral regions.

Chapter 6

Mountain Communes in a Socialist Landscape

6.1 The Importance of the Political Setting

The previous two chapters have focused on the interlinkages between national and local histories and developments in Vietnam. They have identified conflicting relationships between the lowland and upland population and they have shown that central policies are prone to fail in mitigating social and environmental problems in the mountain areas. On the whole, lowlander-dominated histories and central policies have often increased the stress on mountain peoples and have triggered further marginalisation processes. On these grounds, the reproduction of the blueprint policies may be strongly criticised. They are harmful for the local people and largely ineffective in addressing the central problems of environmental degradation and social marginalisation in Vietnam's mountain regions.

In the face of these adverse policy effects, which emerge not only in Vietnam's mountain areas but also in other geographical regions and countries of the world, two concepts have enjoyed increasing popularity in the international development debate. These are the concepts of decentralisation and democratisation. Particularly the combination of democratisation and decentralisation, i.e. democratic decentralisation, suggests a reorientation from top-down to participatory political decision-making that may be favourable for the formulation and implementation of 'better' policy frameworks. However, it advocates for a distribution of political power and responsibilities between political actors as well as administrative levels and herewith calls on politically sensitive issues.

The focus of the thesis now shifts to the state as political feature that frames Vietnam's mountain problematique. It investigates the political setting and political culture in order to discuss the opportunities and constraints of democratisation and decentralisation in Vietnam, especially with regard to political representation of mountain communities. This focus does not claim to be illuminating for mountain-specific problems only. Issues such as state organisation, governance and rule, described with the term political setting, are found to be important for the analysis of any major development problematique. The political setting represents the institutional background in which local development contexts are embedded or from which problems of marginalisation and political under-representation may also emerge.

My focus on the political setting is a response to the claims of the international mountain development agenda, which wants to put mountain communities centre stage and promotes democratic decentralisation. With these measures it wants to raise the awareness for mountain specificities and to make policy-makers and policy frameworks more responsive to them. The mountain agenda also aims at an empowerment of marginalised mountain peoples. However, all these claims are politically sensitive. In the context of

Vietnam, they typically touch on the power monopoly of the Communist Party and a state apparatus that serves the Party's interests before it serves the people. Regardless of the different political histories between the Western democracies and transitional economies, the international mountain development agenda puts forward the claim of democratic reform.

This chapter is critical for understanding Vietnam's political setting as well as the claims of the international mountain development agenda. It is going to shed light on the political organisation, political practice and political representation of popular interests. The opportunities and constraints for decentralised political decision-making and bottom-up development are identified with an organisational analysis of the state. Then, the delivery of public services and policies in Vietnam's administratively decentralised state are explored by looking at governance structures in the localities. The focus on the representative and intermediary roles of the people's representatives and cadres gives insights into the political culture at the centre and in the localities. This helps in examining the scope for political participation and room for manoeuvre for people on the ground. Finally, the Communist Party of Vietnam as the major steering force of governance, democratisation and decentralisation is going to be portrayed. Its need for public legitimacy, accountability and responsiveness to the Vietnamese people is critically examined. In this period of tremendous economic and social change, the political leadership is urged to redefine the roles and responsibilities of the elite and the civil society.

With this focus on the political setting I am going to use a political science framework of governance and democracy. It will show how governance, democracy and decentralisation work for or against development, not only but particularly in mountain areas. These concepts tend to be used in ways that are controversial and conflicting in international development politics. The case of Vietnam shows how the concepts are used in the transition period of a Communist-ruled country in a time when Communism meets democracy and market liberalism. The case of Vietnam shows how the application of these concepts is limited by the overall political power claim of a small political elite. This chapter critically asks how democratisation and decentralisation may work for coming to terms with the problems associated with mountain development in Vietnam.

6.2 Decentralisation in Vietnam

6.2.1 Improving governance – promoting decentralisation

The concept of decentralisation currently attracts a lot of attention and gives rise to a wide and multi-faceted debate in development, politics and public administration issues. In the following I will provide a short review of common assumptions and arguments of decentralisation and show how I am going to link this topic with the investigation of Vietnam's mountain problematique. I start with the widespread assumption that decentralisation is decisive for the efficiency of the state to provide an enabling framework for equal development opportunities and political inclusiveness. This assumption to some extent explains the recent decentralisation efforts by a great number of developing and transitional countries. They argue that, by definition, decentralisation involves bringing government closer to the governed in both the spatial and institutional senses, thus that the government will consequently be more knowledgeable about and hence more responsive to the needs of the people (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). Strong local institutions are found necessary because of their ability to oversee the affairs of the locality, based on local knowledge, interest and expertise. The local government is more likely to provide efficient and effective local services than other agencies and certainly a distant central government

(Andrew and Goldsmith, 1998). During the last two decades, international development politics has therefore promoted decentralisation as solution to many of the problems of administration and governance constraining local and national development, and a means of improving performance in poverty reduction and environmental governance (Ribot, 2002).

The literature on decentralisation tends to assume that decentralisation has generic benefits which are independent of the political regime. Any scheme which appears to offer greater political participation to ordinary citizens at the grassroots level seems likely to increase their voice and, it is hoped, the relevance and effectiveness of the governments' development outputs. While the motives for decentralisation may vary greatly, most donors and governments justify decentralisation as a means for increasing the efficiency and equity of development activities and service delivery. Ribot (2002:4) adds that development agents, natural resource managers, and some environmentalists are also promoting decentralisation as a way of increasing both efficiency and equity in natural resource management. He argues that where decentralisation reforms are proceeding, they affect how local people value, access, use, manage, and voice their claims and concerns about natural resources. Decentralisation reform therefore can change the institutional infrastructure for local natural resource management and have the potential to create an institutional basis for more popular and participatory management and use of natural and other public resources. A lot of these assumptions with decentralisation emerge from experiences with community-based natural resource management and public choice theory (see for example Grima and Berkes, 1989; Ostrom, 1990; Udehn, 1996; Dasgupta and Maskin, 1999; Sager, 2002). They indicate that decentralised and democratic local institutions can be the basis of effective local decision-making. Through and within them local communities have or can develop the skills and desire to make and effectively execute natural resource management decisions. Community-level management may then have ecologically and socially positive effects.

However, there is also increasing criticism against the consensus that decentralised or local governance is always best. The hypotheses concerning efficiency and equity in decentralisation must be approached with caution. Decentralisation is a double-edged sword that also creates more scope for discretion or corruption. Moreover, decentralisation can also serve as bringing oppression closer to the people, especially when it becomes a means of forcing local compliance and local cost-sharing without meaningful power sharing. This side of decentralisation can give rise to highly unfair outcomes. Therefore, decentralisation cannot be treated as technically neutral device which can be implemented without constraint (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). It is essentially about the distribution of power, responsibilities, authority, and resources and it is meaningful to combine the decentralisation idea with theoretical considerations about rule and governance. Important to note is that a historically grown democracy is not necessarily based on decentralised governance structures. On the other hand, a system of autocracy or totalitarianism may make use of a decentralised state structure in order to deliver policies and services effectively to the localities. Decentralisation is therefore independent of the democratic nature of a regime. In terms of governance, it however suggests political power-sharing and the division of competences between the different levels of state administration.

As in the case of the sustainable mountain development agenda, decentralisation may also be motivated by the desire to empower citizens and increase public participation in the development planning and implementation process. Decentralisation may be seen as a way to deepen democracy and enhance the legitimacy of the existing political system. Some autocratic regimes have considered, however, decentralisation as a substitute for democracy (Crook and Manor, 1998; James et al., 2002).

This range of combinations of regime type and type of decentralisation and governance structure is summarised in a common categorisation of decentralisation. It distinguishes between 1) political or democratic decentralisation; 2) administrative decentralisation or deconcentration; and 3) fiscal decentralisation (Crook and Manor, 1998; Manor, 2000). Political or democratic decentralisation devolves resources, powers, and often tasks to lower-level authorities which are in some way democratic. It is a form of power-sharing between central government and sub-national authorities. Local authorities gain discretion in rule-making within prescribed limits, for example, in land use planning and policy implementation. Administrative decentralisation or deconcentration tends to extend the scope or reach of the central government and to strengthen its authority by moving executive agencies controlled by the centre down to lower levels of the political system. The central government is not giving up any authority. It is simply relocating its officers at different levels or points in the national territory. Finally, fiscal decentralisation is the downward transfer of decision-making powers over funds to lower levels. It constitutes a cross-cutting element of both deconcentration and devolution (Dupar and Badenoch, 2002). Any two or all three of these types can be mixed.

The differences of these three types of decentralisation show that decentralisation does not necessarily imply democracy. The outcomes of decentralisation will depend not only on the relative weights of devolution and deconcentration in the institutional and fiscal structures. They also depend on their combination with the kind of legitimation and accountability through participation and elections, and the ideological principles according to which the authority of a decentralised administration is determined. These ideological principles frequently refer to democracy across a wide range of political regimes, including socialist regimes.

The recent literature on democracy, and especially on non-Western type democracy, has pointed at the many uncertainties about theory building in transitional economies of formerly or still socialist nation-states. Anderson *et al.* (2001:154) argue that the postcommunist experiences with democratisation cannot be understood by existing theories and definitions of democracy. They claim that theories of democratisation lack a careful definition of alternatives, hence postcommunist alternatives to democracy. Indeed, the fields of decentralisation and democratisation are complex and difficult grounds. For my purposes to exploring the political setting of Vietnam I intend to use the concepts of democracy, governance and decentralisation flexibly. To study their various meanings in the light of the mountain development debate will provide insights both into political particularities of Vietnam as well as into the effectiveness of strengthened governance structures and political participation of politically peripheral regions and under-represented public and private actors. This is an under-researched and challenging topic. I will only be able to give a glimpse of it that focuses on how political participation and governance structures impede or support locality-specific mountain development plans and mountain resource management regimes.

6.2.2 Vietnam's decentralised state

Structure and institutions

The recent reform processes in Vietnam have brought the concept of decentralisation on the agenda. Dupar and Badenoch (2002:14) claim that the performance of Vietnam's government in policy implementation may be more efficient and successful if it adopts one or a mixture of the three types of decentralisation. However, so far the Socialist Republic of Vietnam stands still for a highly centralised state governed by the Communist Party as the only political party. The official policy style is classical centralist, thus largely top-down and prescriptive. Political power is concentrated in the central government and the Party. This political context represents the framework for both the nature of the regime and

the political objectives underlying the creation of a decentralised system. They are usually the determining factors of choice of what kind of decentralisation is adopted (Crook and Manor, 1998). UNDP (1999:2) remarks that devolution and decentralisation are not among the top priorities of the government of Vietnam as unification remains still a strong driving force. The Communist Party of Vietnam declared in 1996 that "the state power is unified, with a division of responsibilities and coordination of work among State agencies in the exercise of legislative, administrative and judicial powers" (cited in UNDP, 1999:2). The emphasis on unification means that there is still a strong political effort made by the Communist leadership to integrate the two socio-culturally rather distinct regions of north and south Vietnam that do not share the same history of Socialist Revolution and Communist rule. The political leadership is moreover much involved in actively maintaining political and social stability in this ethnically and socio-economically heterogeneous nation-state.

In terms of state structure and political procedures of administrative and Party work, Vietnam shows today some features that may be considered as a form of decentralisation of all three above types. Firstly, in the process of *doi moi*, a partial fiscal decentralisation was realised. The provinces thereby gained more real decision-making and budgetary power. Secondly, a kind of democratic decentralisation process was launched by the Party in 1998. This type of decentralisation aims at the strengthening of local governance structures and the enhancement of public participation in economic and political decision-making at the commune level. Thirdly, administrative decentralisation is a long established feature of Vietnam's state structure.

During the creation of the socialist nation-state a deconcentrated administrative structure was set in place, which binds every commune in the country to the next higher administrative and thus the central level. In the northern mountain areas, for example, the autonomous zones, which were established in the years 1955 and 1956, formally provided the mountain peoples with some autonomy from centralist planning and Communist rule. The socialist economic and political systems were, nonetheless, progressively introduced into the highland zones (McLeod, 1999; Corlin, 2001). The political goal of this project was to establish socialism in every locality of the country and to enhance the control over the periphery.

Although already the first Constitution of 1946 guaranteed the ethnic peoples equal rights as Vietnamese citizens, protection of their culture, and support for their economies, the real political power to control and exploit the mountain areas has lain in the hands of the central government and the Party. They are the steering forces of political life in Vietnam. They assume strategic roles from the central level down to every locality. The lower levels of the hierarchical state apparatus are the operational levels where central programmes and policies get implemented. The hierarchical organisation of the state apparatus from the central to the commune level is depicted in Figure 6-1. The diagram shows the overall structure of the legislative or representative organs of the state. The Party apparatus is a parallel system of hierarchies. It is inherently difficult to depict the system of power-sharing between the state apparatus and the Party organisation. Dang Phong and Beresford (1998:22, 36) provide such figures for the periods from 1945 to 1955 and from 1960 to 1986. Unfortunately, a more recent source that combines the two systems of the state and Party structure in its actual power balance is not available. Figure 6-1 gives only a provisional idea of the interlinkages between the state and Party structure.

