

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY AREA AND COMMUNITIES

3.1 Physical conditions

3.1.1 Geographical location

Binh Dien commune is located in the mountainous and hilly area of Huong Tra district, Thua Thien Hue province, on the North Coastal Central of Vietnam (Figure 3.1). The commune is situated from $16^{\circ}15'$ to $16^{\circ}50'$ North latitude and from $107^{\circ}25'$ to $108^{\circ}55'$ South latitude, nearly 40 kilometers from Hue city (Figure 3.2). It is bounded by Binh Thanh commune in the East, by Huong Binh commune in the West, by natural forest and mountain area of Aluoi district in the South and by Huong Ho commune in the North.

3.1.2 Terrain, hydrology and climate

The average temperature each year is approximately 25.1°C . The study area is located in a region with a monsoon tropical climate, thus there are two different seasons in a year, the rainy season starts from September to January with an average rainfall per year of 2,500 mm to 3,200 mm. The dry season lasts from February to August. In the rainy season, although the number of rainy days in each month is not so different but the variation in rainfall between each month of this season is very high. Therefore, serious floods often occur in the rainy season and they significantly affect crop production. In the dry season, high temperature and low rainfall are causes of droughts which seriously affect crop production in the region.

The study area has a mountainous and hilly terrain with an average elevation of approximately 300 meters above sea level and a highest elevation of about 700

