Photo: Nguyen Van Duy

SOCIAL MOBILITY AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN VIETNAM:

TRENDS AND IMPACT FACTORS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DKN	Dak Nong
ILO	International Labor Organization
IP	Industrial park
LC	Lao Cai
NA	Nghe An
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPHI	Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
PC	People's Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VASS	Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences
VHLSS	Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey
VND	Vietnamese Dong
WB	World Bank

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study aims to analyze the trends and factors in social mobility in Vietnam over the past 10 years, with a focus on the role of education. Social mobility is defined as a change in the social status of an individual or household in the society. Social mobility can refer to a change in an adult compared to his or her parents ("inter-generational social mobility") or a change over the years in a life cycle ("intra-generational social mobility").

The study applies both quantitative and qualitative methods. It demonstrates correlations in findings related to income, profession and skill mobility from three sources of data: the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS, 2004-2014), questionnaire-based interviews conducted among 600 households, and 85 in-depth individual interviews (47 men, 38 women) conducted in Lao Cai, Nghe An and Dak Nong provinces.

1. People's perceptions about social mobility

Vietnamese people view social mobility as a multi-dimensional concept. The dimensions most mentioned are income, profession, education, health, living conditions (infrastructure, culture, information), and voice in the family and community. Each community, group of households, family and individual is aware of social mobility and chooses their own path based on their circumstances, priorities, experience, and future visions. Many parents tend to care more about income and occupational stability, whereas the younger generation is more interested in seeking employment opportunities to raise their income and improve living conditions. Ethnic minorities have a pragmatic view of social mobility, not only in terms of livelihood improvement but also of factors such as employment, voice in the family and the community.

Although perceptions of social mobility vary among the communities in the surveyed areas, the most fundamental aspects of social mobility are centered around income, employment and occupational issues. Those are also the focused social mobility dimensions for measurement and analysis in this report.

2. Social mobility trends in Vietnam

2.1 Occupational mobility is slow, with 79 percent of agricultural workers in 2004 continuing to work in agriculture in 2008, rising to 83 percent during the 2010-2014 period. Meanwhile, fewer than 8 percent of agricultural workers moved to the industry or service sectors during either period. Occupational mobility is not clear among many young people with high educational attainment in the surveyed areas because they have not found suitable jobs.

2.2 Slow skill shifts. Nationally, according to VHLSS data in both periods (2004-2008 and 2010-2014), only roughly one-fifth of manual or traditional sector workers moved to the groups of skilled workers (skilled "blue collar" and non-manual "white collar" workers[1]). During the 2004-2008 period, the ratio of ethnic minority manual workers moving to blue collar work was 2 percent, while that of Kinh (ethnic Vietnamese) people was 15 percent. Remarkably, a significant proportion of workers moved from industry to agriculture and from skilled jobs (blue collar) to manual/traditional jobs.

[1] Manual/traditional jobs are hereafter referred to as manual jobs: Manual or traditional workers do jobs requiring physical labor, such as masons, porters, housekeepers, shop assistants, and farmers.
"Blue-collar" workers: do jobs requiring skilled labor, such as workers at factories, workshops and construction sites, or craftsmen and farmers doing technical work.
"White-collar" workers are non-manual workers with education and skills usually performing jobs in an office setting, such as technicians, officials, managers, and leaders.

In the three studied provinces, the shifts in sectors and skills appear impermanent. Moving from agriculture to industry, or from manual/traditional jobs to low-skilled jobs, is not necessarily a step forward. Youth usually migrate to work as unskilled/low-skilled workers in garment, footwear, and assembly factories for a while (ranging from several months to several years) and then return to live in their localities due to harsh factory working conditions, their responsibilities to care for their parents, or the perceived instability of life at the destination. This important issue needs more in-depth research to work out suitable policy solutions against the backdrop of the Vietnamese Government's economic restructuring, which aims to promote the industrial and service sectors and develop a more skilled workforce in the coming time.

2.3 Intra-generational income mobility has slowed down in recent years. VHLSS statistics showed that during 2004-2008, 45 percent of households in the poorest group in 2004 moved to higher income quintiles after four years. In 2010-2014, this proportion was 37 percent. The slowdown is more clearly demonstrated among younger people. 33 percent of the poorest households headed by people aged 15-30 entered higher income groups in 2004-2008, but only 16 percent did so between 2010-2014. In the 31-60 age group, the proportion entering higher income groups declined from 46 percent to 39 percent. In terms of ethnicity, while 49 percent of the poorest Kinh households in 2010 entered higher income groups by 2014, only 19 percent of ethnic minority-headed households did the same.