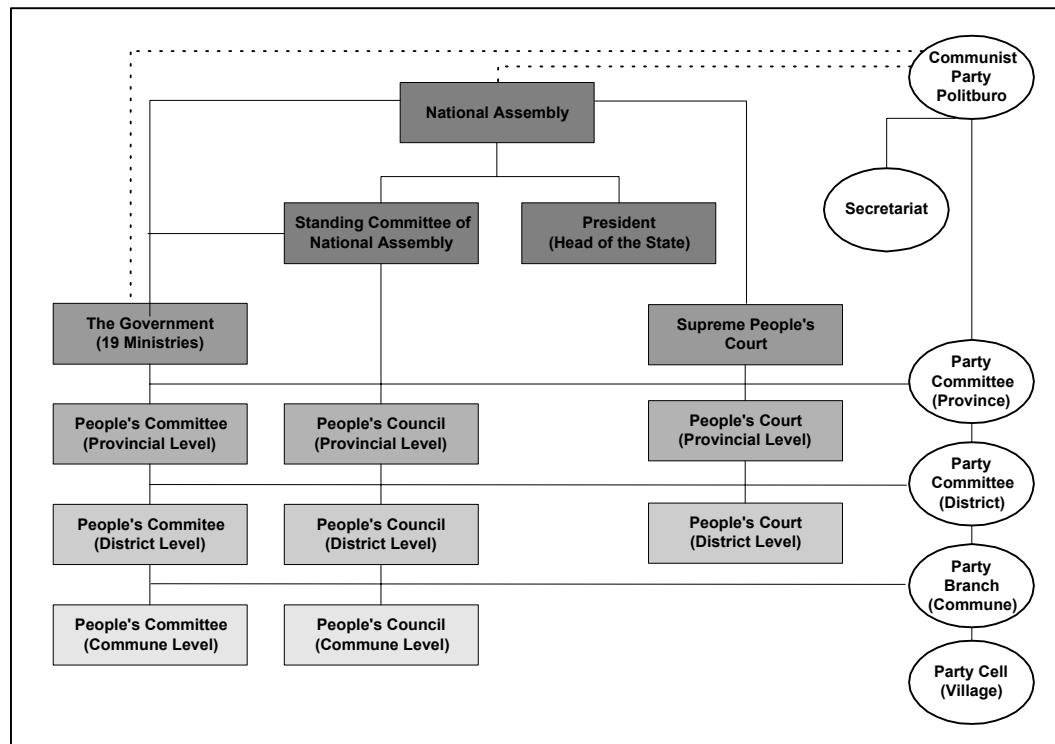


Figure 6-1: State structure of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (UNDP, 1999, modified)

National Assembly and People's Councils are the state organs directly elected by the Vietnamese constituency. The People's Committees at the sub-national levels are the executive organs of the National Assembly, government, and People's Council at the respective levels (see next section). The National Assembly decides about the number and tasks of the ministries and appoints the ministers. After the recent elections of the National Assembly on 19th May 2002, the representatives at the central level appointed or relocated a number of ministers between the ministries and approved the creation of four new ministries and ministerial committees (Vietnam News Briefs, 2002). The government will have a total of 20 ministries and six ministerial organisations in its new five-year term. Newly created are the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and the Ministry for Post and Telecommunications (MPT). The existing Government's Personnel Department will be turned into the Home Affairs Ministry and the Committee for Ethnic Minority People and Mountain Areas (CEMMA) will become the Committee for Ethnic Minority People. The Committee for Ethnic Minority People supervises and controls the implementation of policies affecting the ethnic peoples. The change of name from the Committee for Ethnic Minority People and Mountain Areas into Committee for Ethnic Minority People only may indicate a separation of political affairs concerning ethnic minorities and policies concerning mountain areas. Unfortunately, it was not possible to gather conclusive information on the tasks of the 'new' Committee for Ethnic Minority People. The separation of ethnic peoples' affairs from concerns regarding mountain areas may impede the formulation of mountain-specific policies which pay attention to the different cultural and historical traits of the mountain population.

The decentralised or deconcentrated state administration extends the scope of the central government and strengthens its authorities by moving executive agencies, controlled by the centre, down to lower levels of the political system (Dupar and Badenoch, 2002). In certain cases the central government of Vietnam have assigned specific people to assume cadre functions for some ministries in the locality. In the *Ba Be*

National Park area, for example, the director and other functionaries are directly employed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. With regard to their planned activities in the locality they are only accountable to the central government. In some incidences, this had the effect that the district and the communes were not informed about any plans and activities. The central government agency has therefore moved closer to the locality. But the relocation of central government officials to the locality impinges on the consultation of local communities. Central government officials enjoy a relatively large scope of discretion. This stands in contrast to the lower-level officials in the People's Councils and the People's Committees of the districts and the communes who have traditionally been recruited locally through appointment or election and are socially and culturally engaged with the communities. This is to be discussed in more detail in sections 6.3 and 6.4.

Party apparatus and standard operating procedures

The Party apparatus is a parallel structure next to the state structure and complements it by a similar hierarchy, reaching from the central level of the Politburo down to the Party Committees at the provincial, district and commune level. The Party holds all political, social and, to a large extent, economic threads in its hands. Dang Phong and Beresford (1998:91) report that since the launch of *doi moi* the directly elected state organs, such as the People's Council and the National Assembly, have been gaining more real power and have been able to give more substance to their work. Especially the National Assembly gained more real decision-making power in areas which used to be preserved by the Politburo. The general secretary proposes, for example, an idea and, nowadays, it is not certain that it will be easily accepted by the National Assembly. However, the structure of representative democracy as vested in the People's Council and the National Assembly remains a system of delegation which is typically complemented by a separate, but somewhat similar, system at the levels of the Communist Party. Held (2001:199) claims that in practice complementarity has meant Party domination. A lack of budgetary power and independence of the Party restricts the influence by the directly elected state organs (Papin, 2000). Ultimately, it is the Party through its local Party cells and embodied in all local institutions, that retains the political power at all levels of the state hierarchy.

Finally, democratic centralism regulates some kind of upward and downward flow of information and political opinion. It is the standard operating procedure of politics in Vietnam that claims that pluralist opinions and conflicting views should be freely expressed and widely discussed at all levels of the Party hierarchy (Abuza, 2001). The Party should take these opinions into account when making a decision but once the decision has been made the policy must be unquestioningly accepted and carried out by all Party members. This concept theoretically permits dissent, but in practice it allows very little upward flow of views and opinions (Robertson, 1993). Democratic centralism is also defined by "the part submitting to the whole, the minority yielding to the majority, lower ranks obeying upper ranks, and localities obeying the centre" (Marr 1994 in MacLean, 2001:16).

Democratic centralism stands both for policy style and political culture of Vietnam. Theoretically, it bears elements of direct democratic participation and the possibility to express opinions freely. Theoretically, it also implies downward accountability and the possibility to change things from below. In practice, there have been phases of strong denial of the principles of democratic centralism as well as periods of strong and effective influence from the bottom (Dang Phong and Beresford, 1998). In their historical review of political processes emerging from below, Dang Phong and Beresford (1998:79) argue that the political and economic pressure from the sub-national levels urged the political leadership at the centre to alter policies and to introduce the comprehensive reform

programme *doi moi*. They emphasise that Vietnamese economic reforms considerably emerged through the social initiatives of low-level cadres and the citizenry. Farmers resisted working for the cooperatives, and low-level cadres developed new models that were not planned according to any theory or resolution but arose from the day-to-day needs of the population. A distinction between the two articulations of the national interest by the top leadership and the articulation of the local interests by the lower level officials had emerged. This indicated a 'foot-dragging' process which represented the interests of those who had been effectively disenfranchised. The authors conclude that politics in Vietnam is able to respond to popular sentiment. They add, however, that the formal channels of an overt representation of popular interests are still few (Dang Phong and Beresford, 1998).

The political pressure from below eventually contributed to a slow pace of change at the formal policy level. The outcomes provide evidence that the Vietnamese political culture does not permit the survival of political regimes, which 'sit on the people'. During the economic transition, the state organs which allow such upward flow of information and interest have been strengthened. The National Assembly, for example, has become slightly more democratic, although the Party still controls membership and the ratification of decrees and other edicts (Dang Phong and Beresford, 1998; Abuza, 2001).

In summary, Vietnam is characterised by a decentralised state organisation that would in principle allow decentralised decision- and policy-making. However, decentralisation does not go much further than administrative decentralisation or deconcentration. There is a clear division of strategic and operational planning between the higher and lower levels of the state administration that inhibits decentralised and democratic power-sharing. The central and provincial levels are the policy-making levels whereas the district and the commune are the implementing levels. The two lower levels lack authority and capacity, which impedes decentralised responsibility and competence. In practice, all the decentralised features and operating procedures, such as democratic centralism, that might devolve political power down to the lower levels of the state organisation are inhibited or disregarded due to the political power claim of the Communist Party. Therefore, when discussing decentralisation in the case of Vietnam it is still necessary to take a critical stance and to critically assess how the concept is promoted both in theory and practice.

The following sections are going to shed light on the political procedures in mountain communes, where empirical data was collected. Many of the described features also apply for politics at the commune level in Vietnam in general. The aim is to identify the scope for popular participation and arguments for democratic decentralisation that support the vote of the local people and enhance their political stake.

6.3 The Long Arm of the Party in the Communes

6.3.1 The smallest politico-administrative unit

The commune remains the administrative level, where politics and policies are to a great extent shaped by the particularities of its inhabitants. The strong centralism of political rule and governance and the unifying and equalising drive of the policy style of the central government and the Party are contrasted by the diversity of Vietnamese communes in cultural, economic, and also political terms. The commune is the smallest administrative unit at the bottom of the state hierarchy and provides meaningful insights into the complexities of political life and the politico-administrative system in Vietnam. The interaction between the public and the state administration is most direct at this level, and allows for the study of the room for manoeuvre in local politics and the policy process. The norms, which regulate the relationships between the administrative organs of the commune

level, largely correspond with the ones at higher levels. However, they are simplified as a result of the size of the commune administration, its responsibilities, obligations and autonomy.

For many centuries, the commune had formed a coherent whole in the political system of pre-socialist Vietnam. Historically, the communes in the rural and remote areas conducted social and political life without much reference to the outside world. The commune is typically characterised by cohesiveness and solidarity. Despite the many political transformations they continue to be of importance today. An old Vietnamese saying states that "the laws of the emperor bow for the customs of the village" (Kleinen, 1999:11), which to some extent is true today. However, during the establishment of the socialist regime in the 1950s, the autonomy of the commune was cut down. The commune became a target of nationalist and political interests for planned social change (Kleinen, 1999). The commune society was thoroughly penetrated with an array of Leninist institutions. Some of them kept the citizens under close surveillance, such as the household registration system, the employment system and the neighbourhood police stations (McCormick, 1998). The institutions of the planned economy were embedded in and served a system of power and ideology. Commune democracy and autonomy were gradually replaced by Party rule. Since the 1960s, the commune administration has acted as executive body of the central and provincial government. It is composed of the Party branch, the People's Council, the People's Committee, and the mass organisations.

Decision No. 112/1981/HD-BT of the Council of Ministers (1981) states:

Article 1. - "The commune is the local administrative unit of the State in the rural area. The state authorities at the local level include the People's Council and the People's Committee, elected by the people according to the Constitution and Law. They are the state management organs at the commune level."

Article 2. - "The commune authorities function to manage all fields of state work at commune level in order to ensure that the Constitution and Law are observed completely, to ensure and promote the mastery of the working people, citizens' interests, pay attention to the physical and cultural life of the people, promulgate the people to fulfil their obligations to the government." (1981:n.p.)

Concerning the working culture and institutional system Circular No. 477-TCCP, issued by the Prime Minister (1981), says:

"In operation, the commune authorities should rely on the close cooperation of the Fatherland Front, mass organisations and mass participation of the people in order that the Constitution, law, directions and policies of the Party and the government are well observed in the communes." (1981:n.p.)

The Communist Party is the leading political force in the commune and at all other levels of the state hierarchy. It stands at the fore in every election and political affair and therefore retains the monopoly of political power. It exercises its power from the Politburo to the Party committees and branches, and places its members in strategically influential positions at all levels of state administration. An important promoter of Party rule and ideology are the mass organisations, such as the Women's Union, Farmers' Union, Veterans' Association or Youth Union. In total there are 25 mass organisations in Vietnam, which serve as means to persuade and mobilise the general public to follow the Party line and policies (Endres, 1999b). The mass organisations are under the lead of the Fatherland Front, which propagates the construction of a peaceful, independent, democratic and strong Vietnam (Turner, 1975; Fatherland Front's Central Committee, 2000). Through the mass organisations the Party has thoroughly controlled and organised the civil society in a

prescribed manner. Any other forms of association or public assembly are prohibited or at least restricted (Thayer, 1995; Gray, 1999).

6.3.2 Commune administration

The establishment of the commune administration starts with the selection of candidates for the People's Council by the Party and the Fatherland Front (see Figure 6-2) (Derbyshire and Derbyshire, 1989). In *Ban Chan* and *Tan Lung* of *Dong Phuc* commune, for example, five candidates, who represent the two village communities, are nominated. The nominated candidates do not need to be Party members. Female candidates must be included in the nominations. The two village communities then elect three out of these five candidates as their representatives in the People's Council. The number of representatives depends on the size of the population. In *Dong Phuc*, the People's Council has currently 19 members. These directly elected representatives of the local people then elect the chairs and vice chairs of the People's Council and the People's Committee. Most of the time, these top positions are assumed by Party members. The members of the People's Council then also elect the other five members of the People's Committee.

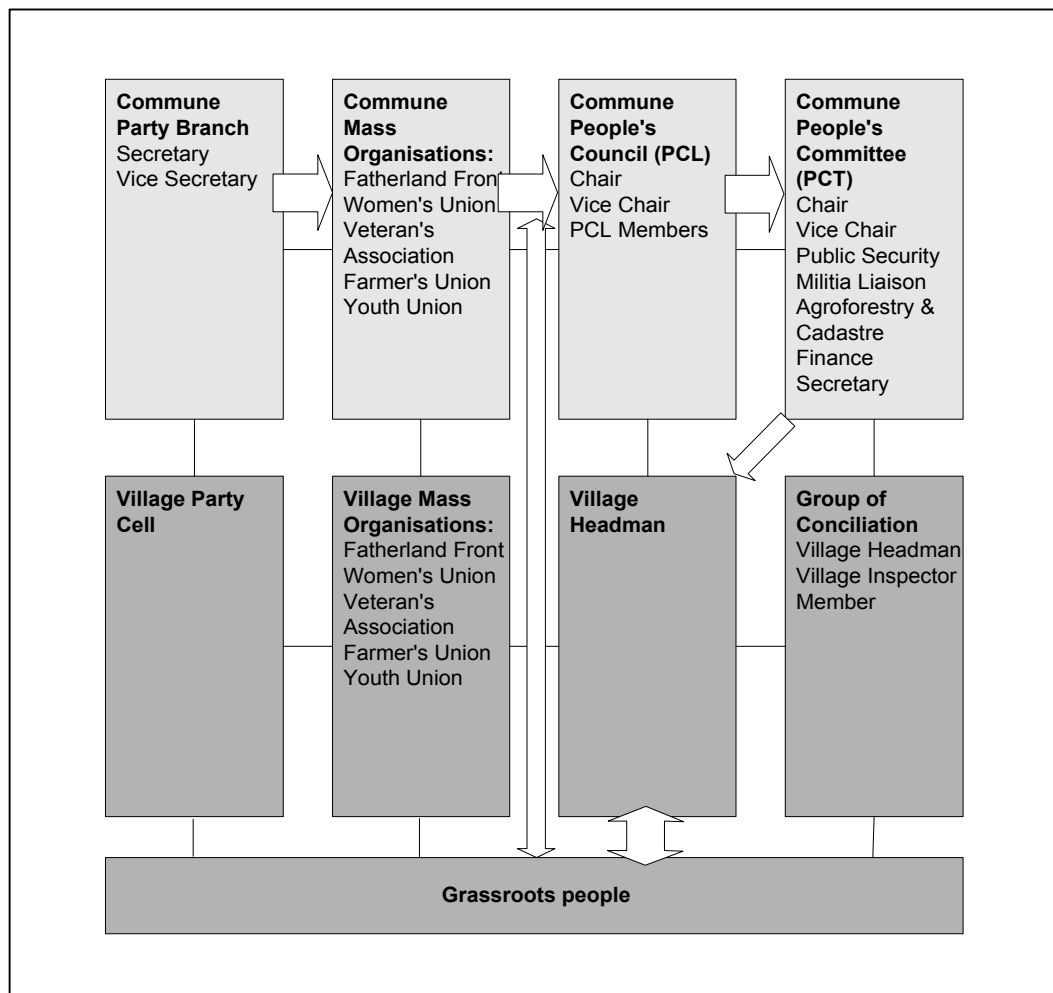


Figure 6-2: The administrative structure at the commune and village level (Source: Field data 2001)

The arrows indicate the election process and which organ or constituency is allowed to elect at which stage. Thus the Party preselects the candidates, the mass organisations approve, the grassroots people elect their representatives in the People's Council, the People's Council elects the People's Committee and so on. The grassroots people directly elect the village headmen.