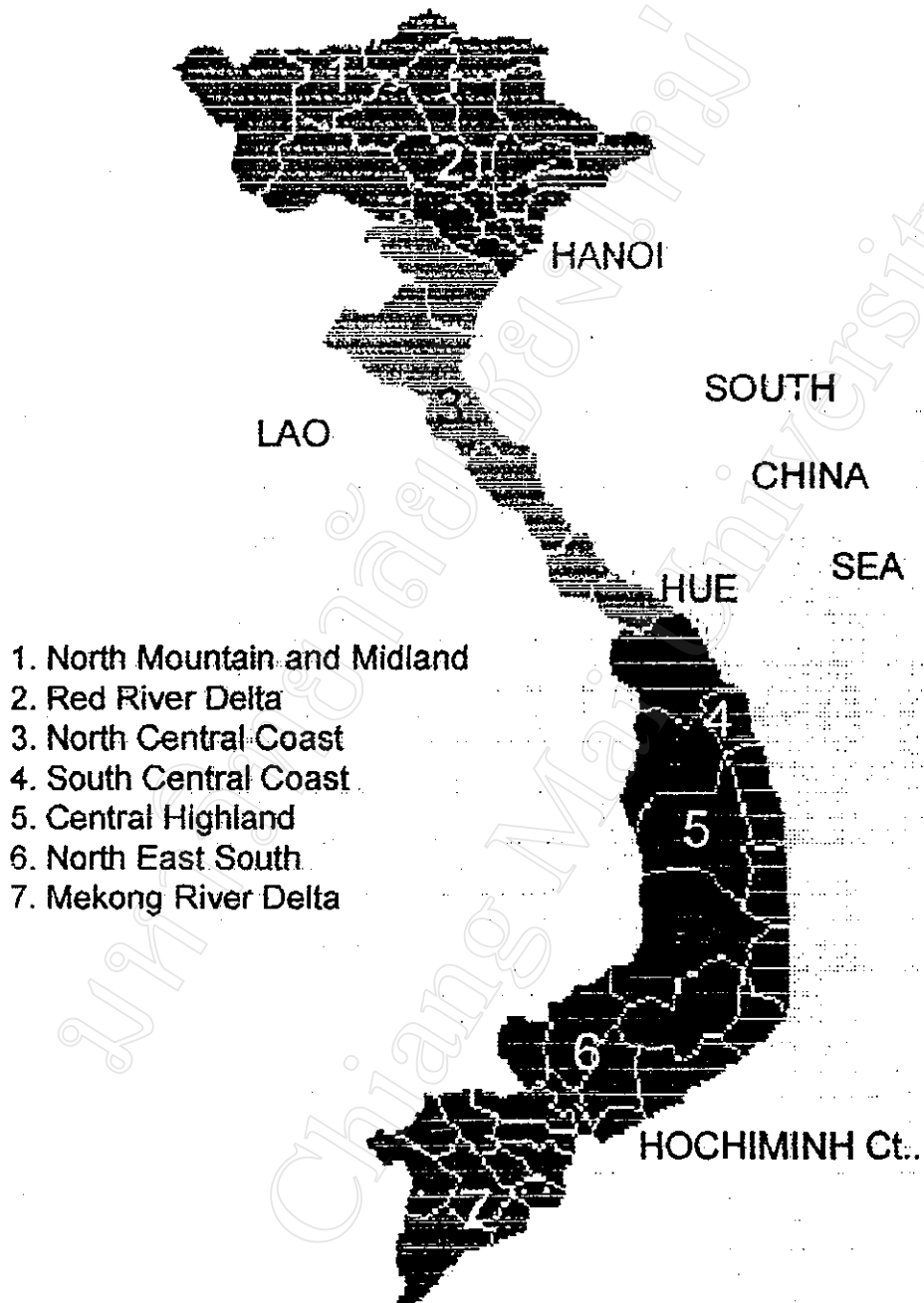


Figure 3.1 Location of the North Coastal Central region of Vietnam

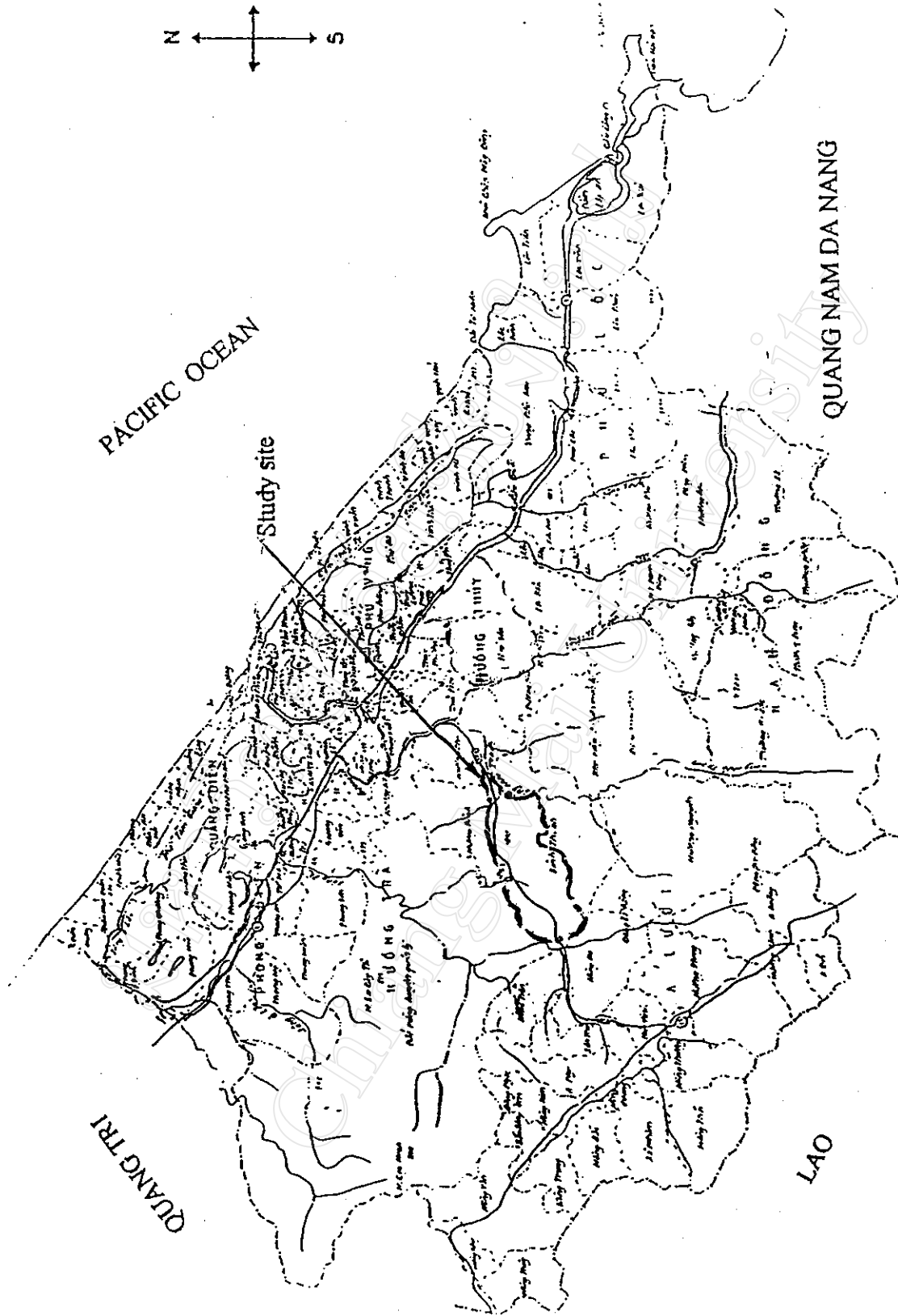


Figure 3.2 Location of Binh Dien commune of Thua Thien Hue province

meters. The topography of the area is very complex because it is divided into sections by river and stream network. This region is the origin of the Huong river which is the biggest river of Thua Thien Hue province and is created by two branches of the Huu Trach and Ta Trach rivers. Therefore, the vegetation cover in the region strongly affects the basin of Thua Thien Hue province.

3.1.3 Land resource and use

The total physical area of the Binh Dien commune is 10,128 ha of which agricultural land is 595 ha. Forestry land is about 9,132 ha of which 8,722 ha is natural forest. Settlement land covers 27.64 ha and the remaining is other land such as special purpose land, ponds, and unused land. Land used for agricultural production is limited because it is very difficult to develop irrigation due to the complexity of terrain. The cultivated land is mostly rainfed. Natural forests belong within the administrative boundary of the commune but are managed by state enterprises. The local community can use only non-timber products and have to have a responsibility to prevent fire. There are also planted forest areas which are managed by the Huong River Watershed Forest Management Unit (a state enterprise), while some other forestry land areas belong to the commune. Therefore, there is a conflict of land ownership which creates some problems in land use and management. Access to forestry land is limited as with respect to soil resources, almost all planted forests belong to high income households. The major soil types are yellow-red feralitic soil which is developed on the parent rock layer, and alluvium soil along rivers and streams. Soil erosion in the area is rather serious, natural forest is poor with low-value trees. Therefore, reforestation and developing agroforestry production is a critical issue in the region.

3.2 Economic, demographic, and social characteristics of the community

3.2.1 Social and demographic characteristics

The total population of the commune surveyed is 3,021 people in which 1,429 are female (nearly 50% of total population). Population growth rate is rather high (about 2.1 %). The total laborers is 1699 people (occupying 56.2 % of total population) of which 889 laborers are women, making up 52.32 % of the total labor force. Total number of households are 630 of which 94 households are high income; 133 households belong to the poor household group, and the remaining number are households with a medium income level.

All the villagers who live in Binh Dien commune are Vietnamese who are often called "Kinh". They have lived here for a long time. Kinh people make up the majority; they live everywhere in the country in general and in this region in particular. The main religion in the survey area is Buddhism. Beside Buddhists, there are also people who are Catholics but they are only a very small proportion, about 1%. The religions in the survey area have a common characteristic of not creating obstacles for socio-economic activities.