2.4 Inter-generational occupational mobility. According to VHLSS data, in the 2010-2014 period, 42 percent of people aged 15-60 whose parents worked in the agricultural sector were themselves working in non-agricultural sectors. This was 10 percent higher than in 2004-2008. The mobility rate from agriculture to non-agricultural work was higher among urban residents, women, adults, and the Kinh and Hoa groups[2] than for rural people, men, young people, and ethnic minority groups.

[2] The Hoa (Chinese) ethnic group, living mainly in urban settings, is sometimes classified together with the Kinh in social surveys.

In three surveyed provinces, the proportion of children with occupational shifts compared to their parents is relatively low: only about one-fifth of children of unskilled/traditional workers are working in different job sectors from their parents. Women have higher occupational mobility compared to their parents than men.

2.5 Inter-generational skill mobility

The higher educational attainment children have, the more skill mobility they have compared to their parents. VHLSS statistics demonstrated that for children whose parents are unskilled/traditional manual workers, 79 percent of those graduating from college or higher and 42 percent of those with upper secondary diplomas had skilled jobs in 2014.

The extent of intergenerational mobility in skills also varies. There is a great disparity in mobility between urban and rural areas, between men and women, between age groups, and particularly between the Kinh and Hoa groups and ethnic minority groups.

2.6 Inter-generational mobility trends in income. In the most recent 10 years, inter-generational income mobility in Vietnam has shown a modest increase. Benchmarking against international cases show that income mobility of children compared to parents in Vietnam is at an average level.

In terms of geographical area and ethnic minority, income mobility is higher in urban areas than in the countryside and higher in the Kinh and Hoa groups than in ethnic minority groups. ***In terms of gender,*** boys' income mobility compared to their parents' is lower than girls'. ***In terms of education level***, the higher children's educational attainment is, the more likely they are to move up in income compared to their parents. The highest inter-generational income mobility is seen among children graduating from college or higher levels, and the lowest is among children who did not complete primary education.

Inter-generational income shifting in the three surveyed provinces is reaching a limit. If young people continue to rely on agriculture with no breakthroughs in occupation and skill mobility in the coming time, their income will be less likely to outstrip their parents', especially because arable land per person is declining. The rate of income mobility also depends on the regional context. Inter-generational mobility is quite high in areas where there are opportunities to diversify livelihoods outside agriculture and low in areas where livelihoods are based primarily on agriculture.

3. Factors influencing social mobility

3.1 Educational attainment

Educational attainment is the most important factor that helps foster social mobility. National statistics show that households headed by people with higher educational attainment are more likely to move from the low-income quintile to higher-income groups. According to VHLSS data, 23 percent of households headed by post-high school education graduates moved up from the 40 percent lowest income households to higher income groups in 2010-2014. Meanwhile, this rate was only 8 percent among households headed by primary school graduates.

The educational attainment of the household head is proportional to the household's per capita income, an effect that was more conspicuous in 2014 than in 2004. In 2004, the average per capita income of households headed by college/university graduates was 2.8 times higher than that of households headed by a person who did not graduate from primary school; this rate was 3.04 times in 2014. This shows that the income return on education is increasing over time.

Households headed by people with higher educational attainment have a higher probability of upward income mobility and a lower probability of downward income mobility. Thus, education plays an important role in both increasing households' ability of upward mobility and reducing their downward mobility probability.

Educational attainment is closely related to job accessibility. College and university graduates and those with vocational certificates were more likely to find salaried jobs than others. Among salaried workers, the income was proportional to their educational level. College-university graduates had the highest income, more than twice as high as those who had yet to finish primary education (VHLSS sample, 2014). Each increased year in schooling brings an average increase of about 5 percent in salary and wages.