The People's Council is the legislative body which guides and monitors socio-economic life at the commune level. The commune People's Council's superior organs are the district and provincial People's Councils and the National Assembly at the highest level of the state hierarchy. Meetings of the commune People's Council are held two times per year. Before the meeting, the members of the People's Council consult the village communities on important issues, needs, and aspirations. Enquiries are also made among the members of the mass organisations. Consultation with local people by the People's Council members and the mass organisations' reports should provide the People's Council with sufficient information to issue appropriate resolutions. The resolutions in *Dong Phuc* commune mostly outline plans for socio-economic development and the implementation of central policies.

These plans have to be carried out by the People's Committee. It assumes an executive role as manager of the commune and is also responsible to implement resolutions and policies which come from the higher levels of the state administration. It is subordinate to the People's Committees at the district and provincial level and to the central government.

The People's Committee works closely together with the village headmen. A village headman is directly elected by the individual village community and must be approved by the People's Committee. He represents the direct link between the commune administration and the village, and he receives instructions and directives from the commune administration to carry out in his community. At the village level, Party and mass organisations maintain small cells or units, depending on the initiative and involvedness of the villagers. A further village institution is the Group of Conciliation, mainly established after decollectivisation and in connection with land allocation policies. It has the function to solve any kind of conflicts, concerning for example land disputes, property issues and domestic problems (divorce, violence). Whenever possible, conflicts are resolved according to social customs and by considering the importance of social cohesion of the community. The members of the groups of conciliation in the three studied communities emphasise that their work is demanding. One of them noted:

"There are no official guidelines to solve a conflict. The members of the group of conciliation act according to their sentiments, thoughts and customs. They study the situation carefully and establish the process of conflict. They facilitate the process of reflection by asking both parties to place themselves in the situation of the other. (...) The problem solution is always searched in a way that none of the involved parties is hurt or experiences a huge loss. They try to avoid that the social relations between the parties are damaged for a long time, even when the easiest solutions would be to say someone is right and the other is wrong." [BC#00160]

Only if conflicts cannot be solved within the village they are reported to the commune or to the next higher level.

The relationships of responsibility and accountability between grassroots people, village headmen, People's Committee and People's Council at the commune level represent important direct democratic features. This so-called commune democracy was always vested in the administrative unit of the commune and seem to re-emerge in the recent reform processes (Endres, 1999a; Ngo Duc Thinh, 1999). The People's Councils have, moreover, been strengthened and more weight has been laid on the accountability of low-level state organs and mass organisations to people's needs and aspirations. Through membership and active participation in the mass organisations the people can strengthen their voice in the political affairs at the commune level. Local interests and petitions are disseminated to the higher levels by the People's Council. This democratic procedure makes the People's Council in the opinion of the political leaders in *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau* "the most powerful organ in the commune" [BC#00158; PN#00190].

However, in practice democratic centralism is experienced differently today. A commune Party secretary explained:

"When people want to respond to central policies and Party directives they can. Theoretically, people can influence higher level decision-making, but in reality it never happens. Finally, people have to follow the Party's objectives." [DP#00218]

This account neglects the fact that objections to policies and modification of policy guidelines occur frequently in the implementation process. As long as the policy outcome does not completely diverge from the Party line, the local people's influence is tolerated. It remains, however, unintended. Facts such as the co-existence of customary and official law or the marginalisation of mountain communities through central policy intervention are only reluctantly acknowledged by the political leadership. The direct links between these functions and organs represent a room for manoeuvre of constituency and representatives. In this room for manoeuvre the people's representatives assume intermediary roles which essentially decide about the commune's cooperation in accepting and pursuing central policy guidelines or its autonomous stance.

In summary, the communes have traditionally enjoyed a relative large autonomy in local decision-making. However, with socialist nation-state building this autonomy was largely replaced by Party rule. Today the commune provides important local services to the people and is in charge of implementing policy programmes in the locality. Typically, its budget is small and the level of political organisation of local institutions and local people is rather rudimentary. The Party controls almost every aspect of political life in the commune. Also the organisation of civil society forces in associations is closely watched. Although the constituency has the power to elect or dismiss local cadres in commune ballots, these elections are not independent from Party influence. This is because it is the Party that nominates the candidates and therefore pre-selects those cadres who are Party-conform. It makes sure that its ideology and its aim to strengthen and build socialism are continuously pursued. Therefore, the organisational structure of the commune resembles a system of representative democracy which is also vested at the higher administrative levels. In practice, the representative democracy in Vietnam is a system of delegation directed by the Communist Party that does not allow much scope for popular political participation.

6.4 Representatives and Intermediaries

6.4.1 Discretion in the local state

This chapter is interested in understanding Vietnam's political organisation and its possibilities and constraints for democratic decentralisation, the local people's and their representatives' stake in local politics and environmental policy-making, and whether they can make their voices heard. After having outlined the political setting and state structure I will look at the roles of government officials and people's representatives who populate the political institutions at the commune and district level. Despite the strong control of the Party, these local cadres seem to enjoy authority and discretionary powers which may go against the Party-dominated political routine.

The Communist Party has penetrated all institutions and administrative organs in Vietnam by placing its members in strategically influential positions. These 'ideological functionaries' of both the Party and the Fatherland Front have the duty to spread and strengthen the Party ideology in the locality. Next to these 'ideological functionaries' there are other representatives in the People's Council and the People's Committee who realise foremost the link to departments at the next higher levels, such as public security, militia,

police, finance, agriculture, and land administration. They are responsible to report changes of directives and policies to the grassroots people, and local incidents and developments to the respective departments of the district administration.

These low-level cadres assume an intermediary function between the Party, the state administration, and the grassroots people that is instrumental for the dissemination and implementation of central policies and programmes and the upward flow of information about local conditions. Low-level cadres in Vietnam are in charge of organising the economy, society and politics in the communes and villages. They enjoy a certain degree of autonomy, which is exercised in the formulation of resolutions, the application and modification of central policies to local contexts, and the conciliation of conflicts on the basis of local customs and habits. As state agents they have to have comprehensive understandings of both the local and the national policy context and political affairs. Frequent training courses at the district and higher administrative levels are provided to encourage fair and appropriate political behaviour when carrying out daily work duties in the communes. They moreover have the function to spread the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and, thus, to keep socialism lively. A central government official explained:

"National policies have in principle to satisfy the interests and main objectives of the Party. Based on the diversity of the people and geographical regions it is impossible for the Party to come up with a kind of policy that suits all. Policy formulation needs to be general. It is then basically in the hands of the provincial People's Committee to elaborate appropriate policy guidelines for the localities in the province. The district and commune People's Committees then largely elaborate socio-economic development strategies for specific localities. As long as any local decision is not against the Party line it is accepted by the higher levels of state hierarchy." [HN#00333]

The division of responsibility and power in policy formulation and policy elaboration enables the government officials at the lower levels of state administration, theoretically, to create policy frameworks that fit with the conditions of the locality. Low-level cadres in Vietnam, therefore, normally enjoy a certain amount of discretion in the execution of their work. However, this bears the risk that policy is distorted by these mediating state agents and local institutions. Particularly in the context of administrative decision-making, excessive discretion has been seen as leading to arbitrariness, inequality and dependency, and failing to meet the most basic requirements of justice (Adler and Asquith, 1993). This is one of the common ambiguities of the concept of the local state.

The examples of *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau* commune in environmental policy processes, discussed in chapter five, have shown that different interests from those of the national dominant groups can control particular localities. On the other hand, local actors can use the local state to promote their own ideas of policies in opposition to those of the central state. Local state relations are, therefore, typically loaded with tensions between the centre and the locality, mostly because of unequal power potentials between the two. Uneven development, however, inevitably forces the central state to organise control of its territory through some local autonomy (Taylor, 1993; Glassner, 1993).

6.4.2 Mediating between different social worlds

Local authorities in *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau* commune note that how they translate the macro ideas to their locality determines the commune's strength and capacity to keep track with the ongoing transformations of the transition period. Most of the local authorities at the commune level are firmly rooted in commune life and village society. They assume multiple roles and responsibilities as household heads, farmers, people's representatives, and the long arm of the Party and the government. Social and political change takes place

through their intermediary function, their capability to translate and disseminate Party directions and policy guidelines, and their attitude towards the people.

However, local state agents are inherently caught in the dilemma to mediate between social worlds and cultures. Sikor and Dao Minh Truong (2000:52) point out that the nature of the local state in the mountain areas is strongly influenced by history, a history that is different from the lowlanders' history. Lipsky (1993) notes:

"Street-level bureaucrats often spend their work lives in a corrupted world of service. They believe themselves to be doing the best they can under adverse circumstances and they develop techniques to salvage service and decision-making values within limits imposed upon them by the structure or their work." (1993:383)

Such a situation was already described with the example of the forest ranger who found himself caught in the dilemma between the local people's claim to satisfy their basic subsistence needs and his responsibility to fine them when they violate the forest protection rules (see section 5.4.1 on forest protection). It gives an idea of the disrupted world of the low-level officials in a situation of rapidly changing policy frameworks and economic conditions. Suddenly they have to carry out their work according to a set of changed rules which are unfamiliar to the people. However, as a local leader of *Dong Phuc* commune mentioned "the work of local authorities needs to take into account the local customs according to which village rules are made. (...) The local cadres' responsiveness to social habits is essential for the confidence of a community" [DP#00308]. Therefore, the local authorities' socio-economic conditions, historical background, cultural values and their personal reaction to more room for manoeuvre in periods of rapid change are factors which contribute to the variation of political understanding and policy implementation across the regions. Some of them may make use of the wider scope for personal discretion offered by the circumstances and may show signs of moral erosion. Others may be loyal with their constituency and act unambiguously in the favour of the communities. The socialist ideology of equity and social justice is therefore likely to get distorted and discrepancies between the regions become wider. The literature and empirical evidence suggest that due to their discretionary powers the low-level cadres are the *de facto* creators of policy (Hudson, 1993; Hill, 1993).

The Party secretary of *Dong Phuc* commune, however, stated:

"There are no adjustments or changes in the political ideology and implications of the Party instructions when they reach the local level. People here are Vietnamese citizens and also as minority groups they carry out the responsibility of constructing and protecting Vietnamese socialism. (...) When the policy and political guidelines come to the locality it's the village headman who has to explain [them to the people]. It is important to explain the guidelines in the language of the minority people in order to make sure that they understand them really." [DP#00218]

The official view of Party members and government officials present an unambiguous, well-functioning political framework and state administration. The above informant stresses primarily the linguistic problem that may impede the implementation of official policy. Certainly, the translation of central policies into the language of the various ethnic groups is important to inform them about the policy decisions made by the government. This emphasis on linguistics does, however, neglect the differing histories and cultural traits between the *Kinh* political leadership at the centre and the ethnic mountain population. The official view of an unambiguous, well-functioning decentralised state is smooth-talking the painful problem of local cadres that found their lives dominated by the accountability to both the people and the state.

The data collected in *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau* commune reveal that low-level cadres are generally responsive and accountable to local people's needs and aspirations. They usually belong to the ethnic groups of *Tay* and *Dao* and have close ties with the constituency. Their behaviour is closely watched by the communities. Social control mechanisms ensure their accountability to the commune (Hoang Be et al., 1992). A local leader in *Pac Ngoi* said:

"There is a general solidarity between the villagers, being local leaders or ordinary people, because all of them face the same livelihood needs and difficulties" [PN#00193].

Despite strong and close ties between the low-level cadres and the grassroots people their relationship is not always easy. A number of studies reveal that only a minority of the mountain population are well informed about policies and programmes, rights and obligations (Government-Donor-NGO Working Group, 1999; Dau Hoan Do et al., 1999). Paternalism and personal discretion of local cadres, who may reiterate the prejudices common to the policy-making concerning the mountain people, disrupt the trust of the public in its representatives.

An informant from *Tan Lung* claimed:

"Local authorities are responsible to help and support the villagers, but what they say is not very well understood by the villagers, who have a low level of knowledge. (...) It is really difficult for the villagers to keep up with the local officials who have allowances, pensions and who are enjoying benefits from the government policies because they know better what is going on". [TL#00179]

A critical voice is also raised by a village elder, who refers to both the collective period and to the present. She recalled:

"When talking about the commune (...) they [the officials] get the salary but they don't pay attention to the people, don't take care of the people. In fact, they don't take care of the villages. They take care of their own interests only. They pay attention to making themselves have enough food or be rich only. Here, the ones who work for the communes are rich, but the people are poor." [BC#00329]

Evidence of the social differentiation within and among village communities (see chapter four, Table 4-2) has shown that there are indeed significant socio-economic differences between the low-level cadres and the ordinary villagers in the communes. Some informants of *Nam Mau* and *Dong Phuc* commune also reported incidences of strong personal discretion for the officials' own benefit. In *Dong Phuc* commune two local officials, for example, tried to benefit from their positions to directly apply for land rights when the delegation from the Cadastral Department visited the commune. They indeed received land use certificates for large areas of forestland, which was not their inherited and appropriated land but which included also the fields of other households as well as communal land. A few months later the issue was brought to light. One of the officials justified his intention by saying, that when he received the land use certificate, he thought that other households would receive them too. This excuse is unconvincing. He was amongst those commune officials who directly experienced the difficulty to implement the forestland allocation policy in the *Tay* villages and knew that the resistance by some influential households made a consensus impossible.

Other incidences of discretion occur in processes of conflict resolution. In a case that happened in *Ban Chan*, kinship relations of the three members of the Group of Conciliation impinged on the fair resolution of the conflict between two parties in conflict.

The close family relations of one of the members to a party involved in the conflict caused partiality in the official's behaviour, which led the other party to give up the case. Such occurrences erode the grassroots people's trust in the local level cadres.