If you only pass the commune you would think that this is a developed area of Thua Thien Hue province Vietnam, because it is located not so far from Hue city (only about nearly 40 kilometers). But this survey shows that it is a less developed area, because people's educational level is very low. There is still a rather high number of people who are illiterate, especially women. The rate of children who are of school age but do not go to school is rather high (about 5 %). They could not go to the school to study because their parents are poor and could not support them. Although the government has issued a policy of illiteracy rejection to subsidize fees for the pupils in primary schools but they still do not have enough money to buy books, notebooks, etc. Almost all children who do not go to the school are girls because their parents often prefer sons more than daughters. Therefore when they are poor, they often try to send only sons to school. Many girls of an age who need to go

to school have to look after children and do housework for rich people in the city, they may become housemaids when they are still children.

3.2.2 Economic activities

Major economic activities of the area are crops, animal, forestry production, and some off-farm activities. Cropping patterns are very diverse and are distributed in different altitudes. The main cropping patterns are spring rice-summer rice, rice-fallow, rice-peanut, peanut-mungbean, mungbean-mungbean, peanut-peanut, rubber tree-mungbean, rubber tree-peanut. The area cultivated for rice is limited and often distributed in the lowest altitude on alluvium soil along the streams. Rubber trees, peanut, and mungbean are crops which are often planted at a medium altitude.

Cattle, pig and poultry raising are the major types of animal production. Grazing land is limited, cattle which often belong to high income households are grazed mainly under planted forest. For forest production, popular trees are *Eucalyptus* and *Acacia*, and some indigenous trees, which are planted at a high altitude. However, like cattle raising, planted forests belong largely to high income households.

Cutting Imperata, broom grass, the collection of fuelwood, small businesses, and some minor professions are the major kinds of off-farm activities in the region. Cutting Imperata, broom grass and the collection fuelwood are often activities of the poor household group because they are small earning and high risk, while small businesses and minor professions mainly belong to the high income group (Table 3.1)

Table 3.1 Frequency of major off-farm activities of household groups.

Off-farm Activities	High income group			Medium income group			Poor income group		
	Frequency	Percent	Purpose	Frequency	Percent	Purpose	Frequency	Percent	Purpose
Cutting Imperata	5	16.7	Roofing animal sheds	15	50	Roofing animal sheds, cash	18	60	Roofing animal sheds, cash
Collecting fuelwood	3	10	Cooking	5	16.7	Cash, cooking	16	53.3	Cash, cooking
Cutting broom grass	0	0	-	6	20	Cash	11	36.7	Cash
Hunting	2	6.7	Cash	5	16.7	Cash	8	26.7	Cash
Minor professional	22	73.3	Cash	9	30	Cash	0	0	-
Small business	7	23.3	Cash	4	13.3	Cash	0	0	-

Source: Surveyed data, 1998

3.2.3 Infrastructure

There are approximately 2 kilometers of water way and 6 kilometers of the provincial road No 49 through the commune, but the road No 49 has to pass the Huong river without a bridge so traffic is not convenient. Additionally, intervillage roads in the commune (especially the roads in Binh Loc, Vinh An and Phu Dien) are degraded. Poor quality roads, complexity of the terrain due to steep slopes and division by streams, together with scattered houses are important causes leading to low development such as the low educational level and poor access to markets in the commune, as it takes the pupils and women a long time to walk to school and market. There is one primary school and one secondary school which meets the need for education for children of school ages. However, because the villages in the commune are located far from each other, it is one of the factors which contribute to a high rate of withdrawal from school among children. There is no high school in the commune.

Therefore, only high income households can send their children to the high schools which are in Hue City or in district towns. There is a kindergarten which is located in the center of the commune but could not meet the needs of all children who are not old enough age yet to go to primary school. Almost all villages of the commune do not have kindergarten.

The commune has a health care centre which can treat basic illnesses for local people. There are some public wells which were constructed by supporting of NAV (Nordic Assistance For Vietnam) non government organization, but they can not provide enough water for daily needs. So, natural streams are still the major water resource for local people. Low water levels of stream in the dry season, and cold weather in the rainy season along with steep roads increase hardness for women who often are responsible for fetching water and washing clothes.

