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Resettlement programs in Vietnam's Central Highlands: Current status and problems

The Vietnam's Central Highlands indigenous ethnic groups are called Montagnards. They speak Malay or Khmer dialect and mainly grow rice using shifting cultivation (slash-and-burn agriculture). Since the establishment of socialism in 1975 and after embarking on a socialist market-oriented economy in 1986, the Vietnamese government developed New Economic Zones and Fixed Cultivation and Permanent Settlements, and constructed large dams in the Central Highlands. This report clarifies the results of our literature research, field surveys and related data, concerning in particular the concentrated resettlement of indigenous people. Relocation due to the construction of dams in the Central Highlands has distressed many indigenous inhabitants.

In the cases of the resettlers in the Ton Klong and Tung II resettlement area, affected inhabitants participated spontaneously. They reclaimed farmland in the resettlement area by themselves, and monitored the construction daily by themselves. How is farmland reclaimed and how is housing performed in resettlement? These are both related to fully restoring the living standards of resettlers. The concentrated resettlement method was a principal trend in Vietnam's involuntary resettlement programs from the 1990s. The donors and project-owners imposed urban-style infrastructure on the resettlers in order to restore their living standards. In a resettlement, allocating farmland must be a top priority to protect the subsistence of resettlers, but such allocation was delayed in this method.

As a result, the main purpose of the concentrated resettlement method failed. To design an ideal rural plan for resettlement, it is essential to establish channels for mutual communication between project owners and resettlers from the outset.