These anecdotal accounts might not be representative, but they show that low-level cadres and local leaders are indeed in a very demanding position, where they have to mediate between different groups of the village communities, between the villages, and between the communes and the higher levels of state administration. They use the room for manoeuvre given to them by loopholes in the political system. Whether they act in compliance with the central state or the local communities depends on both the issues to be decided and the behaviour of the local cadres themselves. Incidences of personal discretion and corruption at the local level are also reported by Luttrell (2001b). Her analysis shows that they cause increasing inequality in the communities. She writes:

"For those responsible for the corrupt acts it represents a means of gaining access, often with official rights, to resources. The formal institutional failure accompanying corruption has affected the most vulnerable groups and, together with the increasing lack of trust in state institutions, has had a negative effect on many households in the commune[s]." (Luttrell, 2001b:200)

The phenomenon of arbitrary use of power by low-level cadres has recently also been considered by the political leadership of Vietnam as an increasing problem. The Government Committee for Organisation and Personnel (2000) remarks:

"In the economic transition period, social inequality and moral erosion [have] emerge[d]. A part of the Party's members considers money higher than everything or make use of imperfections of the law to squeeze the public property and become illegitimately rich". (2000:n.p.)

The Party and the government have responded to these practices and have elaborated a programme according to which local cadres need to give more substance to their work and act in the interest of their constituency. New policy guidelines are ratified in Decree No. 29 on the exercise of democracy in the communes and various Circulars issued by the ministries. They are going to be discussed in section 6.5.

In summary, the local state in Vietnam allows room for manoeuvre for the local cadres and the constituency who elects them. The representatives of the people make local politics both in the interest of the central state and in the interest of the local people. However, as the central policy frameworks often do not fit with the socio-economic and cultural conditions in the localities, the local cadres find themselves caught between differing social worlds and political cultures. Their role is to mediate between them and to work as closely as possible according to the central guidelines. Their most important task is to continuously build and protect socialism in Vietnam which provides the overall framework of any political affair in the locality.

6.4.3 Voices un-heard?

The politico-administrative structure was established all over the country in order to ensure that the political doctrine of socialism successfully penetrated social, economic, and political life in every single locality of Vietnam. In the mountain regions, political and administrative staff for the local state administration has largely been recruited from amongst the local residents and has been trained according to the ideology of the political leadership in the centre (Chaliand, 1969). McLeod (1999:370-371) reports that during the period of the autonomous zones (1955-1976) the 'minority representatives' in the administrative bodies officially represented the interests of the highlanders constituents

with regard to the lowlander-dominated central Party apparatus. He claims that it is likely that the highlanders selected for the local administration were those who had identified themselves more with the Party's civilising project than with their ethnic group. Also the local cadres in *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau* commune seem to be go-betweens, mediating between the cultural particularities of the *Tay*, *Dao* and *H'mong* people and the *Kinh*-dominated central policies and politics. They recalled for example:

"Ethnic people only differ in terms of language, customs and habits. They are all Vietnamese citizens, which means that they have to carry out the responsibility of constructing and protecting Vietnamese socialism." [DP#00218; PN#00239]

This is clearly a position that does not do justice to the dramatic histories of ethnic peoples that occurred to them during the last century and the conflicting relationships between the lowlanders and the uplanders (chapters four and five). It helps them talk about socialism as a common aim but it does not acknowledge the inherent difficulties of unifying an ethnically diverse country like Vietnam under Communist rule. When the local cadres describe their daily political work in the communes they point at the distinct histories and cultural traits of the people they represent. One of the chairmen of the commune People's Committee noted:

"In village and commune meetings the local political leaders have to find solutions which fit with the local customs and habits. Law in Vietnam is made, where possible, in accordance with customs and habits respecting social morality in the locality." [DP#00308]

The empirical evidence from *Ba Be* district suggests that the political attitude of local cadres in mountain communes differs from the general, prescribing top-down mode of Party politics. They say, for example, that the communes are asked to carry out the central policies only. The district and higher levels do not impose any rules on them. They try to implement the policies and to correspond with the production quotas whenever it is feasible for the commune and the village communities. As has been shown for the case of *Ban Chan*, it was not feasible in this community to implement the forestland allocation policy. The district and the General Department of Land Administration realised that it is impossible to impose the implementation of the policy in this community.

The local cadres, nevertheless, try to mediate between the different social worlds of the local and the political culture of the centre. What is most important for them is that politics in mountain communes do not diverge completely from the overall political ideology. In this respect, the Communist Party does not allow any unconventional social initiatives (Corlin, 2001). It exercises major influence on social and political life in the ethnic communities. Data collected in the studied communes show that in the mountain communes political initiative tends to be rare altogether. The villagers in the studied mountain communities consider political issues as too risky to get involved in. In his paper on the long transition from Communism towards Vietnam's new form of state-governed socialist market economy Brocheux (1994:89) even talks about the public's refusal to get engaged in political matters. Officials argue, on the other hand, that local people lack of knowledge and that they are backward. These views provide for many government officials explanations for political lethargy and economic crisis, especially in the peripheral regions of the country. This is an argument which is used again against the mountain population. It even suggests more delegation of political power to the central level and to the only steering force, the Communist Party.

Within the political setting of Vietnam's state apparatus there are nonetheless a few opportunities for political representation of mountain peoples' interests. Ethnic groups are

officially represented in the central state organs of the Council of Nationalities and the Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (CEMMA), now the Committee for Ethnic Minorities. The Council of Nationalities acts in the interest of the ethnic groups and their agendas in the National Assembly. CEMMA supervises and controls the implementation of policies affecting the ethnic peoples. There are only a few, well-established representatives of ethnic groups at higher levels of the state hierarchy, who occupy influential positions as chairmen or Party secretaries. The former Prime Minister and recently elected general secretary of the Communist Party, Nong Duc Manh, is the most prominent ethnic representative. He originates from *Bac Kan* province and belongs to the *Tay* people.

Overall, the voice of mountain people in the political arenas is still weak. Even in CEMMA only 30% of the staff belong to ethnic groups. The ethnic staff, moreover, tends to be recruited from groups such as the *Thai*, *Muong*, *Tay*, and *Nung* that have more formal education and live near administrative centres. Groups such as the *Dao* or *H'mong* are generally under-represented at the levels above the commune or district. Jamieson *et al.* (1998:23) claim that although many provincial and district People's Committees in the mountain areas are headed by members of ethnic groups, few uplanders hold key positions in the ministries and state agencies that implement national policies. Uplanders are also generally under-represented in the ranks of the cadre responsible for implementing and managing development in the mountain areas. In *Lao Cai* province, for example, where 66% of the total population is composed of ethnic groups, only 18% of the administrative cadre are not *Kinh* (Jamieson *et al.*, 1998).

It may be concluded, that the mountain peoples' voices are little heard at the decision-making levels of the central and provincial governments. Although the principle of democratic centralism theoretically allows the upward flow of information, petitions and aspirations, it seldom unfolds its potential of accountability to the lower levels and to the local constituencies. Some committees ensure that ethnic mountain peoples are represented at all levels of the state administration but their political influence is weak. The likelihood that the voices of the mountain peoples located in the political periphery are really heard at the national level is to date severely restrained by the current understanding of a decentralised state and the few opportunities for political participation of the minority mountain population. Although there are potential turns towards more political accountability and responsiveness of the central-level political leadership and the government officials at the lower levels of the state hierarchy, it is still too early to tell whether the political culture of political domination by the Party and the government is going to change to become more politically inclusive and less autocratic. What is being discussed in the following section points at the realm where democratic achievements in Vietnam's economic transition period may be realised.

6.5 Democracy Vietnamese Style

6.5.1 Democratisation

In recent years, the Party has begun to point out deficiencies in political affairs and effectiveness. The Government Committee for Organisation and Personnel (2000) states:

"The market economy has shown positive and negative aspects. The basic positive aspects are the rapid development of the productive forces, the much improved living conditions, the people's belief in the national renovation and in the Party's consolidated lead. (...) [However,] the rights of ownership (*lam chu*) is violated in many places, the bureaucracy, red tape, and bribes are wide-spread and serious, the [people's] petitions are solved very slowly, and the effectiveness of local authorities' activities is very low.

These issues are eroding the revolutionary nature of our regime, destroying the organisation, eroding the governmental staff in terms of politics and virtue." (2000:n.p.)

There is a widespread problem with accountability and transparency in political practice today. As a reaction to this, the political leadership set out to "solve the situation of social erosion, bureaucracy, democracy shortage, inequality and bribes" (ibid.). The Politburo and the government issued Decree No. 29/1998/ND-CP on the exercise of democracy in the communes (Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998b; Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1998b). It was argued, that the public's participation in economic and political decision-making in issues concerning livelihood and well-being in the communes needs to be strengthened. The Decree No. 29 re-defines roles, responsibilities, and obligations in everyday politics in the communes and intends to enhance the democratic links between the public and the authorities.

With the ratification of Decree No. 29 on the exercise of democracy in the communes, the Vietnamese government and Communist Party recognised that setting in place effective governance structures is essential for a well-functioning economy and for spreading the benefits of growth widely among the society. They acknowledged the need for re-orienting the all-encompassing government of the planning era towards a more enabling set of activities, which support and complement individual involvement in economic decision-making at the local level (Government-Donor-NGO Working Group, 1999). Decree No. 29 represents a set of rules of law that encourages local authorities to actively apply democratic principles when exercising their daily work duties, and it provides grassroots people with legal rights to take part in village- and commune-level economic and political decisions.

The trend towards political transformation, which Decree No. 29 seem to have officially introduced, has nurtured expectations for the pursuit of decentralisation and democratisation processes, advocated more by liberal Party members, and frequently supported by international development agencies involved in institutional and administrative reform in Vietnam. However, the concept of democracy promoted with Decree No. 29 bears many paradoxes and dilemmas. The following sections will show that, theoretically, the decree provides more scope for political participation. In practice, however, Vietnam's concept of democracy still limits the possibility that the voices of the grassroots people from the political periphery are really being heard.

6.5.2 "Perfecting" democracy

With Decree No. 29 the Communist Party and government of Vietnam launched a reform project that seems to support better governance structures and involves a distribution of responsibilities, competences, and obligation between the administrative levels (Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998b; Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1998b). In the system of grassroots or commune democracy, all delegates are revocable, bound by the instructions of their constituency, and organised into a pyramid of directly elected committees (Held, 2001). Enhanced participation and more transparency of political and economic decision-making in issues concerning livelihood and well-being in the communes are central elements of the grassroots democracy decree.

The Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1998b) states:

Foreword – "Democracy is the nature of our regime and State. Our Party and State always respect and bring into full play the people's mastery, creating an enormous strength and making a decisive contribution to the success of our revolution."

Article 1. - "The regulation on the exercise of democracy in communes aims to bring into full play the commune people's mastery and creativeness, mobilise the peasants'

and people's great material and intellectual strengths for economic development, social and political stabilisation, to enhance the rural solidarity, improve the people's lives and knowledge, build clean and strong Party organisations, administration and mass organisations in communes, to prevent and overcome the problems of degradation, red tape and corruption, thus contributing to the cause of striving for a prosperous people, a strong country and an equitable and civilised society along the socialist orientation." (1998b:14-15)

When the political leadership in Hanoi issued Decree No. 29 on the exercise of democracy in the communes its aim was to solve the increased problems of violations of the people's mastery, such as bureaucracy, democratic deficit, inequality and bribery. The Party and government therefore embarked on steps to (re-)establish and "perfect" the democracy regime in localities (Government Committee for Organisation and Personnel, 2000). The promotion of grassroots democracy might also be seen as a reaction to the calls for more political participation and democratisation expressed by both more liberal Party members and international donor agencies. These calls largely reflect the assumption that democracy would positively contribute to economic development (Crawford, 1996). However, notions of democracy differ greatly between countries and political regimes. Vietnam's understanding of democracy, for example, is rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideas and the theory of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', a term which describes the concentration of power or forces in the proletariat rather than in capitalist classes (Ehrenberg, 1992). The proletariat would assume state power aiming to eliminate the old, capitalist relations of production, and to both place the productive forces under proletarian control and pave the way for the abolition of class distinctions culminating in a classless society (McLean, 1996).

Vietnamese socialist democracy was established during the revolution in 1945. In its official interpretation socialist democracy is a term used for a certain version of democracy, which emphasises social justice and is considered to be superior to bourgeois democracy (Wilczynski, 1981). Socialist democracy claims to be a social system created by people for people, ensuring equal and secret ballots, the absence of human exploitation and of hierarchical social classes, and the equality of rights and duties of all nationalities, including various minorities. There are, however, certain features of socialist governments and societies which constituted denials of democracy, such as the mono-party system of government, the domination of society's activities, thought and life by the all-empowered state, and the existence of horizontal social classes, i.e. between the Party elite, technocrats, successful professionals, unskilled workers, and peasants.

In Vietnam, socialist democracy is defined as a regime where people are the owners (*lam chu*), and where every interest and power belong to them (Government Committee for Organisation and Personnel, 2000). According to the theory of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', the working class can use this power to oppose the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and to suppress any attempts of counter-revolutions (Ehrenberg, 1992). The essential characteristic of Vietnamese socialist democracy is that the Communist Party plays the sole leading role. Vietnamese socialist democracy is not compatible with the requirements of the Western type of democracy, which is often based on the idea of polyarchy. This type of democracy is defined by Dahl (1989; 1998) and means rule by many, distinguished by institutions such as elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information, and associational autonomy. In contrast to the Western type of democracy, Vietnam's understanding of democracy follows the principle that "Vietnam's Communist Party is the country's leader, Vietnam's government is the country's manager, and Vietnamese people are the country's owners" (Dau Hoan Do et al., 1999:12). The Communist Party of Vietnam asserts that the regime is democratic in nature because it represents the interest of

the majority of the population, the peasants and the proletariat. The Party's legitimacy problem with this argument is that today only three per cent of the total population are Party members (Derbyshire and Derbyshire, 1989; Abuza, 2001).

Consequently, the Vietnamese notion of socialist democracy differs significantly from understandings of liberal democracy which are based on political pluralism, competition, and rule of law (Gutmann, 1993; Nuscheler, 1995). Although Vietnam has become a recipient of multi-lateral development assistance, funded by organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF, obligations of political conditionality have been followed up only reluctantly. Therefore, the Western donors' export of democracy through agendas such as good governance has not yet been able to encourage so-called polyarchical political features (Laasko, 1995). Despite many intra-party debates and changing economic realities, the monopoly of political power held by the Party is untouched (Abuza, 2001). Socialist democracy in Vietnam is implemented in a top-down manner in contrast to the kind of democracy that is being claimed by an active civil society. It has therefore the character more of a political project than a vision of rule by the people and as such, Vietnamese socialist democracy involves the risk of arbitrary use of power by political leaders. This makes many Western observers sceptical about the democratic substance of the whole political system. Critics therefore often point out Vietnam's totalitarian and authoritarian tendencies (Ehrenberg, 1999; Gill, 2000; Abuza, 2001).