Educational attainment promotes skill mobility. People with higher educational attainment are more likely to move from unskilled labor to skilled labor. 41 percent and 35 percent of unskilled workers in working age (aged 15-60) with college and upper secondary education, respectively, in 2010 moved to skilled labor four years later. Meanwhile, only 17 percent who did not complete primary education were able to do the same. Compared to people who did not complete primary education, a college or university degree increases the probability of shifting from unskilled to skilled labor by 19 percent and reduces the probability of moving from skilled to unskilled work by 23 percent.

The analysis in the three researched provinces also shows that people believe in the promoting role of education towards social mobility. The majority of respondents believe that higher education will help their children increase income in the long run as well as increase opportunities to find stable jobs. The lowest-income group trusts as much as higher income earners in the long-term role of education to upward mobility.

3.2 Family and community context

There is a tight correlation between parents' socio-economic status and educational attainment and that of their children. It can be seen from this study that parents' economic conditions and educational attainment have a great influence on their children's access to education, and this correlation is growing over time. Of fathers who did not finish primary education, only 15.5 percent and 2.2 percent of their children had completed upper secondary or tertiary education by 2014, respectively. Meanwhile, of fathers who had graduated from college or university, 47.5 percent of their children have also completed tertiary education.

Family economic status also increases children's chance to find jobs, particularly in areas that have few offers for jobs requiring skilled workers. Besides, multiple forms of community support, particularly among ethnic minority communities, could play a significant role in the upward mobility of individuals and households.

3.3 Capacity in diversifying livelihoods and leveraging local advantages. Agricultural development is important for ethnic minorities in increasing their income by optimizing land potential, promoting intensive cultivation to increase productivity, and restructuring their crops and livestock. Commercial tree plantations are a preferred choice of many ethnic minorities in Nghe An. Local non-agricultural jobs help to promote income mobility in areas with little farming land. In Lao Cai province, doing business in community-based tourism has become a way of improving income and living conditions. Migration for employment is a flexible solution to increase income in the short term in areas with little chance of local employment.

4. Barriers to social mobility

4.1 Poor quality education is a major barrier to accessing skill-demanding jobs. After graduating from secondary vocational school, college or university, young people in rural and mountainous areas usually seek local low-skill jobs. Very few intend to reach the high-skill labor market in urban areas.

4.2 Great disparity in access to education between the poor and the rich adversely affects social mobility of the poor. VHLSS analysis shows that there is a large gap in access to education at high school and college-university levels between the poor and the better-off, between ethnic minorities and Kinh people. The proportions of ethnic minority people with the highest level of college-university graduation in 2004 and 2014 were 0.9 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively, while for Kinh these figures were 5.1 percent (2004) and 11 percent (2014).

4.3 Many agricultural policies have been implemented ineffectively, affecting the ability and opportunities to improve people's incomes, to name just a few: production support, agricultural extension, especially contract-based land and forest allocation policies. In addition, agricultural risks (climate, markets, diseases, etc.) are also an important factor impeding income mobility.

4.4 Discrimination and segregation adversely affect social mobility opportunities of ethnic minority people. There are many implications of prejudice against ethnic minority people, one of which is recorded in the surveyed areas: limited participation and voice in local activities, adversely affecting ethnic minority people's access to social services and income/occupation enhancement programs/projects.

5. Policy implications

5.1 Education plays an active role in occupation and skill mobility. Upper secondary school graduation is the main factor that provides an admission ticket to skilled jobs and hence higher income. Therefore, improved access to upper secondary education for poor students should be a main policy focus. There should be more effective supportive policies for upper secondary schools to increase enrollment rates among ethnic minority students.

In addition to reducing gaps in access to education, policy measures should address quality disparities in education among the children of the rich and the poor, between the Kinh and ethnic minorities, and between better-off and disadvantaged areas. These measures need to start from early learning phases (kindergarten) to the higher levels. Addressing language barriers for ethnic minority children is an important issue, for example through the development of a multilingual learning environment, and by increasing the number and quality of local ethnic minority teachers.

The role of higher education in occupation and income mobility persists, but at a diminishing rate over time. Many poor families have invested heavily in higher education, but their children have been unable to find high-paying jobs, becoming a burden for the household. Early career orientation, selection of education level and development of job-based skills, including soft skills help to improve social mobility. Higher education and vocational training should be linked to the labor market needs.

