Livelihood Sovereignty and Village Wellbeing
A Pilot Baseline Study for supporting indigenous peoples in the Mekong

INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, Indigenous Ethnic Minorities are classified according to conventional economic measurements, such as cash income, as the most impoverished population. However, these measurements do not take into account noncash-income factors contributing to wellbeing. To give an accurate assessment of the wellbeing of indigenous ethnic minority individuals and communities, a set of cash-income-neutral wellbeing indicators is necessary. These indicators include: access to natural resources, strength of spiritual beliefs, and vitality of cultural practices, indigenous knowedge, and customary laws. CENDI utilzed the concept of 'Livelihood Sovereignty' to capture these important indicators for wellbeing.

LIVELIHOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The concept of 'livelihood sovereignty'emerged in response to and the rejection of the conventional 'poverty alleviation' approach and policy that have been applied to indigenous ethnic minorities over the past decades. Despite suffering from dispossession of their land and identity, it was found that indigenous ethnic minorities were not 'poor'. They were rich. They were living in harmony with their environment rich in natural resources and spiritual vitality, secure in caring by communities under the guidance of wise and respected elders, and gaining their livelihoods directly from nature through utilizing their own wealth of knowledge and technical skills. If they are 'poor' it is only because of the policies of discrimination that restrict their movement and activities and leave them *isolated* from each other; years of cultural discrimination and denigration has left them *unconfident* to address their concerns to policy makers; and because, in the eyes of the state, they had *no ownership* of their land, or even of their own culture and identity. Based on these observations, the founder of LISO concluded that the concept of 'structural poverty' best represents the vicious cycle created by the three overlapping conditions of *isolation, unconfidence, and no-ownership,* and subsequently designed a program of action to promote livelihood sovereignty in order to overcome these conditions and thus the structural poverty of indigenous ethnic minorities.

Between 1995 and 2000, three organizations, Toward Ethnic Women (TEW), Centre for Human Ecology Studies in the Highlands (CHESH), and Centre for Indigenous Research and Development (CIRD) were formed to pursue this program, and out of it was born the Mekong Community for Ecological Trading (MECOECOTRA), the indigenous ethnic minority flagship for 'livelihood sovereignty'.

MECOECOTRA, as a network of indigenous ethnic minority key-farmers, developed around six themes: customary law-based community governance of natural resources; herbal wisdom for community health care and biodiversity preservation; ecological farming for land use planning and livelihood security; traditional handicraft textile manufacture; and farmer field schools for the transmission of indigenous wisdom to the young. Working on these six themes in an holistic way means realizing what is captured in the concept of livelihood sovereignty. While putting the

livelihood sovereignty approach into practice it was found that the best way to define it is in terms of five fundamental rights:

1. The right to land, forest and water (*basic*);
2. The right to maintain one's own religion (*unique*);
3. The right to live according to one's own culture (*practice*);
4. The right to operate according one's own knowledge and decide what to plant, initiate, create and invent on one's own land (*holistic*); and
5. The right to co-manage or co-govern natural resources with neighbouring communities and local authorities (*strategic*).

LISO acknowledges that the contemporary discourse of 'rights' has arisen only in the context of indigenous people becoming subject to the state. Before then, indigenous people used and managed natural resources, and regulated relationships between individuals, families, clans and communities according to their own customary laws. With the forced integration into nation states of indigenous people lost their economic, social and political sovereignty. Customary law governance was not recognized, state law and governance are imposed on them, and within this legal-political context the need to address the lack of 'rights' becomes necessary. It is only now that we live in a world where the fact of dispossession defines the very concept of 'indigenous', and we are forced to deal in the currency of 'rights' in order to defend their customary sovereignty

Therefore, LISO defines the rights of indigenous ethnic minorities differently from how they are conventionally understood. The rights of 'livelihood sovereignty' have been defined based on twenty-three years of working with indigenous ethnic minorities in the Mekong region to reflect their inner yearning for lives of freedom and creativity, lived in harmony with nature. It is from listening to their voices that LISO has defining these rights.