Decree No. 29 on the exercise of democracy in communes as well as the various programmes of decentralisation have, however, introduced a new perspective and prospect for democratisation in Vietnam. Democracy is again discussed widely at all levels of state administration and in the localities. As understood by local cadres, democracy in the communes is closely linked with equitable socio-economic development, since more political transparency creates better conditions for rational decision-making and better allocation of productive resources. The Party secretary of *Dong Phuc* commune explained:

"If grassroots democracy was implemented correctly then there is no opportunity to violate the interest of local people. [However,] once people know and discuss they also have to carry out. If they fail to do so the authorities will treat them according to the law. Local people must know about policies and resolutions. Within a certain frame people are free. This is democracy." [DP#00218]

And the chairman of the People's Committee of *Dong Phuc* commune said:

"The People's Committee has the power to manage the commune and to force people to follow the law. According to grassroots democracy, people must know about the decisions and resolutions. If some organs failed to let people know the socio-economic situation would not improve." [DP#00216]

This understanding of democracy is prevalent in the communes. On the one hand, it reflects the view that the executive power of the People's Committees and government is more important and stronger than the legislative and judicial powers, which is to some extent in the hands of the people (Jørgensen et al., 2001). On the other hand, democracy is a bounded framework in which people are free to act and to raise their concerns. Their influence to change political and economic decision-making is limited due to the political tradition of Vietnamese socialist democracy. The above expressed understanding of democracy in the communes does not challenge the narrow notions of socialist democracy from below.

Consequently, the scope for the exercise of democracy in the communes is conscientiously constrained by the central level of political decision-making. There is a discrepancy between the degree of democracy at the national and local level. Grassroots democracy is an idea formulated by the Party, which has defined its political scope with

reference to Marxist doctrine. In contrast to advocates of liberalism, who developed a theory of civil society because they sought to democratise the state, Marxists developed a theory of state because they wanted to democratise civil society (Ehrenberg, 1999). Grassroots democracy in Vietnam therefore does not result from an emerging civil society claiming basic democratic political rights, but has been implemented from the centre to the locality.

This top-down character of Decree No. 29 places massive constraints on its implementation. Although officials of government institutions and administrative bodies at the provincial, district and commune level are advised to adjust their daily work to the principles of grassroots democracy, many officials still tend to see democracy as simply another administrative duty. They frequently argue that the people do not need to be informed about all matters (MacLean, 2001). Whether empowerment and sharing final decision-making are supported by the low-level cadres depend tremendously on their capabilities, capacities and conviction. These working attitudes hamper a continuous and rapid implementation process. Dau Hoan Do *et al.* (1999:26) report that grassroots democracy tends to be perceived as a political experiment, which materialises only when the government and the Party provide budgets for training courses, workshops, and regular meetings for government officials. The role of local authorities is crucial to the implementation of the exercise of democracy in the communes. Their attitude to the expression of opposing views and to representing the local people decides whether concerns at the grassroots level are transmitted to higher decision-making arenas or not.

It was inherently difficult for me as a foreign researcher to gain insights into these procedures and processes. The documents which report on which and whether petitions are handed in by the local cadres to the next higher administrative level were confidential. I therefore relied much on the study of policy documents and the observation of how these guidelines shaped political behaviour towards the local people in the communes.

6.5.3 Local politics: adhering to grassroots democracy?

Regulations

The regulation in Decree No. 29 outlines which work and decisions need to be informed and publicised by the local administration, which of their aspects need to be directly discussed and decided by the people, for which people need to be consulted, and which need to be supervised and inspected by the people before being decided by the state agencies. Thus, the four levels of participation are 1) information sharing, 2) consultation, 3) participation in decision-making, and 4) monitoring and supervision. This refers to Ho Chi Minh's statement "people know, people discuss, people supervise, and people execute" (Government Committee for Organisation and Personnel, 2000:n.p.).

Work directly discussed and decided by the people concerns infrastructure, funds, conventions and village rules, internal village affairs, infrastructure management boards, and interest groups for production and business. Work to be discussed or consulted by the people but eventually decided by the state and representative organs (People's Committee and People's Council) include socio-economic development plans, land use planning, public work organisation, territorial organisation, and health and clean water programmes. All information must be timely and open (Vuong Thi Hanh, 2001).

The Decree No. 29 points out that attention must be paid to the building of a "contingent of grassroots officials" (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1998b:19). Capacity-building in order to raise their educational level and professional skills, to link their work to political theory, and to adjust their work according to a useful set of tools and methods is found essential for the implementation of the Decree No. 29. Through capacity-building the grassroots officials should be capable to satisfy the requirement of their tasks in "the new revolutionary stage" (*ibid.*).

Decree No. 29 on the exercise of democracy in the communes reached the communes of *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau* of *Ba Be* district in 1999 and 2000 respectively. The communes' People's Councils and People's Committees received training by the Government Committee of Organisation and Personnel, a government agency very close to the Communist Party. The training material outlines that government activities and policy purposes need to be made more transparent, and the responsiveness to local people's needs and socio-economic conditions needs to be enhanced (Government Committee for Organisation and Personnel, 2000). Although the decree supports the establishment of management boards, self-managed groups, and a people's inspectorate, the way the decree is implemented adds more duties and obligations to the directly elected and representative organs of the commune administration, especially to the chairmen. Despite the possibility to establish non-governmental institutions at the commune level, this is not actively supported. In the studied communes self-managed groups have not been formed through the initiative of local residents. Institution-building for shared local governance between state, private sector and civil society largely depends on external inputs and funds from development agencies and international non-governmental organisations.

Grassroots peoples' rules

A Circular of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and its local implementation provide a more tangible focus on the link between democratic procedures and natural resource management issues. Here, the assumption that democratisation may result in better resource use practices can be tested against the environmental political practice in *Ba Be* district (for theoretical references see also sections 2.2.3, 3.4.3., 6.2.1). Circular No. 56/1999/TT-BNN-KL guides the elaboration of the convention on protecting and developing forests in the plains and mountain areas (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1999). The Circular states:

Foreword - "In the furtherance of Decree No. 29 [...] of the Government promulgating the regulation in democracy to be implemented in the communes [...] the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development provides the following guidance on the elaboration of the convention on protecting and developing forests."

Article 1. – "The law recognises the convention of the hamlets and villages in the plains and in the mountain areas as the rules of behaviour within the community and voluntarily observed by the community on the principle of 'majority consensus'. The regulation on protecting and developing forests in the convention of the hamlet community must, on the one hand, conform with the undertakings and policies of the Party and follow the prescription of law, and on the other, must inherit and develop the fine customs and habits of the localities." (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1999:17)

The circular wants to realise the link between central policy and Party rule and local rules as well as the 'good aspects' of traditional life in the communes. The new conventions on protecting and developing forests are to be elaborated in direct consultation with the local communities. A convention takes up the cultural and geographical particularities of the local communities and the natural environment. The conventions are therefore as multi-faceted as the diverse socio-cultural and ecological conditions in the mountain areas. The elaboration of a convention takes place in a local decision-making process. The consultation either includes the whole village community or representatives of each household.

The process is launched by MARD and the forest protection department. It assigns the commune People's Committee and the village headmen to organise village meetings. The convention elaborated in the communities is handed back to the commune People's

Council and Committee which seek for approval in the district People's Council. The approved convention is then sent back to the communities which again discuss the convention's implementation. Forest management boards at the commune level then ensure that the rules elaborated in the convention for protecting and developing forests are respected.

The elaboration of the convention turned out not to be as smooth as it was planned. Local cadres in *Dong Phuc* commune reported that this was a difficult task. They recalled:

"It was not possible to discuss the land use planning scheme with the villagers because of their low level of knowledge (...) Some people do not understand the content of the discussion, and this is when convention elaboration fails." [DP#00216]

Although his position reiterates the common assumption that local people lack of knowledge and are therefore not capable to come up with substantial suggestions, it points also to the fact that the capacity for environmental governance at the local level is limited. On the one hand, the people refuse to actively participate because of the political pressure they face with strengthened legal frameworks and rules. On the other, the long political inactivity due to the all-deciding Party and central state undermined their ability to get involved in self-administered political decision-making.

It is therefore rather the norm, that such locality-specific conventions get formulated by the state organs and not by the local people. In the case of *Nam Mau* the situation was entirely dominated by MARD and the high level agencies. Although formally, the villagers were invited to attend village meetings and to discuss constraints and rules of forest protection and development conventions, the paper itself was ready-prepared by the MARD officials and was merely distributed to the villagers. They did not have the opportunity to amend the wording or to put some of their considerations into the convention. This is an example where consultation of the people is bypassed by the governmental agency although the official circular explicitly advises it to respect local customs and to build conventions on the acceptance and participation of the local communities.

It can also be concluded that where policy details and natural resource management plans are deemed to be elaborated in a participatory effort, it is still likely that the popular participation is circumscribed by the political culture of top-down policy- and decision-making. The grassroots democracy is still too weak to be adopted in everyday politics at the commune and district levels and its potential of popular participation in local policy formulation is not brought into full play.

6.5.4 Party legitimacy

The political debate about the scope of democracy and the political participation of the public in daily politics has opened a new discussion about the role of the Party. Critical Vietnamese intellectuals ask whether the Party does not primarily follow its own interests and survival linked with those of the state by providing a little more room for local initiative and debate. These critics are aghast at the arrogance of the three per cent of Party members, who believe that they represent the interests of all people of Vietnam (Abuza, 2001). The aim of the critical voices is, however, not to undermine the system or to overthrow the Communist Party. They seek to broaden the political spectrum, scope of political debate, and political participation in order to strengthen the Party and to restore its legitimacy.

The relationship between the people and the political leadership is a recurrent theme throughout Vietnam's state history. Turley's review of political participation (1980:182) reveals that the responsiveness of political leaders to the mass public was particularly

strong during war times, when even open criticism of Party cadres by the public was allowed. In peace time popular participation was, however, always abandoned in favour of the intellectual superiority and plans of the political leaders. The desire to check bureaucratic abuse by permitting greater public scrutiny did not extend so far as to place either the state structure or the Party under popular control. The recreation of direct democracy was used to strengthen national solidarity with the Party during the wars. With the demonstrated openness of the Party concerning criticism it could retain its legitimacy (Turley, 1980).

The economic transition era appears to be the first peaceful period in which the democratic links between the political leaders and the public are openly discussed. Thayer (1995:48) reports that the need for political reforms of Vietnamese political institutions was identified as early as 1981. Leading intellectuals pointed out deficiencies in the political system and called for democratic reforms. Abuza (2001:17) recalls the short-lived period of *coi moi*, which means "openness" and was similar to the Russian idea of *perestroika*. It provided intellectuals with more freedom to express, to expose corruption, and to cajole the bureaucracy into implementing the necessary reforms. The central Party Committee's political report declared at that time that "the errors and shortcomings in economic and social leadership originated from shortcomings in the Party's ideological and organisational activity and cadre work" (Thayer, 1995:48). However, events in the year 1989, such as the massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators in China, the armed resistance activities of overseas Vietnamese in Vietnam, and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe later in the year brought the period of political liberalisation to a close. The Party banned public discussion and the loosening of the Party's monopoly role (Thayer, 1995). Since then the Vietnamese transition has been characterised by the political leadership's focus on economic development in the absence of political reforms. Vietnam proceeds along a "third way" as a compromise between capitalism and socialism while remaining firmly committed to the socialist ideology and Communist rule (Fahey, 1997; McCormick, 1998).

In summary, Vietnam's recent reorientation towards democracy is a response to the shortfalls of the central government to reach the locality and to ensure that the policy programmes and procedures are implemented according to the overall understanding of equal development for all. As was shown, the Vietnamese understanding of democracy differs significantly from the Western notions of democracy. In Vietnam, democracy is a political project steered by the only political force, the Communist Party. There is scope for democratic participation at the lower levels of the state administration but in general, it is rather limited.

The grassroots democracy decree was launched, firstly, as an attempt to strengthen local governance structures and to make local government institutions more responsive and accountable to the various problems in the communes. Secondly, it was also a political move by the Party which is alert to its popular legitimacy. In the process of ongoing economic, social and political transformation the Party is urged to respond to unforeseen social and political drives that emerge from an economically highly active civil society, which now is influenced more by external ideas and ideologies than ever before.

An example for democratic procedures and enhanced popular participation is given with the elaboration of forest protection and development conventions. Here, the local constituency was consulted in environmental governance issues. It turns out, however, that their inclusion in local political and economic decision-making and policy-formulation is difficult. Many of the mountain peoples refuse to actively participate in local decision-making. This shows that after a long time of Party dominance and top-down politics it is difficult to build on an active civil society. The Party is ambiguous about the processes an increased popular participation might trigger (see also Thayer, 1995; Gray, 1999). On the

one hand, it encourages local participation, on the other, it fears the emergence of strong civil society forces that may oppose the Party and challenge the overall programmes according to which Vietnam is proceeding with its renovation.

6.6 The Controversial Use of Decentralisation and Democracy

The chapter shed light on the politically nested mountain communes, following the argument that the political framework of a nation-state like Vietnam essentially shapes the opportunities for the local level and peripheral areas to be included in political processes. The chapter therefore picked up on the international development claim that calls for more decentralisation and democratisation in states which obviously have difficulties to come to terms with development problems in the political and geographical periphery. This claim prominently appears on the mountain development agenda and emphasises that development in marginal or peripheral regions is better guaranteed with a decentralised political structure and democratic procedures, thus when more scope for popular political participation is provided. This claim needs, however, to be considered against the political setting and political culture of individual nation-states. In the case of Vietnam, it can be summarised that Vietnam's political setting, the political culture and the governance structures typically circumscribe the scope for popular participation as well as an upward flow of information and innovations from the localities to the central state. However, Vietnam successfully adopts international development rhetoric. In its recent reform period, it presents both processes of decentralisation and democratisation. Yet, by taking a closer look Vietnam's notions of decentralisation and democratisation show characteristics that may not lead to the proposed benefits of decentralised and democratised forms of governance and political organisation.

Regarding the concept of decentralisation, the Vietnamese version of the decentralised state is largely a system of delegation. Administrative tasks are devolved to the localities but without devolving also political powers. This kind of decentralisation is called deconcentration where the central state retains all its political and decision-making power. Most of the benefits of decentralisation, such as the improvement of efficiency of public services, better governance conditions, and the empowerment of citizens, get dismissed by the overall power claim of the Communist Party. It is tremendously wary of social initiatives from the civil society and therefore restricts its scope of political participation.