5.2 Agriculture accounts for a large share in the income structure of many households, making an important contribution to household income mobility. However, the path of upward mobility through agricultural development is showing signs of slowdown and risks. In the coming time, Vietnam's agriculture needs to be transformed in the direction of increasing value added. It is necessary to change some agricultural policies such as supports for production expansion, agricultural extension, and risk management in agriculture, among others. Vietnam needs a new development strategy, which places more emphasis on farmers, adjusts land policies in favor of farmers and adopts sustainable agricultural solutions.

5.3 Migration for employment is a short-term livelihood strategy to increase income in many parts of Vietnam. There are, however, no mechanisms to support appropriate labor mobility to increase efficiency and mitigate risks, such as information support, support for women migrant workers, enhancement of skills to work in industries, or development of social networks. Addressing these policies will contribute to increased social mobility opportunities from the agricultural to non-agricultural sectors.

5.4 Young people are the driving force for the upward mobility of families and society, playing a critical role in inter-generational social mobility. However, no effective policy support system is in place yet for the youth in general and poor/ethnic minority youth in particular. It is necessary to develop a policy system in support of livelihoods for young people, especially poor youth. Support policies for young migrant workers should become a highlight of livelihood support programs for young people in mountainous and ethnic minority areas in the coming years. In order to increase inter-generational mobility and reduce chronic poverty, it is necessary to have innovative solutions to promote non-agricultural employment for young people.

5.5 For poor people and ethnic minorities, improved opportunities for income, skill and occupational mobility should be a focus of poverty reduction policies towards sustainable and inclusive development in the coming time. Breakthrough policies are needed to: i) improve access and quality of education for children of poor households and ethnic minorities; ii) increase opportunities and access to employment services, vocational training, livelihood diversification and employment for poor people and ethnic minorities; iii) promote the important role of social capital and community capital and its support mechanism; iv) minimize prejudice and discrimination towards ethnic minorities.

I- BACKGROUND

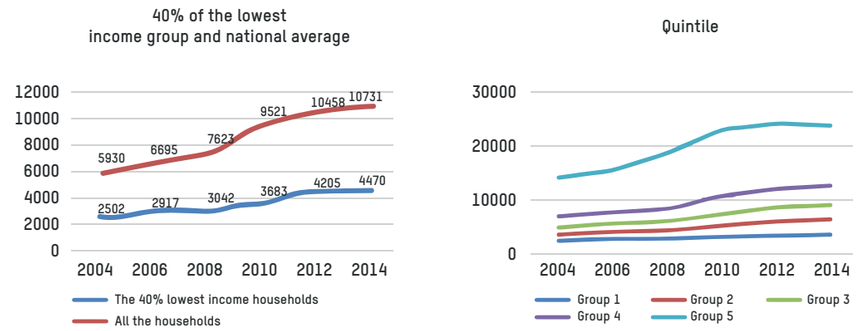
Vietnam has recorded significant achievements in economic development and poverty reduction. This is evidenced by an annual economic growth of 5-6 percent during the past 3 decades and GDP per capita increasing from US$100 in 1990 to US$2,300 in 2015. Nearly 30 million people have surpassed the official poverty threshold since 1990s. However, the economic growth pace has slowed down. The poor are increasingly concentrated in ethnic minority communities (WB, 2012 and 2016).

Inequality in Vietnam tended to increase over the past two decades (1993-2014), regardless of the criteria used to measure it. The Gini coefficient[3] of Vietnam's expenditures was 0.348 in 2014 against 0.326 in 1993 (WB, 2016). Income inequality between the 20 percent richest households and the 20 percent poorest households ("wealth gap") increased from 7 times to over 8.5 times during 2004-2010 (WB, 2012), and was unchanged between 2012 and 2014. Income inequality between the Kinh and Hoa ethnic groups and other ethnic minority groups also rose slightly from 2.1 times to 2.3 times during the 2004-2014 period (Nguyen Viet Cuong, 2016).

Recent studies by Oxfam have showed that during the 1992-2012 period, the Palma coefficient[4] saw an increase of 17 percent, from 1.48 to 1.74. This trend was mainly due to the decline in income of 40 percent lowest-income earners, from 19.33 percent to 17.28 percent (Oxfam, 2016).