RATIONALE FOR LIVELIHOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND WELLBEING BASELINE STUDY

It is not the intention of this Baseline Study to measure the progress of Indigenous Ethnic Minority communities toward higher cash income through cash cropping. Lessons learned from those farmers today who have been persuaded or pressured into cash cropping for cash income by growing high-yield crop varieties dependent upon heavy applications of chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, are that they are unhappy and are feeling very un-wellbeing. This is because, along with the introduction of cash cropping and market dependency, they are experiencing a decline in their traditional community values of voluntarism which are being replaced by new market values of individual possessiveness and self-seeking bargaining behaviour accompanied by a parallel decline in kinship reciprocity and participation in community rituals and ceremonies, leading to a loss of spiritual values and community structures necessary for them to continue their own wisdom, customs, local knowledge, and cultural identity. Meanwhile, those farmers who have maintained their own culture and traditional system of ecological farming and community governance, have a very real sense of happiness and wellbeing. This Baseline Study aims therefore to provide indicators for measuring the progress of IEM communities toward livelihood sovereignty and community wellbeing based on their own indigenous value system, local knowledge, and customary law system of governance.

To help monitor the progress of specific communities toward livelihood sovereignty, a set of 'Indicators of Livelihood Sovereignty' has been developed from observations made in communities where LISO has already been substantially progressed, e.g., in Long Lan in Luang Prabang province, Lao PDR, and in Vi Olak in Kon Tum province, Viet Nam. These indicators will be used to construct a Livelihood Sovereignty and Wellbeing Survey (see Draft Questionnaire below) for measuring the level of Livelihood Sovereignty, the strength of Livelihood Identity, and the level of Individual and Community Wellbeing in other communities, and as standards of Livelihood Sovereignty and Wellbeing toward which communities lacking full Livelihood Sovereignty can aspire.

At the start of each new project, a 'Livelihood Sovereignty and Wellbeing Survey' can then be made to measure the current level of Livelihood Sovereignty and Wellbeing for the project community, in order to identify *which* of the Five Rights of LISO should be addressed first within the famework of a 2-3 year project. The project objectives can be defined as addressing *one or more* of the Five Rights of Livelihood Sovereignty, according to the people's priorities.

The results of this Livelihood Sovereignty and Wellbeing Baseline Study can then be used for measuring the community's progress toward LISO the end of the project, and whether there has already been any change in their level of Wellbeing; although normally it would take a longer period of time for any significant improvement in Wellbeing to be fully manifested.

A consecutive 2-3 years projects can then be built on the initial project, aimed at progressively addressing the remainder of the Five Rights of LISO. At the end of successive projects, when all 5 Rights of LISO are being exercised, a comprehensive Wellbeing survey can be conducted to assess what improvements in Wellbeing have resulted from the achievement of LISO.

LISO and Wellbeing Surveys can also be conducted in communities that are totally lacking the 5 Rights of LISO. These communities can act as a control groups for comparing the level of Wellbeing in communities which *do* have one or more of the 5 Rights of LISO. The assumption to be tested being that the higher the level of LISO in a community, the higher the level of Wellbeing.

GOAL, OBJECTIVE, EXPECTED OUTCOME AND OUTPUTS

The long-term goal of the proposed initiative is to help in the strengthening or restoration of Livelihood Sovereignty of indigenous peoples in the Mekong region.

The specific objective is to develop and test an approach and methodology, including a set of progress indicators, for conducting community-level baseline studies for projects promoting and supporting Livelihood Sovereignty of indigenous communities.

This project also seeks to test means of measuring the effect upon the rejuvenation of traditional core values, social structure, local knowledge, and norms of behaviour of indigenous societies of shifting from individual to community land little, and the effect of this rejuvenation of traditional culture upon individual and community wellbeing.

The expected outcome is the capability of CENDI to work more effectively for the promotion of Livelihood Sovereignty among indigenous communities in the Mekong region.