Also with respect to democratisation Vietnam shows deficiencies that reduce the beneficial effects of more democratic structures and procedures in political decision-making. Democratisation in Vietnam is not claimed from below, as when an emerging civil society claims its political rights, but is launched from above. The Party has been proactive in bringing the democratisation issue to the fore of political discussions. Its driving motive is to ensure its legitimacy in the population by making some concessions to the citizenry that is to be better informed, consulted, and given some scope for active participation in political affairs in the localities. This form of democratisation launched from above and, in a first attempt, confined to the strengthening of the commune democracy, indicates that the Vietnamese notion of democracy differs significantly from the understanding of democracy as a pluralist system of power sharing, discourse, negotiation, and consensus-finding between different political forces of a society. The socialist democracy of Vietnam is a system of delegation and representation. The Communist Party is the seemingly unquestioned leader and decides as the representative of all people in the name of the people, for the people but without the democratic participation of the people. This notion of democracy bears the inherent problem of autocracy by a small political elite that is unable to represent all groups of the ethnically and culturally diverse Vietnamese society.

There is the prevalent problem of arbitration, corruption and of a biased polity that pursues its particular interests.

Despite all these concerns, there is scope for democratisation and for popular participation. Although it is still confined to the very local level of the commune and is therefore limited in representing a political turn, the democratic procedures that are prescribed by the Party and the government may build the active involvement and the waking-up from a long-lasting political abstinence of the Vietnamese citizenry. At the commune level, the interactions between the constituency, the people's representatives, the Party and the state administration are a first political arena in which the local people can develop a political understanding and ability to take responsibility in local politics. On the other hand, the microcosm of politics in mountain communes may also result in the coexistence of different political systems that do not interfere with each other. There may be an institutionalised and well-functioning commune democracy in the locality which is nested in the system of democratic centralism and Party rule of the national political setting. This provides the local level with a certain degree of autonomy which cannot be used, however, to change the political setting and political culture substantially from below. It rather is a form of democratisation that keeps the countryside quiet.

All these national particularities of a political setting and a political culture have to be taken into account when decentralisation and democratisation are suggested as concepts for attaining better political performance and ultimately better policy frameworks for coming to terms with national and local development problems. Concerning Vietnam's mountain problematique, it may be concluded that the political setting plays a decisive role in its emergence. The political state organisation and the concentration of political power in the centre and the Party have hindered the inclusion of politically peripheral and typically under-represented groups of the society, such as the ethnic mountain peoples for example. The claim for decentralisation and democratisation in order to enhance the political voice of the lower administrative levels and the politically marginalised population groups may therefore be right and undoubtedly necessary to introduce a political turn towards more democratic procedures and political power-sharing. Both concepts, however, require long-term learning processes of both the Communist regime and the Vietnamese constituency. The Party may be urged to gradually distribute political and financial powers to the civil society. However, much needs to be done still and additional measures are required. Capacity building as well as political and theory building of models of democracy in transitional countries are necessary in order to enhance our understanding for diverse forms of democracy next to the Western notions of direct or representative democracy.

Regarding the notions of the mountain problematique with its structural element of political and social marginalisation of the mountain population, much effort is required to make the mountain people active partners in the common political task of sustainable mountain development.

Chapter 7

Re-appraising the Mountain Problematique

7.1 Vietnam's Mountain Problematique

This thesis set out to examine the relationship between people and the mountain environment. It shed light on the direct human-nature relations in the northern mountain region of Vietnam, but more so, it was interested in exploring structures of knowledge and environmental and political claims regarding mountain areas. The study worked with the concept of mountains as politicised environments. Mountains are placed in dense webs of interests formulated by a great number of actors, both located within as well as outside the mountain regions. As the resources in the plains begin to decline, as the lowland population grows wealthier and as ever more international travellers seek for new recreational ground, the resource endowment and the characteristics of the mountain landscapes are revalued and become goods of great demand. The growing interests in the mountains increase the struggle over the economic and political control over the mountain areas. Being loosely organised and little represented in the national governments, mountain peoples in many countries find themselves in a situation where the influence by the lowland population grows whereas their entitlements and control mechanisms decline. Their socio-economic and socio-political situation becomes all the more tense and their scope for mountain-specific action and initiatives gets more circumscribed.

The process of the politicisation of mountains largely lacks theoretical explanation. This thesis attempts to contribute to its enhancement by discussing the international mountain development debate and the discursive plurality of Vietnam's mountain problematique. I have taken a limited social constructivist approach to the study of various versions of the mountain problematique, which does not deny that there are real mountains and real problems. However, I emphasise that there are many contested representations of mountains as well as numerous versions of the mountain problematique.

The thesis provided a new perspective on the difficulties in development and natural resource use in Vietnam's mountain areas, also found in the mountains of China or Tibet or Kyrgyzstan. It applied an analytical framework largely focusing on political aspects of mountain development, policy and politics in general and in a socialist country in transition in particular. It drew largely on primary empirical data collected as oral testimonies of the experiences of the mountain peoples in *Ba Be* district of *Bac Kan* province. These accounts reflected the historical and current process of the socialist and economic transitions in Vietnam. The thesis linked the mountain peoples' testimonies with national and international mountain development discourses. It thereby combined endogenous views by the mountain peoples with exogenous views of the mountain problematique by policy actors and scholars typically situated outside the mountain regions. Both endogenous and exogenous views were interpreted through my scientifically and personally situated

knowledge as researcher. Although my scholarly attempt was inclusive and (self-)critical, others might have identified them differently and may have come up with another set of alternative views.

Vietnam's mountains and their various and changing representations were scrutinised primarily by the study of underlying structures, identified as historical legacies, political-economic conditions, structures of knowledge, and ideational frameworks. The study argued that a number of prevalent problems in Vietnam's mountains are triggered by these structural conditions. The relations between the wider world and the mountain regions and how they contribute to mountain development problems are also an issue discussed in the international mountain development debate. On the basis of the discourses pursued in this debate, the study elaborated on the discursive plurality of mountain problems, historical, policy-related, and political issues. The study proceeded by using the following four thematic analyses: 1) discursive analysis; 2) historical analysis; 3) policy and policy process analysis; and 4) organisational analysis. Each looked at Vietnam's mountain problematique from a different angle. The discursive analysis ran throughout the thesis but was most comprehensive in scrutinising the contested representations of mountains shaping the international mountain development debate and the formulation and delivery of policy in the national and local arenas. Political ecology and a discussion of theories of democracy served as the theoretical underpinnings of this study's analysis.

7.1.1 The historical dimension

The historical analysis focused on development and change in Vietnam's northern mountain areas. It revealed that what is considered as today's mountain problematique is not a recent phenomenon but has been triggered over time. Many of the recent problems in Vietnam's mountains have their origins in the past projects of Vietnamisation and the socialist economy. The thesis herewith outlined a particular version of Vietnam's mountain problematique. It identified its roots in the historical events of the last century, such as the struggles for independence, the importance for the *Kinh* people to bring the mountain peoples on their side, the promises of autonomy and self-determination in the mountain regions, and the subsequent projects of assimilation, economic exploitation and resettlement processes between the uplands and the lowlands.

This version of the mountain problematique emphasises the socio-cultural characteristics of Vietnam's multi-ethnic society. It points at biases and attitudes of superiority by the *Kinh* majority towards the mountain ethnic groups. Although Vietnam's Constitution outlines a fair and equal multi-ethnic nation, the *Kinh* people always dominated politics and the economy, providing the mountain peoples with only little scope for political representation and influence in policy-making. Their subsistence economies were largely transformed by the economic strategies of an emerging and transforming national socialist economy. They both altered political-economic and socio-cultural conditions for economic and cultural life in the mountains. Moreover, they thoroughly modified the modes of production and the social organisation of natural resource use in formerly subsistent mountain communities. The processes of incorporation of mountain areas into socialist economies and the centralisation of political and economic power in the lowlands were also experienced by the former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan or the mountain and rural areas in China (Stone, 1992; Muldavin, 2000; Omuraliev, 2002). In the so-called postcommunist era after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the reform politics, the mountain areas of these nation-states have experienced another major turn, namely the capitalist drive of a globalised economy and of international business and development agreements.

In Vietnam, the recent economic reforms and the combination of market economy and socialism tend to widen the gap between different groups of the population and

between the lowlands and uplands regarding living standard and well-being. Although the reforms have brought about many and in general desirable changes such as property and land tenure rights, market structures, credits and governmental development programmes there have been tremendous changes in policies and the enforcement of new rules and control. This has created a situation of great uncertainty, especially for people in the political periphery who are usually less well informed and lack of direct representatives in the higher administrative hierarchy. For some of them the changing rules of the game meant a loss of livelihoods safety nets previously supported directly by the government and the Party. All these changes and reforms in Vietnam's recent transition have largely taken place in the absence of political movement. Within the mountain areas, the reforms have benefited approximately half of the mountain population, leaving at least the other half in severe conditions as well as structurally and politically excluded from the increased economic opportunities. Although factors such as population growth and resource depletion contribute to the actual situation of widespread poverty in the mountain areas of Vietnam, it is also the lack of mountain-specific policy frameworks and support mechanisms that have caused a selective and progressive marginalisation process among the mountain population. The progressing marginalisation of poor people in peripheral regions is a problem shared also by lowlander communities in remote rural areas. By confining this problem to mountain areas, as some of the arguments in the international mountain development debate tend to suggest, means keeping that relationship hidden. A consequence of this may be that political action uniting the interests of the poor and marginalised is kept off the agenda which is typically formulated for mountain areas only.

The version of Vietnam's mountain problematique constructed in this study differs substantially from the version by Vietnam's political leadership. The latter identifies the mountain peoples and their natural resource behaviour as the main causes for environmental degradation and poverty in the mountain areas. This version needs to be criticised as it lacks of analytical depth and reiterates the orthodoxies of vicious circles of population growth, poverty and environmental degradation, conceptualised as being confined to mountain areas alone. The version the thesis comes up with also differs from the representations of mountains discussed in the international mountain development debate. It is a more specific, more complex version that focuses on the diversity and heterogeneity of environment and society in mountain areas. The international mountain development debate, on the other hand, operates more with generalised notions to generate policy-relevant recommendations that apply for the case of mountains in many different mountain regions of the world. Both the specific and the generalised may be criticised. Working with my specific version of Vietnam's mountain problematique means being confronted with many hurdles on different levels and prioritising action may be difficult. Nevertheless, the insights this study currently delivers can be used by government agencies, international development organisations or researchers interested in getting involved at the micro, meso or macro level. For each it provides insights and a critical analysis emphasising the need for structural and political cultural changes. This corresponds with the message of the international mountain development debate. Namely, that it focuses on issues such as global partnership, better policy frameworks and governance structures to come to terms with the prevalent problems in the world's mountain areas. However, a problem which this thesis repeatedly highlights is that the proposals for sustainable mountain development are all too often unconditional and are frequently not pursued meaningfully because of a lack of political will.

7.1.2 The policy aspects

The thematic analysis concerned with Vietnam's environmental policy processes showed that the above analytical misconceptions of enclosed systems of downward spirals and

vicious circles reiterated with the government's version of the mountain problematique still nurture policy formulations. Although the forest policy and biodiversity conservation frameworks are being designed in order to mitigate further encroachment on the forests and the biodiversity resources and stimulating socio-economic development by the intensification of lowland agriculture, the policies produced ambiguous rather than positive policy outcomes.

The economic transition has brought all sorts of profound social, economic and ecological changes. However, there is not a lot of difference in the political sphere as well as in the attitude of bureaucrats and technocrats. Policies tend to be formulated and implemented in the top-down manner that is characteristic to a centralised government and the claim of the Communist Party to know what is good for the entire people. However, there are other issues such as new market opportunities which change the importance of local politics and challenge policy implementation, as has been shown for forestland allocation policy implementation in *Dong Phuc* and *Nam Mau* commune. In some areas there have been tremendously positive changes, such as in the overall increase of food production or the land tenure rights that make people eligible for getting credit and loans. However, in other areas, such as in forest protection and biodiversity conservation there is still little change although people are now much more frightened and frustrated because the control mechanisms are rigidly enforced on them or the compensation mechanisms do not work for them. The resource users in the mountains are increasingly supposed to fulfil obligations and responsibilities in the public interest mainly. This causes contradictions between the national and local welfare or between public and private rights to resources. The current policy frameworks are unable to adequately link them and to create mutual benefits. Where control mechanisms are being enforced in a rigorous manner they reduce the scope for household decision-making and trigger the social and political marginalisation among mountain peoples. In the research sites of *Ba Be* at least 35 per cent of the households face struggles due to progressive marginalisation.

The environmental policies reproduce the predominant structures of knowledge about Vietnam's mountain peoples and environments in the policy realm. At the national level, they are shaped by the *Kinh*'s claim of overall social and political influence as a majority group, still revealing traits of civilising projects for the minority population of 54 distinctive ethnic groups. The policy document of the Five Million Hectares Afforestation National Programme, for example, clearly identifies the mountain dwellers as shifting cultivators and resource destroyers that need to be educated to become resource protectors. Additionally, at the international level, the structures of knowledge prevalent in the environmental policy formulation and implementation are strongly influenced by a financially well equipped conservation community that also has the tendency to downplay local people's livelihood struggles. Its priority lies on the conservation of significant biodiversity resources for future generations, thus representatively acting in a national and international interest. These structures of knowledge, that tend to assume what is good for the mountain areas and the mountain peoples, create policies which neglect and deprioritise the socio-economic development of the mountain population. Their design lacks of consultation with the mountain peoples. Rather, these policies express a growing awareness among the lowland political leadership about the long-term consequences of environmental degradation in the uplands. The policies tend to enhance lowlanders' control over the upland region and the people who live there.

Among the mountain population a range of reactions and policy responses can be found. This situation of diverse policy response points out the difficulties with central level policy formulation and the delivery of governmental services and policy frameworks to the ethnically diverse mountain regions. In the studied village communities of *Ba Be* district, official policy and local policy practice repeatedly collides. The central policies have

caused severe problems and conflicts at various interfaces which so far have not been resolved. Interests in the biodiversity resources and concepts of nature conservation and wilderness, for example, tend to collide between the international and national level. At the interface between the national and local level, social worlds of the *Kinh* and the mountain peoples clash because of socio-cultural differences and incompatible systems of value. At the very local level conflicts may also emerge among the different mountain peoples due to resource claims and the struggles for better livelihood opportunities. In sum, the environmental policies of forest management and biodiversity conservation produce harm rather than being able to come to terms with the problems of environmental degradation and poverty as important elements of Vietnam's mountain problematique.