The growth in average annual income of the poorest 40 percent of the population was slightly slower than the country's average level over the past decade (5.4 percent per year compared to 5.5 percent per year)[5]. Notably, the average income of quintiles 1 to 4 (from the poorest group to the nearly richest group) was quite close to each other, while the average income of the quintile group 5 (the richest) was far ahead of the four others, which shows that it is very difficult for the first four groups to break into the richest group (Figure 1). However, the figures above do not fully reflect the state of economic inequality in Vietnam for many reasons. For instance, wealthier people do not cooperate or did not provide exact amounts of their income[6].

Figure 1. Average income per capita in 2004-2014 ('000 VND, comparative price level of 2004)



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

[3] The Gini coefficient measures relative income inequality and is calculated based on income distribution among the total population. Gini = 0 (or 0 percent) means absolute equality, Gini = 1 (or 100 percent) means absolute inequality.
[4] The Palma coefficient is the ratio of the income share of the top 10 percent to that of the bottom 40 percent.
[5] Among the 17 SDGs of the UN for 2015-2030, goal 10.1 on inequality reduction targets to "gradually achieve and maintain the income growth rate of 40 percent of the bottom group's population at a higher level than the national average figure by 2030."
[6] Surveys of living standards often do not adequately record the income, expenditure and assets of the better-off. This is not a problem faced only by Vietnam, but also by other countries that rely heavily on cash transactions.

Economic inequality is only one side of the problem. Inequalities of voice and opportunity are much more worrying, especially for the poor and people in rural, mountainous and island areas. World Bank and Oxfam research shows that people in different geographical and socio-economic backgrounds are worried about the state of inequality in many aspects, especially the aspect of opportunity (WB, 2014; Oxfam, 2013).

The Vietnamese Constitution clearly stipulates ensuring of social justice for all citizens. The government has recognized the increasing economic inequality and has issued a series of strong poverty reduction policies, especially for ethnic minorities in "extreme difficulties". However, effective implementation of those policies remains limited (National Assembly Standing Committee, 2014).

In the past years, there have yet to be regular and in-depth debates on inequality issues in Vietnam as in other countries around the world. Even the term "inequality" or the issue of inequality (except for gender inequality) is rarely mentioned in official documents and in public discussion. For the first time, the political report at the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (January 2016), one of the most important documents of the country, used the term "inequality" to mention the country's social issues: *"...unsustainable poverty reduction, wealth disparity and inequality tend to increase. We are not fully aware of the role of harmonious social development and are yet to have timely and effective policies and solutions for the issues of structural change, wealth inequality, social stratification, risk control, the resolution of social conflicts, and the ensuring of social safety and security for the people."*

The United Nations Conference on September 20, 2015 officially adopted the 2030 Agenda with 17 global sustainable development goals (SDGs), among which is "Reduced inequalities". Former State President Truong Tan Sang, who headed the Vietnamese delegation to the event, affirmed Vietnam's commitment to focusing all resources and mobilizing the combined power of all ministries, sectors, localities, organizations, communities and people to successfully realize Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

Inequality exists in all societies and nations to some extent. However, extreme inequality is detrimental to economic growth, reduces social cohesion and hampers poverty reduction (Oxfam, 2014a). A recent survey conducted by the World Economic Forum indicates that inequality threatens political stability and global security (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso, 2014). Instead of waiting for inequality to reach a high level, the government needs to act quickly when inequality shows signs of increasing. This may be a unique opportunity. Once inequality increases and is closely tied to the political-economic system, people begin to get used to higher levels of inequality, making support for the redistribution policies more difficult (ODI, 2014). International studies show that monitoring inequality is necessary to ensure that the poor benefit fairly from allocation and use of resources. Poverty alleviation measures should be supported by an independent mechanism evaluating inequality among the poor (OPHI, 2014).

Vietnam has transitioned from a single-dimensional poverty measurement approach (by income) into a multi-dimensional poverty measurement approach (not just income poverty but also shortage of access to basic social services) since late 2015. When assessing achievements and challenges to poverty reduction in Vietnam, the World Bank recommends: *"Although Viet Nam has successfully eliminated extreme poverty and hunger in all except for the most remote areas, there are widespread concerns about increasing inequality of opportunity and outcomes. New studies need to be conducted to better understand the sources of various inequalities and, more importantly, to understand the role of public policies in addressing increasing inequality"* (WB, 2012).