3.2.4 Social structure and local organization

The union and authorities of the commune consist of the party committee, people's council, people's committee, women's union, young person's union, farmer's association, and agricultural cooperatives. At present, the agricultural cooperative still plays an important role in supplying some services such as fertilizers, seeds, and cultivation technology. The farmer's association is a social organization, which understands farmers' difficulties to propose to the appropriate authorities for solutions. The women's union works as a social organization which can protect women's rights in the society and family as they can be representative to receive credit and give this credit to local women. However, in reality, many poor women and especially poor women who are widows still are not respected, so they do not receive any credit.

3.2.5 Cultural aspects

Vietnamese government issued the law to ensure that women and men are equal in all aspects of economy, politics, society, and family life; husband and wife have the same responsibility in the family; sons and daughters have equal rights in the family. However, in fact, in Vietnam society, there is a strong influence of Confucianism which denigrated women. In rural areas, in villages, and in communes, there is a strong tradition as regards gender which does not yet follow the legislation. In general, those traditions discriminate against women. They consider that women play a dependent role both in family and in economic activities and only have a limited role in social management.

In all rural areas in the country in general and in Binh Dien commune in particular, the tradition is that sons are more desirable than daughters. This stems directly from the low status of women. A Vietnamese saying was that "*Daughter is another's child*". The fact that a girl, once married, leaves her family and is responsible for the care of her parents in law in their old age, rather than for her own

parents. So, the traditional view is that the investment in a girl is lost once she marries, while a son stays within the family and supports his parents. Also, only sons are able to carry out the important task of ancestor worship. This leads to parents' preference of boys more than girls and giving sons more opportunity to study than daughters. The women who do not have a son are considered as people who do not have any child and they have to bear unfortunate things all their lives. Consequently, many women who have only daughter suffer a loss of both physic and spirit.

Respecting men and overlooking women is also a view in every where in the country, especially in rural area (including Binh Dien commune). Another Vietnamese saying is that

“No matter how poor man’s thinking is, it is still a deep well.

No matter how deep woman’s thinking is, it is a shallow cup only.”

This saying implies that women’s knowledge is very limited compared to men. This view considers women as housewives only and constraint them to join in social management. The view, which considers housework as “sacred mission” of women lasts through many generation. This habit leads to unreasonableness of housework shared in almost all family in the region. Housework are still largely done by the women and female children, even although they are also fully employed with either farming, other work or both. Thus, although the law and constitution are progressive on their statement on women’s equality and role in marriage, many aspects of traditional and Confucian practices remain, and women are still largely subordinate in family and social life.

3.2.6 Land tenure procedure relating to gender issue

The revised land law in 1993 in Vietnam, was that land belongs to all people and it is managed by the state. The state assigns long-term use right to organizations, households and individuals. The duration of land use for annual crop farming is 20 years and for perennial crops is 50 years. Besides the land, which is already assigned,

organizations and individuals can rent extra land which is owned by the state to use for production and doing business.

According to decree 64/ CP of Vietnamese government, land is assigned to all people, who live in the rural region. There is no difference in land received by gender. Therefore, rural women have equal opportunity in access to land as the same as men in the law. However, there were still some problems which discriminate women in implementation procedures.

When the women receive land before getting married, after marriage they could not take that land to their husband's family. This leads to a subordinate position of the women in husband's family. The land share after divorce of a couple was not mentioned in the law. When women are divorced, it is very difficult for them to take their land in the husband's family when they have to go back to their own parent's house, especially when they get married outside their villages.

It is also worthy to mention that most certificates of land use have been borne only the name of the family's heads that often are the men. When a couple is happy, it is no problem. However, when the family has disagreement, it is at a disadvantage for the woman. In reality, there were many cases, due to loss from gambling, the husbands forge the wives' signatures to sell the land. Moreover, when the couple divorces, the husband can give his relatives the land and the wife has to go back her parent's house without land. This leads to women's loss of land use right.