7.1.3 The political factors

The relationships between the lowland and upland population and the structures of knowledge about mountain livelihoods and peoples were further examined from a political science point of view. The political organisation of the state and the society was considered as being another influential underlying structure, identified as crucial for the emergence and reproduction of this thesis' version of Vietnam's mountain problematique. The thesis looked critically at the political setting and the political culture in Vietnam. It worked with an understanding that political setting and culture are the main referential background for all policies and programmes in which mountain development issues are being debated and implemented. The mountain communes were conceptualised as being embedded in this political setting which is difficult to change through political initiative by the mountain peoples alone. There is an unequal reflexivity in this system. Mountain peoples have to take in more from the political framework than they are able to effect with the scope for participation and autonomy given to them, such as by the grassroots democracy concept.

This perspective is a novelty in the study of mountain development in a socialist country in transition. Theoretically it made use of the discussion about democracy and the concepts of democratic decentralisation and good governance. However, the study was only able to give some glimpses of the link between politics and mountain development by shedding light on the relationship between Communist political leaders and the mountain peoples. It gave an idea of the many notions of democracy in Western and Vietnamese understandings, the importance of the political culture, and the way concepts such as decentralisation and democratisation are used and how they get filled with diverse sets of ideas. The thesis finds that there are democratic features in the rather rigid political system of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam but that it is mostly confined to the local level which is not well linked to broader, more influential arenas. This combination of democratic procedures and Communist political monopoly found in Vietnam, and to a similar extent also in China, let me argue for a broadened notion of democracy that can engage with governance issues in socialist countries in transition. Strengthening the theoretical framework of thinking about democracy with experiences and insights from the postcommunist era is certainly a future research task to be pursued in the field of political science and development studies. By identifying the scopes for democratic procedures and initiative in a Communist-ruled country the mountain development agenda may be brought forward more deliberately. Having identified these grounds, its arguments for issues of governance and democracy can be brought to the fore of the political debate associated with the various versions of the mountain problematique. This means again to embark on politically sensitive terrains not much liked by the Communist Party. By working with a revised set of democracy theories and ideas taking into account the combination of formally rivalling political systems there may be less reluctance to consider political reform and to eventually give more voice to the people on the ground.

Currently the situation still is such that the overarching central state and the ruling political elite thoroughly control the concentration of political power in the hands of a few. Although the recent reform processes have formally given the representative organs, such as the National Assembly and the People's Councils, more real decision-making powers their political capacities are still rather weak. Also the mountain peoples' representative committees are not necessarily in a position from which they could or would want to pursue the interests of those whom they represent. The system of delegation controlled by the Communist Party strongly acts for securing the Party's legitimacy in the long term.

Research in the mountain communes has shown, that at the lower levels of the state hierarchy democratic procedures in local political and economic decision-making are more institutionalised and provide a certain degree of commune autonomy. At this level the aspirations and needs of the population find entrance into the local development plans and resolutions of the communes and the districts. So far, the scope for commune democracy allows only to take decisions about issues of only minor relevance and importance for the national welfare and political development. However, some mechanisms for locality-specific rule-making, as was shown in the examples of the conventions on forest protection and commune development plans, already apply. The upward flow of socio-political and socio-economic information to the higher decision-making levels is usually still restricted both by cultural and political practice. The principle of democratic centralism is used flexibly by the political elite who primarily decides about the magnitude of popular participation and representation of popular interests.

The discussion about the political setting in which the mountain communes and other rural political units are embedded shows that it is generally not possible for them to claim democratic rights and to build on local initiatives. They are closely watched by the Communist Party which is the leader of the country and the implementer of socialist democracy. The notions of democracy and the concepts of decentralisation and governance differ from the common understanding of the international development community. Vietnam's state structure is deconcentrated but not decentralised as democratic or fiscal decentralisation would suggest. This political setting allows only little scope for democratic participation, mostly found at the local level in the communes. Regarding sustainable mountain development, the political setting constrains the attempt to build capacity of mountain peoples to become equal partners in policy-making processes for mountain areas. The current political setting represents an overly rigid and inflexible political framework, dominated by a lowlander political elite that does not stand for the interests of the mountain peoples. The few official organs such as the Committee for Ethnic Minorities (and Mountain Areas) and the Council of Nationalities cannot make up for this lack of political representation of culturally and ethnically distinctive groups.

The investigation of the concepts of democratisation and decentralisation showed that they experience in the case of Vietnam, and most likely also in other transitional countries, a reinterpretation at the national and sub-national levels. The contents are different while the labels stay the same. It is therefore necessary to be aware of the constraints that these reinterpretations place on the implementation and pursuit of the experiment of sustainable development, and more specifically sustainable mountain development.

7.2 The World's Mountain Problematique

Many of the mountain development problems and their underlying structures in Vietnam can be found in other mountain regions of the world. By looking into the field of mountain studies it is found that mountains as geographically distinctive landscapes share similar experiences in terms of human and political development. However, generalisation is

difficult as mountains are characterised by diversity regarding the natural environment and the peoples who populate them. While in one region, for example, the mountains are places of disadvantage for mountain agriculture due to limited arable land, shallow soils or slope gradient, in others they provide more favourable conditions than the lowlands because they receive more precipitation or benefit from rather moderate temperatures (see for example Blaikie, 1984; Jenik, 1997). While the mountains are in one region home to an autochthonous population that have been living there for many centuries (e.g. the Berber in the High Atlas)(Funnell and Parish, 2001), in others the socio-cultural pattern is ethnically more diverse as a number of groups have migrated to the mountain areas at different periods in time or have been resettled by the central authority (Salemink, 2000; McKinnon and Michaud, 2000).

Despite the difficulty to generalise, there is a shared consensus among mountain scholars and policy-makers that mountains are geographical units which tend to have difficulties in terms of development and economic growth. However, the problems of mountain development are largely socially constructed. The problem definitions and versions of the mountain problematique reflect numerous interests and diverse policy agendas of non-mountain policy actors. They rely on a number of contested representations of mountains, each of which is an expression of interests in the mountains as pools of biodiversity and cultural heritage, economic potential, or development periphery. The international mountain development debate identifies both tangible problems as well as promotes particular social constructions of mountain environments and mountain peoples. These problems and their constructions emerge both from within the mountains as well as from the lowlands.

Much of what these problems and their construction constitute is not well supported by empirical data and there is a lot of scope for interpretation by actors who are largely situated outside the mountain areas. It may therefore not represent the endogenous views of mountain development struggles experienced by the mountain population. The debate is prone to miss the interests of the mountain population and serves mainly outsiders' interests. To share a certain version of the mountain problematique, in the same way as that of the crisis narrative, helps policy actor groups that seek justification and funding for their research, administrative, or political interventions in the mountain areas pursue specific political and social agendas. My investigation of the mountain problematique claims to be conceptually and analytically more enabling and less reductionist than the crisis narrative to provide insights into a local and national mountain development context as well as into the discursive plurality of mountain problems.

On the other hand, the shared experiences of challenges encountered with mountain development has helped institutionalise the discussion about the future of the world's mountains. It serves as the common ground for mountain scholars, governmental and international development agencies to work on specific policy frameworks for mountain regions. As the discussions go on, it may be likely that stakeholder participation will get more inclusive and that the politically weak and under-represented mountain peoples are taken on board of the international mountain development debate. Of course, taking them on board and consulting them does not necessarily mean that they get respected as real partners or that most of the current shortcomings in policy frameworks could be eradicated. Again, it is primarily the political commitment of those in power and their willingness to share political and economic power that decide about the impact of more inclusive stakeholder participation.

The recently terminated International Year of Mountains 2002 provides first examples of the changing nature of international mountain development discourse. Although it is still largely led by scholars and government agencies based in the lowlands, representatives of upland peoples and communities took part in the many events, such as

workshops and conferences or the Global Mountain Summit in October 2002. The intensification of the debate about sustainable mountain development has so far led to a number of declarations and action plans that show an attempt to put sustainable mountain development policy frameworks into practice (World Mountain Symposium, 2002b; Adelboden Declaration, 2002; paragraph 42 in United Nations, 2002; Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, 2002).

Despite the many achievements that found their expression during the celebrations of the International Year of Mountains, the plans for sustainable mountain development tend to be over-ambitious. It is difficult to estimate whether it is possible to generate positive policy and political effects in the near future. At least, there seems to be a consensus that mountain peoples need to be empowered and their capacities to act as active partners in the international mountain development debate need to be strengthened. This claim seems to be nurtured by the generic benefits assumed by democratic and decentralised governance structures. Suggestions concerning the political organisation of the state largely point at decentralised and federalist state models. It is claimed that these structures may provide more scope for self-determination and sustainable development plans in the localities where they are also elaborated. However, much advocacy work is still needed in this regard. It is foremost the political will of national governments and the political leaderships that is essential for the pursuit of the sustainable mountain development agenda with its emphasis on empowerment and democratic decentralisation. In Vietnam, the claims for more empowerment, capacity-building to strengthen political action and representation, and local level decision-making opportunities are still largely withheld by the powerful lowland political elite, namely the members of the Communist Party.

7.3 The Mountains' Futures: Sustainable Mountain Development and Beyond

The completion of this thesis fell together with the end of the International Year of Mountains 2002. What was outlined as an overly unspecific and generic goal of "helping the poor and marginalised people living in mountain areas by drawing attention to their cultural heritage" (FAO, 2000:13) found its expression in a great number of events, conferences and activities dedicated to the world's mountains and the mountain peoples. The final results of the International Year of Mountains are a number of declarations and conventions that express some kind of political commitment of governments and international development organisations to help local partner organisations and mountain peoples to put sustainable mountain development into practice.

A number of countries from Europe, Asia and Latin America have taken a leading role in this debate. Their political and policy mechanisms may serve as models or examples of how to address, modify and experiment with political structures and policy frameworks that work for mountain regions in other countries with considerable shares of mountains (Villeneuve, 2002). Among the many suggestions derived from the mountain development actions, the revaluation of mountain areas is given high priority. The claim thereby is that mountain peoples must be given more voice to express their opinions and needs, and must therefore be integrated into mainstream political processes (World Mountain Symposium, 2002a). Decentralisation is suggested as the way forward in the political sphere, whereas the principle of subsidiarity is considered as one of the most important instruments for helping to bridge the gap between the central lowlands and the marginal areas.

The trend in the international sustainable mountain development debate therefore also indicates, that the traditional approach of addressing mountain development problems with technical and policy means is being enhanced by a strong focus on improvements of

political structures and supporting mechanisms (Adelboden Declaration, 2002). In order to come to terms with mountain development problems, the debate tends to emphasise the transformation of the underlying structures that trigger them rather than cosmetic programmes to temporarily lessen one or several of them, such as poverty, environmental degradation and so on. It suggests, for example, that mountain areas should not be protected from globalisation and further capitalist penetration. Rather their position must be strengthened to resist unwanted and forced accumulation processes as well as economic exploitation. Again, this points at an enhanced participation of the mountain peoples and the civil society in general, pro-mountain policies and support mechanisms, and improved institutional and political structures that support democratic decentralisation processes.

However, the international mountain development debate after the International Year of Mountains 2002 tends to remain relatively unspecific. What has been achieved and what needs to be done in terms of research, policy programmes, and political reforms? How can the underlying structures of mountain development be changed? Derived from the findings of this thesis for each individual level of the local, sub-national, national, and global level an agenda that goes beyond can be outlined.

Starting at the local level where people-environment relations are most direct and the struggle for livelihoods and conservation is most contested, further insights are vital with regard to local politics and the opportunities and constraints for combining local rule with national legal frameworks. It is not sufficient to devolve responsibility for environmental protection and sustainable livelihoods to the local level without carefully considering the capacities and capabilities of the local institutional arrangements. Mountain peoples may know well what could be done in their immediate local context but they certainly do not speak with one voice and do not all agree on the same policy and action required. We cannot assume everything will be fine when we let local people decide because they are challenged by structural conditions such as the restriction of their livelihoods and the exclusion on forests. Part of the problem in the mountain localities is a much more general one, namely about the notions of conservation and mountain specificities and difficulties in policy implementation. From there enduring contradictions emerge in the attitudes and policy delivery towards the mountain areas. Therefore, it is necessary to find a common ground that is responsive to the legitimate calls on mountain resources from the local as well as national and international community. Answers to why-questions, such as 'why is there environmental degradation and social and political marginalisation?' may show general and particular ways forward to develop supporting political mechanisms for sustainable mountain development in the respective nation-states.

Such a research agenda engages with different types of political systems and the power sharing between different levels of competence and decision-making. How political culture and policy style impede or support pro-mountain policy frameworks is crucial to find out for every country or regions with considerable shares of mountain territory and people living there. A politically engaged international sustainable mountain development agenda would want to know more of the structural pre-conditions and the opportunities for change in order to come up with more specific, tailor-made ideas for sustainable mountain development in individual nation-states.

At the international level, the mountain development debate got firmly established during the last decade. The Bishkek Mountain Platform is the latest and politically most important declaration concerning sustainable mountain development in the future (Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, 2002). It was issued at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, which was the culminating global event of the International Year of Mountains 2002, and handed in to the United Nations General Assembly on 6th November 2002. The Bishkek Mountain Platform aims at providing guidance and a structure for all stakeholders to act together towards sustainable mountain development at all scales, from local to global. The

Platform includes three elements, namely principles for sustainable mountain development, a declaration, and a framework for action (see Table 7-1).

Approaches	Principles	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory • Multi-stakeholder • Multi-disciplinary • Eco-regional • Decentralised • Long-term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidiarity • Human diversity • Human rights • Gender equity • Environment • Scientific and indigenous knowledge 	<p><i>International level:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Nations Resolution • International Partnership <p><i>Regional (supra-national) level:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional focus • Regional cooperation • Regional agreements <p><i>National level:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance • Policy advocacy • Mountain-specific data • Investment and compensation mechanisms • Providing access <p><i>Local level:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local stewardship • Local development

Table 7-1: Overview of principles and action plan Bishkek Mountain Platform

The international sustainable mountain development agenda emphasises, finally, the need for strengthening international partnership (FAO et al., 2002). As possible partners it identifies national governments, International Year of Mountain national committees, local authorities, international organisations/UN agencies, regional organisations, NGOs, the private sector, universities and research institutes, associations of farmers and other users of mountain natural resources, and other major groups. It is outlined that every partner shall contribute to the goals of the partnership according to its own priorities and is fully responsible for its own actions. Each of these partners then may initiate partnership actions that should directly relate to Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 and to other relevant sections of the report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 (United Nations, 2002). It may be criticised, however, that as these documents are rather generic, partnership actions may be proceeded that follow particular interests, neglecting the threefold nature of sustainable development. The proposal for International Partnership for Sustainable Mountain Development does not provide monitoring and evaluation guidelines and conflict resolution toolboxes. The proposal also does not reflect on the various representations and the politicised nature of mountains. It seems to assume that by improving partnerships, the risk of conflict between actors interested in the mountain areas for various regions is reduced. Based on the analysis provided by this thesis, I argue that without succinct analyses of the social and political agendas of the potential partners the marginalisation processes of the mountain peoples are going to continue. Only a small number of the above partners actually take real interest in changing the relationships between weak and powerful policy actors, thus between mountain peoples and the lowlanders.