Contributing solutions to curb inequality, before it becomes too large, has been identified as a focal issue in Oxfam's 2015-2019 Country Strategy in Vietnam through the design of future programs, research and policy advocacy (Oxfam 2014a and 2014b, 2016). In that context, Oxfam plans to develop a technical framework to monitor inequality in Vietnam during 2016-2020, including a topic on social mobility. Research on social mobility, based on poverty monitoring and poverty reduction policy analysis in the past 10 years in Vietnam, will not only direct Oxfam's activities in the areas of programs and policy advocacy in Vietnam, but also function as a potential cooperation base with individuals and organizations with common interests.

Social mobility and the facilitating role of education

Social mobility is considered as the movement in position/social status of an individual or a household or a group along time in a certain society. Social mobility can also be a change of position/social status of a person into adulthood in comparison with their parents ("inter-generational social mobility"); or over the years in a life cycle ("intra-generational social mobility"). Social mobility can be "upward" or "downward" in direction.

Social mobility is a measure of equality of opportunity, because it reflects how opportunities are converted into social and economic outcomes. In an equal society, everyone has equal opportunity to achieve economic and social status. Wealth and social position are decided by characteristics, efforts and results of individuals, not by external factors such as region, ethnicity, gender, or parent's position.

Research around the world shows that social mobility is hindered by an uneven playing field. In the United States, the so-called "land of opportunity", children from poor families have lower chances to graduate from college or achieve above average income levels (Stiglitz, 2012). Economic inequality is inversely proportional to inter-generational social mobility. Countries or even provinces in a country, with higher economic inequality have lower intergenerational social mobility. This relationship is called the "Great Gatsby Curve" (Corak, 2013a and 2013b; OECD, 2013 and 2014; Kearney and Levine, 2014).

Oxfam's studies show that Vietnamese people consider equality of opportunity to be a major issue of social equality (Oxfam, 2013 and 2016). This does not mean that all outcomes will be even. Everyone, regardless of origin or economic and social conditions, has equal rights to health care, education, employment and participation.

The study of social mobility in Vietnam has begun since the mid-1990s in association with a number of research projects about social change, social stratification and the segregation between the rich and the poor (Tuong Lai, Trinh Duy Luan, Pham Bich San, Bui The Cuong, and Do Thien Kinh, documents from 1996 to 2015). Among those authors, Tuong Lai, Trinh Duy Luan and Pham Bich San (1996-2002) mainly used the criterion of grouping by income quintiles (comparing the 20 percent poorest and 20 percent richest) to analyze the process of social stratification and segregation between the rich and the poor which has been occurring strongly in an open social structure since the Doi Moi (Renovation) process. Next, Do Thien Kinh (2003-2014) and Bui The Cuong (2015) grouped social strata by the criterion of occupational status (including 9-10 groups of occupations featuring 3 classes) to measure social mobility associated with social stratification. This research shows that structural mobility is slowly becoming institutionalized, reflecting the process of economic structural transformation and the formation of the middle class in a modern society. Farmers remain the group with the most difficulty to rise in the "tower of stratification", and inequality is increasingly growing between social strata.

Education plays a very important role in social mobility. The facilitating role of education in social mobility is based on two key assumptions: (i) Increasing access and quality of education help improve knowledge and skills and human capital, thereby making significant contributions to raising productivity and personal income and increasing social mobility ("assumption about education"); (ii) At the same time, there may be a tight correlation between parents' socio-economic status and educational attainment and that of their children. Better-off families in the upper class often pay more attention to education and have greater ability to invest in it, while also having voice and power to find their children better jobs. This leads to increasing disparities in education and income between children of wealthy families and those of disadvantaged families, and hence a reduction in social mobility opportunities of vulnerable groups ("assumption about income").

If the assumption about education (relationship between education and income) increases and the assumption about income (relationship between parents' socio-economic status and children's education) declines, the link between parents' socio-economic status and children's income will be increasingly reduced. This means that the "ascribed" default features of an individual will gradually give way to "achieved" characteristics of that individual, and society will become fairer, more meritocratic and mobile. Then education will play an increasingly important role in upward social mobility of disadvantaged groups (Goldthorpe, 2013).