The extra land in each locality (especially industrial crop and forestry land) is often assigned to rich households who are able to invest in production and return the loan. This results in the difference in land ownership between high and poor income households. It is also the cause leading to less access to land among poor households many of which are female-headed. In Binh Dien commune, the land which is used for planting forestry trees, rubber and sugarcanes with capital support of some projects belongs to mainly high income households. Almost all poor households in which 16 percent are female-headed do not have forestry and rubber land.

Moreover, according to land law in 1993, land use assignment in rural area was based on age levels. People who are in labor age are assigned two fold amount of land compared to people who are not in labor age. The labor age decided by the government for male farmers is 16-60 years old while for female farmers is 16-55 years old. Therefore, female farmers have to be out of labor age earlier than male farmers. This means that female farmers who are 56-60 years old are assigned half of land area compared to men in the same age. This is also a reason to explain that why an average land area of female farmers is smaller than compared to male farmers although this was not mentioned in the law. Furthermore, the women (especially poor women) are not assigned locality's extra land because they are not able to compete with high income farmers.

To sum up, there was no gender discrimination in the land law. However, inequality in land use right assignment discriminates against female farmers in the procedure of implementing the law.

3.2.7 Products marketing

There is a market which is located on the provincial road No 49. Therefore, trading of farm and off-farm products is rather convenient. However, because of the sloping terrain and clustered settlement of the households in the commune, with low quality intervillage roads present difficulty in trading retail products and this leads to a loss in income for poor farmers, especially for poor women who often generate income from retail products.

3.3 Household characteristics

3.3.1. Age, educational level and size of household

This survey shows that there is a difference in educational levels among household groups which have different economic status. This reflects the fact that

educational level has an influence on the economic status of household. The average age of people who are heads of the households is not so different. Some households with young heads are poor because they have many children. Some other households with older heads are rich because they have experience in production and they often receive assistance from their children. The educational levels of males in all income groups are higher than those of females. It was found that there are still people who are illiterate in the study area. In the 90 households surveyed, there are 1 male and 4 females who are heads or head's wives who are illiterate. Some of them are rather young people. This shows less development in the survey area compared to other rural regions in Vietnam. The household size is highest in the poor income group and lowest in the high income group (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Age, educational level, size of household by economic status

Items	Age (year)		Educational level (year)		Size of household (persons)
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
High income	45.9	42.8	6.6	4.3	4.7
Medium income	43.1	40.9	6.0	4.0	5.4
Poor income	42.7	40.8	5.0	2.8	6.3

Source: Surveyed data, 1998.

Poor households often have an average of 6-7 children. This is very high even compared to other rural areas in the country. This is one of factors which contributes to the limitation of productivity and welfare of women.

3.3.2. Land holding

Since the implementation of the Land Use Law in 1993, land is assigned to farmers for long-term use. They have rights to inherit and lease their land. Therefore, all of farm households have nearly equal access to agricultural and settlement land. However, there is a distinction in forestry land ownership. It was found that forestry

land area in high income group was nearly six fold greater than that of the medium income group and more than eight fold that of the poor household group (Table 3.3). The average farming area per capita of high income group is higher than other household groups. Clearly, because the main family income comes from crop production, cultivating land area is one of the causes which influences on the development of a household. Small sized farms and a high number of children are the main problems of the poor household group. Therefore, the gender roles in making decisions on distribution of land for production, and access to land are important factors which affect improvement of household status. So, to improve household status, it is necessary to understand gender roles in decision making for production and gender related access to productive resources.

Table 3.3 Land holding per capita among household groups (Sao = 500 m²)

Type of land	High income group	Medium income group	Poor income group
	(Sao=500 m ² = 0.05 ha)		
Food crop land	1.23	1.15	0.85
Fruit tree land	0.68	0.38	0.23
Industrial crop land	2.29	1.35	0.25
Planted forest land	9.72	1.74	0.26
Housing land	0.13	0.09	0.06

Source: Surveyed data, 1998.