The expected outputs are:
- A documentation on the process of applying the approach and method in the pilot baseline study in two communities
- A set of progress indicators for achieving the Five Rights of LISO
- A set of questionnaires for conducting community baselines studies, which are corresponding to the set of indicators for each of the Five LISO Rights
- A set of questionnaires for measure the effect of livelihood sovereignty upon individual and community wellbeing.

LOCATION, APPROACH and METHODOLOGY

Location of project
Three different Central Highland indigenous ethnic minority communities – Hre, Ka Dong, and Monong – with 3 different historical backgrounds and traditional governance systems will be selected.

Data sources and quantity
For each community, one village will be selected, and in each village 36 households – 12 'suffering'; 12 'struggling'; 12 'thriving' in terms of opportunities, education, confidence, and wellbeing will participate.

Data collection methods
Phase 1
Each household will be interviewed individually, followed by group meetings both within and between the 3 groups of households for cross-checking. Followed by a whole village meeting including village leaders to get feedback from the whole community.

Preliminary data analysis for early feedback

Phase 2
Forum for communal and district authorities to share in the results of the surveys.

National Forum to engage policy makers, researchers, media, and business sector to join the discussion about the findings and feedback.

Formal data analysis
Formal analysis of Baseline Study data.

Report Writing, Final Feedback, Editing, and Publishing
Writing up Formal Analysis into Baseline Study Report, and Edited for final feedback from farmers of the 3 ethnic communities before Publishing as a measuring tool for follow-up projects in the coming years.

Research personnel
Village elders, Key Farmers (male and female), Young (male and female), 2 seniors of CENDI, one external researcher.

Time needed
Data collection Phases 1 and 2 will take about 9 months
Formal data analysis, report writing, final feedback, editing and publication: about 9 month
Total 18 months. Starting January 2019

Budget
Self-Funding

DRAFT QUESTIANNAIRES FOR THE POLIT BASELINE STUDY

A. LIVELIHOOD SOVEREIGNTY SURVEY [1]
Customary lands and forest play a central role in cultural and spiritual identity of Indigenous Ethnic Minority peoples, and provide the vast majority of income-neutral contributions to their material wellbeing, such as resources for housing, fuel, medicine, and dietary supplements, and therefore reduces dependence on cash for many of life's necessities. It is also the location of sites of spiritual significance essential to their cultural identity and spiritual wellbeing. In Indigenous Ethnic Minority communities, land and forest is not a personal commodity, but a public good. It belongs to a family, clan or village. No one individually owns land and forest. Instead, families and individuals are custodians of the land and forest. Access to land and forest resources is maintained only when control over land and its resources are in the hands of village leaders.

1. **Rights to land, forest and water**
   a. What rights do you hold to land, forest and water?
   b. What rights would you like to have?
   c. Why are those rights important to you?

2. **Rights to maintain one's own religion**
   a. How easy or difficult is it for you to practice your own religion in your community? [Impossible/ Possible/ Easy/ Very easy]
   b. How important is it to you to be able to practice your own religion? [Not important/ Moderately important/ Important/ Very important]
   c. Why do you wish to maintain your religion?

3. **Rights to live according to one's own culture**
   a. How easy or difficult is it for you to live in your community according to your own cultural values, and practice your own customs? [Impossible/ Difficult/ Moderately easy/ Very easy]

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[1] The Questions for this survey (A), and the other survey subjects (B-D), are indicative only. The final survey questionnaire will be constructed for use in the field from these questions.

b. How important is it to you to maintain your own cultural values and practices? [Not important/ Moderately important/ Important/ Very important]

c. Why do you want to maintain your own culture?

4. **Right to operate according to one's own knowledge and decide what to plant and produce on your own land**

   a. How easy or difficult is it for you to apply your own indigenous knowledge in your farming and other activities? [Very difficult/ Difficult/ Easy/ Very easy]

   b. How important is it to you to maintain your own indigenous knowledge? [Not important/ Moderately important/ Important/ Very important]

   c. Why do you want to maintain this local knowledge?

   d. How much freedom do you have to decide what to grow and how to practice farming? [No freedom/ Some freedom/ Enough freedom/ Total freedom]

   e. How important is it to you to be able to decide what to grow on your farm? [Not important/ Moderately important/ Important/ Very important]

   f. Are you able to grow local varieties if you so choose?