In addition, a number of elements concerning the socio-economic structure, the labor market, and public policies also affect social mobility but are not directly related to education. Therefore, international studies on the relationship between education and social mobility have generated mixed results: education (especially mass education) is an important factor that can promote social mobility of vulnerable groups; but in some cases, education (especially privileged education) can interfere with social mobility of disadvantaged groups, depending on the specific context of each country in each period of development and policies for each social group. (Mitnik et al., 2013; Blanden and Macmillan, 2014; OECD, 2009 and 2010; Chusseau and Hellier, 2012).

Some econometric analyses based on recent VHLSS data show that income mobility is relatively strong but occupational mobility remains low. Education of the household head is closely correlated with the household's position in income distribution. The poor often have low educational attainment. Graduation from high school and higher education is considered a "ticket to escape poverty" (WB, 2012; VASS/UNDP, 2015; ILO, 2015).

The economic structure of Vietnam in the context of international integration remains focused on sectors with low value added, without requiring high levels of education and skills. Therefore, the role of education in upward social mobility remains limited (Brand-Weiner, 2015). The level of additional income thanks to education in Vietnam is low compared to other countries in the world. The average wage income of a person with a post-high school degree is only 40-50 percent more than a person with a primary school degree (Baulch et al., 2012). The imbalance in educational investment and the imbalance between supply and demand on the labor market are big challenges to the educational sector in particular, and to social mobility and sustainable and inclusive development in Vietnam as a whole (OECD, 2014; VASS/UNDP, 2015; WB, 2015).

Research on awareness of inequality in Vietnam shows that the majority of people with different socio-economic backgrounds is willing to accept others' rising above themselves in a legitimate fashion, if they still have the opportunity to rise in their life. Most people expect investment in education to result in upward mobility of children compared to their parents. Also, according to people's perceptions, two main factors hindering the conversion of investment in education into good employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups are limited educational quality and the illegitimate role of voice and power in searching for jobs (Oxfam, 2013).

Although social mobility and the role of education (in interaction with other factors) in social mobility are crucial to multidimensional poverty reduction, inequality alleviation and sustainable and inclusive development, there has yet to be any in-depth and coordinated research in Vietnam aiming to promote public discussion and policy debate on this issue. The number of studies on social mobility and the role of education in Vietnam in the past is very small. Such studies either form a small part of other reports or are found in specialized reports or magazine articles at a particular time, without coordination.

II-RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Study objectives

Measurement and analysis of social mobility and the facilitating role of education (in interaction with other factors) in social mobility in Vietnam in the period of 2016-2020, aiming to promote public discussion and policy debate towards multidimensional poverty reduction, inequality mitigation and sustainable and inclusive development.

2. Research questions

1. What are the current trends of social mobility in Vietnam?
2. How does education (in interaction with other factors) affect social mobility?
3. What strategic measures should be taken to remove obstacles in social mobility towards inequality mitigation and sustainable and inclusive development?

3. Measurement and Analytical frameworks for social mobility

Social mobility measurement indicators

Sociologists and economists around the world have long tried to define this concept for measurement and analysis. There are many methods and indicators used to measure social mobility, but generally in three main directions: earnings/income mobility, occupational status mobility, and class mobility (Torche, 2015; Fields and Ok, 1996 and 1999).

- Income mobility can be definite or indefinite. Definite income can be measured in the change in income according to a definite value. There are two ways to measure indefinite income. First is the measurement of change according to percentage. Second is the change in income allocation, often in quintiles from the 20 percent lowest income group (poorest) to the highest 20 percent (richest). Measurement of intra-generational income mobility can be the measurement of definite or indefinite income. In this research, indefinite income mobility is more often used by means of statistical analysis of income quintiles. Intergenerational income mobility measurement is the definite measurement for income mobility (comparing the definite income of children to that of parents).

- Occupational or job mobility is often measured by the change in status in a job pyramid. This pyramid consists of hundreds of groups of occupations. In Vietnam, Do Thien Kinh (2012) groups them into 9 basic groups from low to high status according to people's perceptions and statistical analysis, including farmers, manual workers, artisans, industrial workers, trading/services, office staff, professional workers, businesspeople, and leaders. There are limitations to this categorization, especially in the farmers' group, because it has not separated low-end farmers (have little land, self-employed / employed) from high-end farmers who have their own lands and hire labor.

