

## Comparison of socio economic characteristics of ethnic minority vis-à-vis main stream population: New Survey Evidence from Vietnam<sup>1</sup>

*Summary: The ethnic minority people are known to be poor in general, low in education and perform less compared to the main stream population in Vietnam. There is however less evidence backed by field data to compare the overall standards of ethnic minority people and the main stream people. This note based on survey data gathered from 420 households (75% minority and 25 % main stream) corroborates that minority households in general perform poorly compared to main stream population is. Out of the 11 socio-economic variables populated in this survey, it is revealed that ethnic minority people have performed less in 7 while their achievement is higher than the main stream in two variables namely, ownership of income-generating assets and schooling rate. The ownership of household assets by ethnic minority and main stream households show a mixed pattern where a higher number of ethnic minority households owned water storage jars and sewing machines compared to the main stream households.*

With 53 different ethnic groups and the main stream of Viet people making up the population of Vietnam, the country possesses a higher level of ethnic diversity than others in the region. The spatial distribution of ethnic groups indicates that the mountain areas in the northern and central highlands are predominantly occupied by the highland tribes commonly known as the *Montagnard* whereas the minority people who occupy the Mekong Delta in the south are Khmer and Hoa. The Khmer has their origin in Cambodia while the latter has its origin in China. In terms of population distribution, the ethnic minority people contribute to 13 per cent and the main stream population (The Kinh people) make up 87 per cent of the population. The ethnic minority people that occupy the Mekong Delta have characteristics different from the hill tribes. This makes it important to separate Khmer from Montagnards in this note.



Ethnic Minority People in Vietnam

It is widely believed that ethnic minority people are poor and are less educated compared to the main stream people are. However, it is hard to find comparison of ethnic minority people with that of main stream people on the basis of actual data.

It is in the above context that this note presents new socio-economic data for ethnic minority and main stream people in Vietnam collected through a household survey undertaken in 2012. The household survey included a sample of 420 households randomly selected from five provinces. The distribution of the survey sample is presented in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Comments are encouraged by the author, Anura Widana, at: [anura1\\_nz@hotmail.com](mailto:anura1_nz@hotmail.com)

Table 1 : Distribution of Survey Households by Location and Ethnicity

Province Name in Vietnam	Location	Survey Households (number)	Households by Ethnicity (number)		
			Ethnic Minority	Khmer & Hoa	Kinh
Lao Cai	Northern Mountain	120	110	0	10
Dien Bien	Northern Mountain	60	45		15
Quang Nam	Central Mountain	60	60		
Gia Lai	Central Mountain	60	8		52
Tra Vinh	Mekong Delta (South)	120		95	25
All		420 (100)	223 (53)	95 (23)	102 (24)

Note: Per cent ethnic composition is within parentheses

The 15 minority people who participated in the survey are Ba Na, Co Tu, Dao, Giay, Hoa, H'Muong, Khang, Khmer, Kho Mu, Man, Muong, Nung, Sa Pho, Tay and Thai. Kinh people are the main stream population included in the survey.

Data relating to eleven socio-economic variables gathered by the survey are summarized below.

### 1. Household size

With 5.58 persons in a household, this variable is the largest for ethnic minority people compared with 4.85 persons per Kinh household. The household size for Khmer and Hoa is the smallest with 4.51 persons.

### 2. Literacy

The literacy rate for the main stream language called Viet was assessed from the head of each interviewed household as well as their spouse. Data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 : Distribution of Household Literacy by Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Household Head Literate (%)	Spouse Literate (%)
Ethnic Minority	73	54
Khmer + Hoa	60	43
Kinh	94	97

### 3. Vulnerability

Each respondent was asked to identify whether their household is vulnerable in terms of the presence of sick and/or disable people or an extremely poor household. Data reveals that 86 per cent of Khmer households have reported as vulnerable whereas 78 per cent of highland minority households have identified themselves as vulnerable. On the other hand, 56 per cent of Kinh households have reported as vulnerable.

### 4. Schooling

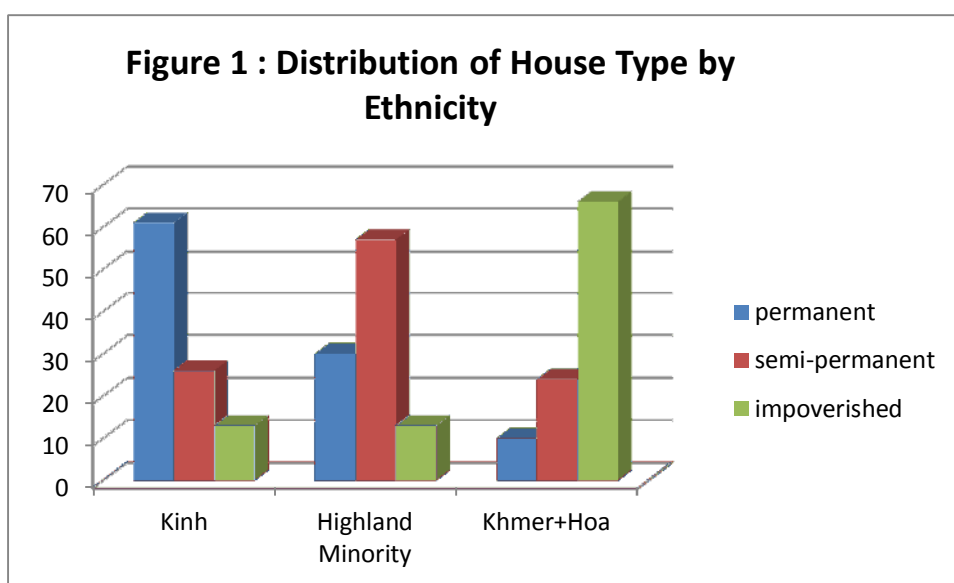
Sixty nine per cent of ethnic minority households have reported schooling children while 66 per cent of Kinh households have reported schooling children. The relevant statistic for Khmer is 67 per cent. This variable suggests that ethnic minority people have exceeded that of the main stream people with regard to schooling.