5. **Right of co-management of natural resources**

   a. What regulations does your community have regarding the management of its natural resources?

   b. Are these regulations custom-based?

   c. Are these regulations shared with neighbours and local authorities?

B. LIVELIHOOD IDENTITY SURVEY

Every 'livelihood' has its own 'identity', and 'Livelihood Identity' is defined as a holistic social identity reflecting a unique cultural, economic, socio-political, spiritual and ecological relationship between humans and nature. In every society, livelihood and identity are interactively connected. By achieving the five rights of Livelihood Sovereignty, a group can both sustain their own livelihood and preserve their own identity - that which distinguishes them from others and instills community pride. Wellbeing and Happiness can be achieved only when each ethnic group is able to maintain their own Livelihood Sovereignty and Livelihood Identity.

1. **Attitudes toward farming**

   a. What rituals do you perform with respect to different plants varieties in your farming activities throughout the year?

   b. What ceremonies conducted by your community during the year with respect to the planting, harvesting, or processing of different crops do you participate in?

   c. How highly do you value the performance of rituals during your farming activities? [Very lowly/ Lowly/ Highly/ Very highly]

   d. How highly do you value participation in community ceremonies connected with different farming activities? [[Very lowly/ Lowly/ Highly/ Very highly]

2. **Attitudes toward nature**

   a. What beliefs do you have toward different natural landscape features: e.g., mountains, rivers, forest, trees, birds, animals?

    b. What customary laws, or norms of behaviour do you follow in your actions toward different landscape features?

    e. How highly do you value following and nurturing nature over controlling and exploiting it? [[Very lowly/ Lowly/ Highly/ Very highly]

    c. How high is your commitment toward preserving nature? [Very low/ Low/ High/ Very high]

    d. How do your rate your knowledge of names of plants and wild animals in your area? [Very low/ Low/ High/ Very high]

    e. Do you agree with the statement: "Nature is the domain of spirits"?

    f. Do you feel responsible for conserving the natural environment?

3. **Attitudes toward production**

    a. How are different features of the landscape categorised for land use in your community?

    b. What rules are followed with respect to the productive use of differently categorized area of land?

    c. What rules are followed with respect to the processing of different types of farming produce?

4. **Attitudes to selling and exchange**

    a. What kinds of produce can or cannot be sold?

    b. What kinds of produce can or cannot be exchanged for other produce?

    c. What kinds of produce should or should not be shared freely with others?

    d. With what kinds of people should labour be shared?

    e. To what kinds of people can labour be sold?

5. **Indigenous knowledge and skills**

    a. How do you rate your knowledge of: family history; local flora and fauna; planting and harvesting periods; traditional songs, dances, games. [Weak/ Moderate / Strong]

    b. Do you or anyone in your household have any of the following skills: weaving, embroidery, carving, housebuilding, making medicine, bamboo work, blacksmith, stonework, leatherwork, gold/silversmith, etc.? Yes/ No

C. SOCIAL, CULTURAL, VITALITY SURVEY

Culture is one of the key means to achieving a satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual life. In assessing the contribution of culture to an individual's wellbeing, priority is given to the capacity of a culture to maintain and develop cultural identity, knowledge and practices, and overcome challenges and difficulties coming from other outside norms and ideals. In this sense, the significant aspects of culture are the strength of language, traditional knowledge, traditional skills, ritual knowledge, participation in ceremonies.

1. **Social interaction**

    a. Who do you share your feelings with when you feel happy or unhappy, successful or unsuccessful, glad or sad, satisfied or not satisfied about anything in your daily life?

b. When you feel the most happiness suddenly, who do you inform first?

c. Who do you share problems of daily livelihood with. For example, when you are sick, who is the one who first comes to you and takes care of you?

d. When you have a problem suddenly, whom do you think of informing first?

e. What kind of social event do you like to join in, to share, to be involved in, to devote your time to, to open up and engage with others in, in your daily livelihood.