It appears that the international mountain development debate still has not much to say about the specific ways forward, although it has come up with strategy papers that

show a certain commitment to put policy into practice. Having agreed on a number of conventions and declarations there is currently not much more need to strengthen and further institutionalise the international debate more. However, it should grow qualitatively more accurate and politically more powerful, for example, by taking the local level and the discursive plurality of mountains and mountain development problems into account and to learn something different from the struggles and contradictions international policy debate creates in the national and local arenas.

How the relationships between the local, national and international levels develop over time is key to a future research agenda on sustainable mountain development. This thesis tried to show to researchers, development practitioners and policy-makers that the creation of support mechanisms and the monitoring of policy programmes and transformation of political structures are crucial topics to be addressed in their attempt to work towards sustainable mountain development. It worked from different perspectives, applying a flexible focal lens on the local, national and global policy arenas. It finds that a future research focus should be adjusted to scrutinise the relation between better governance structures, thus decentralised and democratic governance, and the performance of the mountain environment more thoroughly. Such a research agenda may derive a lot of analytical depth and policy-relevance when working with the conception of mountains as politicised landscapes as it is able to take into account the interlinkages between the international, national, sub-national and local levels of policy- and decision-making in all questions concerning mountain development and sustainable natural resource use in fragile ecosystems.

Epilogue

In December 2002 a member of the Mountain Forum e-mailing list placed a message of striking straightforwardness. This person asked "how a declaration of any kind is helpful to mountain communities?". The response by other Mountain Forum members was rich and meaningful. It reflected both hope and criticism regarding the interlinkages and potentials between high level knowledge generation and international agreements with positive changes in the mountain communities. This ambivalence was also prevalent during the pursuit of this study. On the one hand, the research and advocacy activities of the last ten years have informed the international policy arena with substantial knowledge of mountain livelihoods and peoples. To this body of knowledge this study intended to contribute. It advocates for an understanding of complexity and diversity typical to mountain areas as well as to its development problems. It wants to raise the awareness for the politicised nature of mountains and the contested representations and agendas of development and growth. The international sustainable mountain development debate shows that also in the global policy arenas the knowledge of the problem complexes has been enlarged. Underlying structures are being identified as sitting at the core of many different versions of the mountain problematique. Building on these bodies of knowledge, the declarations recently issued are syntheses of inputs and discussions led in the common attempt to find a way to put sustainable mountain development into practice. Especially the Mountain Platform, the declaration endorsed by high level representatives at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, is of significant value. Although it is far from any legally binding obligation and commitment, the declaration was sent to the United Nations General Assembly for incorporation in the General Assembly's resolutions. The declaration serves as a rationale for policy planning and project implementation that recognises the sensitivities of mountain regions and the marginalised situation of mountain peoples. The declarations then are a way to assure that the mountain peoples voices are being heard. At a much smaller scale, of course, this study intended to work in the same direction: to make the mountain peoples voices in Vietnam heard and to inform scholars and policy-makers about the difficult relationships between the mountain and lowland population, the problems with today's central policies, the political setting and the continuing struggle for local livelihood security and civic freedom.

According to the other, more critical stance regarding declarations for sustainable mountain development the response pointed out that declarations were being issued by those in power for those in power. By critically looking at who is actually debating sustainable mountain development and new ways to come to terms with mountain development challenges, we find scholars, politicians, and organisations originating from the lowland centres of political and economic power. An observer of the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit noted that nobody of the participants and discussants could be considered as a mountain dweller whereas outside the conference building police tried to disperse a crowd of locals. There is certainly the problem of a lack of empathy with mountain peoples, which may not be intended but which usually results from a lack of experience with most basic living conditions and the usual struggle for livelihood security in remote mountain villages. Experiencing what mountain life looks like on the ground may make some of those in power perhaps more humble concerning the influence of their work at the policy- and decision-making levels on everyday life in peripheral mountain areas.

The Vietnamese government recently discussed a regulation that government officials should spend some of their annual working time in remote rural communes. The idea was to provide the civil servants at the national level with impressions and experiences of life outside the economic and political power centres of the big cities. This mechanism may sound utopian but it may oblige those in power and privilege to seek ways to be more empathic and to enhance their solidarity commitment with the disadvantaged and the marginalised. It would help making the many un-echoed voices heard.

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Appendix I: Household Data Sheet

[INT: Introductory phrases]

In order to get to know you and your family better we would like to ask you some questions concerning you personally and your household.

Quest01 What's your family's name?

Quest04 Would you please be so kind to tell us each household member's name, age, and birth year?

Name	F	FIL	M	MIL	H	W	S	D	SIL	DIL	other	Age	Born in:
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
10													
11													
12													
13													

[INT: F=father, FIL=father-in-law, M=mother, MIL=mother-in-law, H=husband, W=wife, S=son, D=daughter, SIL=son-in-law, DIL=daughter-in-law, other => specify if possible: GS=grandson, GD=granddaughter, Ne=nephew, Ni=niece etc.]

Quest02 How many persons are currently living in your household, including yourself?

Quest05a Are some of your children or close relatives living somewhere else? ☐ yes 1
☐ no 2 [INT: continue with Q06]

Quest05b If yes, who of your close family is living somewhere else?

Quest05c Where do your close relatives live at the moment?

Quest05d How do you stay in contact with them (ex. telephone, mail)?

Any other?

Quest03a Was your house built by yourself or by your parents? ☐ myself/spouse 1
☐ parents/PIL 2

Quest03b When was your household established?

Quest06 Were you born in this village? ☐ yes 1 [INT: continue with Q08b]
☐ no 2 [INT: continue with Q06b]

Quest07a How long have you been living in this village?

Q07a ☐ less than 3 years 1
☐ for about 3-5 years 2
☐ for about 6-10 years 3
☐ for about 11-20 years 4

- ☐ more than 20, less than birth 5
☐ don't know 6 [INT: not to be read]

Quest07b How long have you been living in this commune?

- Q07b ☐ less than 3 years 1
☐ for about 3-5 years 2
☐ for about 6-10 years 3
☐ for about 11-20 years 4
☐ more than 20, less than birth 5
☐ don't know 6 [INT: not to be read]

Quest07c Where did you live before?

- Q07c ☐ in another commune of BBD 1 Which commune?
☐ in another district of BKP 2 Which district?
☐ in another northern province 3 Which province?
☐ in Central or South Vietnam 4
☐ in another country 5 Which country?
☐ don't know 6 [INT: not to be read]

Quest08a Was your wife/husband born in this village? ☐ yes 1 [INT:
 continue with Q09]
☐ no 2 [INT: continue with Q08c]

Quest08b Where did she/he live before?

- Q08b ☐ in another village of the commune 0 Which village?
☐ in another commune of BBD 1 Which commune?
☐ in another district of BKP 2 Which district?
☐ in another northern province 3 Which province?
☐ in Central or South Vietnam 4
☐ in another country 5 Which country?
☐ don't know 6 [INT: not to be read]

Quest09 Which languages are spoken in your household? [INT: give examples]

	0 no	1 v. little	2 little	3 fair	4 well	5 v. well	
Q091 Dao Do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q092 Dao Tien	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q093 Tay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q094 Nung	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q095 Viet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q096 H'mong	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q097 others:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

We are also interested in getting to know some aspects of your household economy.

Quest10a Which are the main crops you are cultivating?

Quest10b How large is the area of your cultivated crop fields?

Quest10c What kind of rice cultivation are you engaged in? ☐ wet rice 1
☐ dry rice 2
☐ both 3

Quest10d In comparison to each other, how much wet rice, how much dry rice? [INT: only proportions]

- Q10d ☐ wet rice only 1
☐ mainly wet rice, little dry rice 2
☐ half wet rice, half dry rice 3
☐ mainly dry rice, little wet rice 4
☐ dry rice only 5

Quest11a Besides crop cultivation are you engaged in any other agricultural activities?

- Such as for example: ☐ animal husbandry 1
☐ poultry raising 2
☐ fruit tree planting 3

Quest11b Any other activities?

- Such as for example: ☐ vegetable production 4
☐ collecting products in the forest 5
 Which ones?

Any other?

Quest12a Do you usually sell your agricultural products? [INT: if not clear give example. Market, within village]

Quest12b If yes, where do you sell them?

Quest 12c If yes, to whom do you sell them?

Quest13a Besides agriculture as a source of income, do you have any other sources of income?

Q13a ☐ yes 1 ☐ no 2 [INT: continue with Q14]

Quest13b If yes, which are these?

Quest13c How important are these activities for your household, compared to farming? [INT: read answers 1-5]

Q13c

8	0	1	2	3	4	5	
d.k.	no	v.unimportant		unimp.	fairly imp.	imp.	v.important
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Quest14 Which difficulties or constraints do you face any in your agricultural production system?

Quest15a In your village or commune are you in charge of anything, or do you hold an official position?

Q15a ☐ yes 1 ☐ no 2 [INT: continue with Q16]

Quest15b If yes, which official position do you currently hold in your village or commune?

Q15b1 Position/in charge of:

Q15b2 Position/in charge of:

Q15b3 Position/in charge of:

Quest16a Are you a member of one of the mass organisations or the Party? [INT: give MO examples]

Q16a1 Mass organisation: ☐ yes 1 ☐ no 2

Q16a2 Which one?

Q16a3 Party: ☐ yes 1 ☐ no 2

Q16a4 other:

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer our questions! [INT: Hand out gift]

Only to be filled in after the interview:

X17a name of the interviewee:

X17b name of village:

X17c name of commune:

X18 the interviewee is:

X18 ☐ a man 1 ☐ a woman 2

X19a name code:

X19b household code:

X20a other active participants in the interview: ☐ yes 1 ☐ no 2

X20b If yes, who?

X21 Ethnic background of the interviewee:

X21 ☐ Dao Do 1

☐ Dao Tien 2

☐ Tày 3

☐ Nung 4

☐ Viet 5

☐ other 6 other:

X22 Interview situation and atmosphere:

Appendix II: List of Informants Cited in the Thesis

Code	Place	Date	Informant	Method
PN#00185	<i>Pac Ngoi</i>	11.12.2000	male, age 42, <i>Tay</i> , village headman of <i>Pac Ngoi</i>	informal interview
PN#00190	<i>Pac Ngoi</i>	12.12.2000	male, <i>Tay</i> , vice chairman of commune People's Council	interview
PN#00193	<i>Pac Ngoi</i>	13.12.2000	male, age 54, <i>Tay</i> , member of the People's Council, former Party secretary of the commune	well-being ranking
PN#00239	<i>Pac Ngoi</i>	22.03.2001	male, age 42, <i>Tay</i> , village headman of <i>Pac Ngoi</i>	interview
PN#00332	<i>Pac Ngoi</i>	23.03.2001	female, age 41, <i>Tay</i>	oral history
PN#00333	<i>Pac Ngoi</i>	23.03.2001	female, age 69, <i>Kinh</i>	oral history
BC#00088	<i>Ban Chan</i>	09.10.2000	female, age 58, <i>Tay</i>	well-being ranking
BC#00158	<i>Ban Chan</i>	01.12.2000	male, age 36, <i>Tay</i> , vice-chairman of the commune People's Council	interview
BC#00160	<i>Ban Chan</i>	03.12.2000	male, age 35, <i>Tay</i> , secretary of Party cell of <i>Ban Chan</i> and <i>Tan Lung</i>	interview
BC#00165	<i>Ban Chan</i>	03.12.2000	male, age 43, <i>Tay</i> , village headman of <i>Ban Chan</i>	interview
BC#00281	<i>Ban Chan</i>	01.04.2001	male, age 54, <i>Tay</i>	interview
BC#00300	<i>Ban Chan</i>	10.05.2001	female, age 21, <i>Tay</i>	interview
BC#00329	<i>Ban Chan</i>	04.03.2001	female, age 63, <i>Tay</i>	oral history
BC#00331	<i>Ban Chan</i>	03.03.2001	female, age 73, <i>Tay</i>	oral history
TL#00179	<i>Tan Lung</i>	07.12.2000	male, age 44, <i>Dao</i> , member of the Group of Conciliation	interview
TL#00334	<i>Tan Lung</i>	30.03.2001	male, age 66, <i>Dao</i> , shaman, former village headman	oral history
TL#00335	<i>Tan Lung</i>	29.03.2001	male, age 57, <i>Dao</i> , former village headman	oral history

DP#00036	<i>Dong Phuc</i>	29.09.2000	male, <i>Dao</i> , village headman of <i>Lung Minh</i> village	informal interview
DP#00216	<i>Dong Phuc</i>	02.03.2001	male, <i>Tay</i> , chairman of the commune People's Committee	interview
DP#00218	<i>Dong Phuc</i>	03.03.2001	male, age 51, <i>Tay</i> , Party secretary of the commune, chairman of the commune People's Council	interview
DP#00308	<i>Dong Phuc</i>	10.05.2001	male, <i>Tay</i> , chairman of the commune People's Committee	informal interview after the focus group meeting
BB#00296	<i>Cho Ra</i>	07.05.2001	male, <i>Tay</i> , head of Forest Protection Unit of Ba Be district	interview
BB#00322	<i>Cho Ra</i>	15.05.2001	male, international consultant for PARC project	workshop presentation
BB#00328	<i>Cho Ra</i>	15.05.2001	male, <i>Kinh</i> , senior project manager for VN-Finland Forestry Sector Co-operation Programme	interview
HN#00333	<i>Hanoi</i>	10.05.2002	male, <i>Kinh</i> , Vice-director of the People's Aid Coordinating Committee	interview

Appendix III: Photographs *Ba Be* National Park Area

Photo III-1: Lake Ba Be in Ba Be National Park, March 2000

Vietnam's only natural mountain lake surrounded by densely forested limestone cliffs and mountains. Declared a Protected Area in 1977 and Vietnam's 8th National Park in 1992.



Photo III-2: Agro-ecological system in the Leng river valley, May 2001

Intensive rice and maize cultivation in the valley. Orchards and tree plantations around the settlements. Upland fields and pastures on the slopes, where pockets of forest between regenerating forest, shrub, pastures and cropped fields remain.



Photo III-3: Upland fields of Tan Lung, Dong Phuc, May 2001

Dry rice and maize cultivation on hillside; bare areas (brown) prepared for dry rice planting. At lower belts of the hill mosaic of maize fields and re-generating forest area.



Photo III-4: Rice transplanting in Pac Ngoi, core zone of Ba Be National Park, March 2001

Intensive rice cultivating in the valley floors, actively promoted by the government to take pressure from the forest resources in the National Park Area.