### 5. Employment

Kinh people have reported the highest household employment rate of 78 per cent. Forty nine per cent of Khmer and Hoa households have reported employees while highland ethnic minority households have the lowest employment rate of 38 per cent.

## 6. House type

House type of each respondent was classified either as permanent, semi-permanent and impoverished, based on the type of building materials used in construction. Permanent houses use durable materials in construction of roof, walls and the floor whereas semi-permanent houses used at least one of the items constructed using a permanent material. The all three components of impoverished houses were built using impoverished materials such as leaves, bark, plastic sheets, etc. The details are graphically presented in Figure 1.



## 7. Latrine ownership

Kinh households have the highest latrine ownership (99 %) followed by Khmer and Hoa households (76 %). The relevant statistic for highland minority households is 66 per cent.

## 8. Possession of household assets

Data on household assets ownership by ethnicity is presented in Table 3.

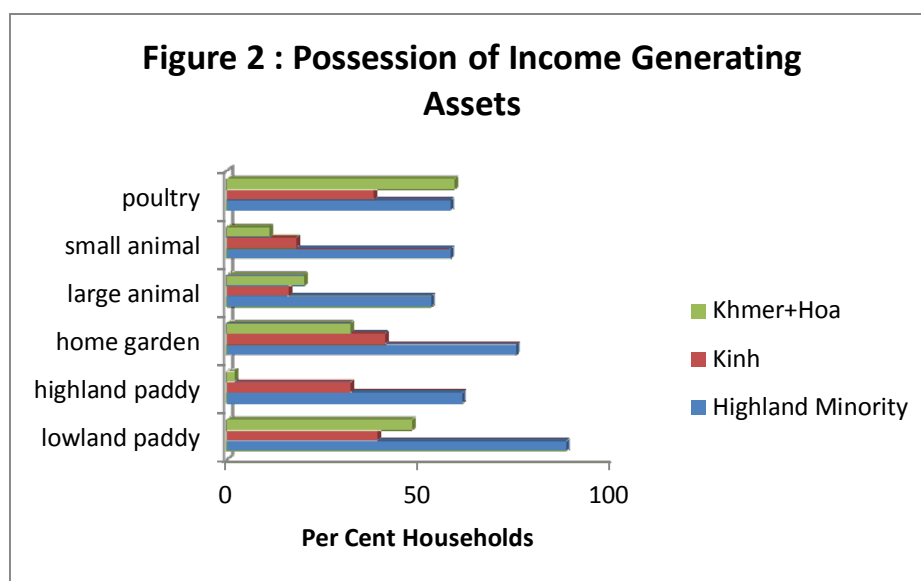
Table 3 : Household Assets Ownership by Ethnicity

Asset Type	Households Possessing (per cent)		
	Highland Minority	Khmer and Hoa	Kinh
Tables	57	90	89
Chairs	52	78	83
Show cases	73	54	79
Bicycles	20	88	56
Motor cycles	87	71	89
Hand-tractor	1	2	1
Motor car	1	2	8
Television	75	56	82
Radio	4	5	8

Mobile phone	83	51	92
Washing machine	2	5	13
Sewing machine	32	8	16
Electric fans	57	37	77
Water storage jars	54	7	44

## 9. Income generating assets

Data were gathered on four income generating assets namely, ownership of lowland paddy, highland paddy, home gardens and livestock. The relevant data for study subjects are graphically presented in Figure 2.



A greater number of highland minority households possess most assets compared to both Khmer and Kinh households.

## 10. Household power bill

The monthly household power bill is the lowest (VND 58,000) for highland minority people followed by VND 84,000 for Khmer and Hoa combination. The monthly power bill is highest with VND approx.. 140,000 per Kinh household.

## 11. Household income and expenditures

The annual household income and expenditure for the three ethnic groups are presented in Table 4. The Kinh households have annual savings whereas the income and expenditure for minority households balance out, leaving no savings.

Table 4 : Household Income and Expenditure by Ethnicity

Category	Income and Expenditure in Million VND per Household		
	Highland Minority	Khmer + Hoa	Kinh
Household Income	27	33	60
Household Expenditure	27	33	58

## 12. Poverty perception

Each household was asked to identify their poverty perception in comparison to other households in the community according to four groups. The groups are extremely poor, poor, non-poor and wealthy. Data reveals that both extremely poor and poor households are highest among Khmer people followed by highland ethnic minority households. On the other hand, the extremely poor and poor households among Kinh are the lowest. Table 5 presents relevant data.

Table 5 : Poverty Perception of Ethnic Minority and Main Stream Households

Category	Households in Per Cent		
	Highland Minority	Khmer+Hoa	Kinh
Extremely poor	12	31	5
Poor	47	50	24
Non-poor	39	17	66
Wealthy	2	2	5

### Conclusions

Based on survey results, it can be concluded that ethnic minority people perform poorly in 9 out of 11 socio-economic variables compared to main stream people are. The two variables where the performance by ethnic minority people is higher than the main stream are ownership of income generating assets and schooling.