2. Spirituality

a. What forms of spiritual activities do you like to join?

b. Why and how do you join?

c. Where and when do these spiritual activities take place, and why in those places?

d. Is there anything special or unique about those places according to your understanding?

e. Has there been any change in the rituality and places of those spiritual practices, and why has the change happened?

f. How do you feel about those changes in both rituality and places? [Unhappy/ Neutral/ Happy]

g. If you had the prestige and power to determine your traditional original rituality and places, what would you determine and how would you sustain/consolidate/preserve them?

h. How spiritual do you consider yourself? [Not spiritual/ Moderately spiritual/ Very spiritual]

i. How often do you visit places of spiritual significance within your community?

3. Cultural identity

a. How would you rate your knowledge and understanding of local festivals, traditional legends, folktales, stories and songs, etc. … [Weak/ Moderate/ Strong]

b. What do you value most about your culture?

c. What do you think are the most important aspects of your culture that you would like to see preserved?

d. What is there that is unique about your culture, e.g., food and eating and drinking style, housing style, farming practices, kinship system, governance system, attitudes toward nature.

e. How would you rate your knowledge and understanding of historical events of your community? [Weak/ Moderate/ Strong]

f. How do you rate your understanding of tour community's customary laws and regulations? [Weak/ Moderate/ Strong]

4. Cultural resilience

a. Language
- How do you rate your ability to speak your indigenous language. [Weak/ Moderate/ Strong]

b. Participation in community events
- Rate your level of participation in community events over the last 12 months,

e.g., in construction/renovation of religious structures, house construction/repairs, clean-ups campaign, fund raising, other [specify]? [Very active (once or more a month)/ Active (at least once in 12 months)/ Not active (did not participate)]

c. **Participation in Ceremonial events**
   - Rate your level of participation in community ceremonies over the last 12 month: e.g., in marriage, death, reconciliation, status, harvest ceremonies. [Very active (once or more a month)/ Active (at least once in 12 months)/ Not active (did not participate)]

d. **Subjective assessment of importance of community ceremonies**
   - How important do you think community ceremonies are? [Not important/ Moderately important/ Important/ Very important]
   - Compared to the past, is participation in community ceremonies today [Weaker/ About the same/ Stronger]

B. COMMUNITY VITALITY SURVEY

The frequency of contact with others and the quality of personal relationships are crucial determinants of people's wellbeing. Social networks provide material and emotional support in times of need. Well developed social connections can generate trust in other people, reinforce norms of reciprocity, and facilitate exchange of information and collective actions. For example, at community meetings for conflict resolution, community development, or ceremonial planning, social connections are made and reinforced

1. **Participation in Community Meetings**
   a. How many community meeting are there in your community per month?
   b. How many community meeting did you attend last month?
   c. How many meetings did you speak at one or more times?

2. **Community Support**
   a. How strong is cooperation in the community
      [Strong / Weak / Doesn't exist / Don't know]
   b. How many people you can count on to help in times of sickness, financial hardship

3. **Voluntarism**
   a. How many people in your community have you helped in the previous 12 months with something for which you did not expect payment.
   b. What activities did you volunteer for: e.g., gardening, clearing, preparing the land, planting, tending, harvesting, childcare, house construction or repair, tending livestock.
   c. How many times in the last 12 months have you received help from others in your community that did not requiring a cash payment.

4. **Trust**

    a. How many of your neighbours do you trust?
        [All/ Some/ None]
    b. How high is your level of trust in community leaders?
        [High/ Medium/ Low/ Don't know]
    c. Have you been a victim of theft or vandalism in the last 12 months?