3.3.3 Livestock holding

Almost all households of all economic groups hold approximately 2 pigs and some chickens because pigs and chickens are often raised by using left-over food (Table 3.4).

Only some high income households who have wine making and enough capital to invest in pig raising hold rather high number of pigs (about 5 pigs). Some high income households do not raise pigs because of the low return in this kind of

production. Most cows belong to high income households because cattle raising requires high investment capital and a long business cycle. The local people often use heads of cattle as one of the indicators of household status. There is no big difference in buffalo, pig and poultry holding among household groups but for cow holding, there is a distinction among household groups. The average number of cows in the high income household group is nearly 20 fold that in poor income group, and more than 5 fold compared to that of medium income group.

Table 3.4 Livestock holding by household groups

Kind of livestock	Household groups		
	High income	Medium income	Poor income
		No. of heads	
Buffalo	0.1	0.2	0.1
Cow	5.7	1.1	0.3
Pig	2.0	2.0	1.9
Hen	9.9	7.5	7.7

Source: Surveyed data, 1998

3.3.4 Living expenditure and standard

The living standard of the high income group is distinctly superior to the medium and poor income group, while latter two are seemingly identical. The expenditure for education and production in the high income group is exceedingly high (Table 3.5). The data shows that high income households pay more attention to investment in production and their children's education (only high income households have children who attend high school, professional school and college). In the households surveyed, there are some households that have children who pass competitions to be enrolled in national high school, but they could not attend such schools because their parents have not enough money to support them. For poor income households, because of the lack of money, their expenditure is mainly devoted to food.

Table 3.5 The average annual expenditure per person of household group

Household group	Poor income	Medium income	High income
Items			
		-----1000 Dong-----	
- Total production expenditure	781.6	1,635.7	2,392.7
- Food	668.4	968.4	1,673.3
- Clothing	19.8	42.0	60.4
- Education	20.6	32.0	57.7
- Health care	19.0	21.6	37.3
- Others	17.2	34.3	51.2

Source: Surveyed data, 1998.

3.3.5 Income sources and net income per person

Household income consists of on-farm and off-farm components. There are differences in terms of total household income and income source structure among different household groups (Table 3.6). It was found that the average income/person/month of the high income household group is three times as much as that of the poor income group. Income in all household groups come mainly from crop production (income coming from crop production occupies the highest rate of total income). The high income household group has diverse income sources, including incomes which come from forestry production, minor professions and others. The poor group has no income from forestry production and minor professions because they have not enough capital to plant trees which require a long business cycle and to invest in other jobs. Crop production and off-farm incomes are the primary income sources among the poor household group, while cottage industries and forestry production generate the main income for wealthy households. Therefore, the role of women in generating income from the collection, use and management of wild plants in the forest, as well as in small businesses is a very important factor influencing on household's life. The

other income of poor households is earned mainly from labor contracting, but that of high income households is earned from social works and their children's remittances.

Table 3.6 Net income per person in household groups by income sources

Household group Income resources	Poor income		Medium income		High income	
	Amount (1000D)	%	Amount (1000D)	%	Amount (1000D)	%
*Total	51	100	96.1	100	154.8	100
- Crop production	15.2	29.8	37.4	38.9	44.0	28.4
- Gardening	7.7	15.1	14.1	14.7	24.3	15.7
- Animal production	7.6	15.1	13.6	14.1	26.1	16.8
- Forestry production	0	0	4.1	4.3	19.9	12.9
- Minor profession	0	0	6.5	6.5	20.3	13.1
- Off-farm activities	15.8	30.9	18.6	19.4	12.1	7.8
- Others	4.6	9.1	2.0	2.1	8.1	5.2

Source: Surveyed data, 1998.