5. **Leadership**
    a. How do you rate your community leaders' ability to settle disputes, communicate with community members, respect culture, protect and manage community resources.
        [Very good/ Good/ Not good/ Don't know]

6. **Changes in Community Vitality**
    a. Over the last 2-3 years, do you think the level of participation in community meetings, community support, voluntarism, trust, leadership in our community has:
        [Become stronger/ Stayed the same/ Become weaker/ Don't know]

7. **Attitudes toward community**
    a. How important do you think it is to follow customary laws and community regulations? [Not important/ Moderately important/ Important/ Very important]
    b. How important is it to fulfil family responsibilities [Not important/ Moderately important/ Important/ Very important]
    c. How important is it to respect knowledgeable and prestigious elders
        [Not important/ Moderately important/ Important/ Very important]
    d. What are the required qualities of community leaders.

C. INDIVIDUAL WELLBEING SURVEY

People are the best judge of how their own lives are going. Subjective Wellbeing refers to an individual's perceived level of *happiness* and *satisfaction.*

1. **Sense of happiness and satisfaction**
    a. Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are? [Very unhappy/ Unhappy/ Happy/ Very happy]
    b. What are the most important things that will make you lead a truly happy life?
    c. How satisfied are you with your health, standard of living, major occupation, relationship with immediate family members? [Not satisfied/ Satisfied/ Very Satisfied]

    Happiness
- How do you rate your life on a scale of 1-10, where (1) is the worst life you can imagine, and (10) is the best life you can imagine.
  [Responses are classified as: 7+ "thriving"; 5-6 "struggling"; -4 "suffering"]

Satisfaction
- How do you rate your level of satisfaction with your entire life, including the present. [Very satisfied / Satisfied / Neutral / Unsatisfied / Very unsatisfied.]

- List the main causes of dissatisfaction in your life. [These will later be classified and coded for analysis.]

2. **Changing sense of happiness over lifetime**
   a. What is your understanding of happiness according to your different circumstances/perceptions/context as child, student, youth, adult, farmer having a family, wife, husband, being a father/mother/grandparent, alone, socially active, self-employed/ employee/employer.

3. **Social Support**
   a. How many people are very close to you that you can count on if you are sick, have financial problems, have emotional problems, have to attend to important personal events such as wedding, childbirth, funeral?

4. **Inter-dependence**
   a. In your daily life is there any inter-dependency between your individual happiness and communal happiness? Give examples

5. **Family Vitality**
   a. Do you agree or disagree with statements:
   You have enough time to spend with your family
   Your family is always arguing, never peaceful
   You feel good when you are with your family

6. **Safety**
   a. How do you rate your fear of personal attack from another individual in your community?
   [Very afraid/ Slightly afraid/ Not afraid/ Don't know]

7. **Food Security**
   a. How often in the previous 12 months did your family miss a meal or reduce the size of meals due to not having enough available food?
   [Never/ Once or twice/ Occasionally/ One or more times a month/ Don't know]

D. **COMMUNITY WELLBEING SURVEY**
IEM society is not centered on the individual, it is based on the family, clan, and village community, as opposed to the individual. Wellbeing is a collective pursuit and can be achieved only through the collective.

1. **Overall perception**

a. Rate your community on a 10 point scale where (1) is the worst community you could imagine, and (10) is the best community you could imagine.

2. **Community Governance**
   Rate your community in the following areas:
   a. Justice (resolving conflicts, maintaining law and order)
   b. Safety and security (protecting community resources and community members)
   c. Communication (spokepersons for community, organizing and leading of community meetings)
   d. Community work (delegation of work, overseeing community development)
   e. Maintaining peace, unity and happiness (conflict prevention)
          [Very good/ Good/ Not good]

E. HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC SURVEY[2]
1. **Household demographics**

2. **Type of crops grown** [e.g., grain, root, leaf, fruit]

3. **Kilogram yield per year**

4. **Use value** [e.g.,own consumption, selling, storing, animal feed, saving for planting]

5. **Other income sources** [e.g., selling labour, children earning money outside, small enterprise (e.g., selling coffee, pho, fertilizer; tailoring, hair cutting; xe om]

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[2] A suitable matrix will be constructed for each section of this survey.