  In this research, occupational mobility is measured by two simpler indicators, including job shifts and skills shifts.

  - Job shifts are measured by the change of job from agriculture to non-agriculture sectors (industry or services).

  - Skills shifts are measured by the change in status/level in the three categories of labor: (i) Manual / traditional labor: do jobs requiring physical labor, such as masons, porters, housekeepers, shop assistants, and

farmers; (ii) "blue-collar" labor: do jobs requiring skilled labor, such as workers at factories, workshops and construction sites, or craftsmen and farmers doing technical work; and (iii) "white-collar" labor: are non-manual workers with education and skills usually perform job duties in an office setting, such as technicians, officials, managers, and leaders.

In this study, increase in income is automatically considered to be a positive, "upward" mobility. However, whether occupational mobility (from agriculture to non-agriculture) and skill mobility (from manual / traditional labor to "blue-collar" or "white-collar" labor) can be considered as positive/"upward" or not depends on the level of income, working conditions, sustainability, and social and cultural factors associated with such mobility.

- This research does not measure the complex "class" movement of the society, although it mentions a similar term "socio-economic status", reflecting the combination of income, employment status and education.

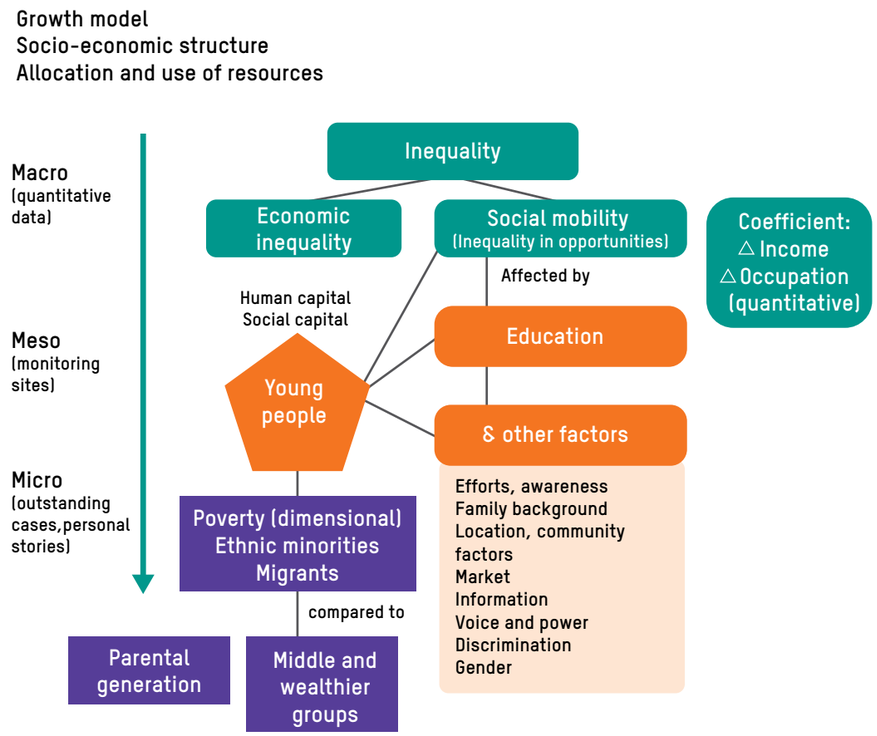
Analytical frameworks of social mobility

There are many drivers at the macro level affecting inequality, such as the growth model (the relationship between growth, efficiency and equity), changes in the socio-economic structure (the development of high value-added sectors requiring high skills, and the formation and development of the middle class), resource mobilization, allocation and use policies (e.g., investment structure in education: from early learning through tertiary and vocational education); governance, anti-corruption, and asset accumulation; and changes in technology, migration and globalization, etc.

This study monitors and analyses the evolution of social mobility in association with economic inequality (inequality of income, expenditure, assets) and the above-mentioned macroeconomic factors. Social mobility is measured by the income, job and skills shift of an individual or household over time.

The central subject of this social mobility monitoring and analysis is youth aged between 16 and 30 who are entering adulthood and beginning to participate in the labor market. We focus on the poor/near-poor, ethnic minority and migrant groups. Young people belonging to these vulnerable groups are compared to youth in the middle and rich groups (when analyzing intra-generational mobility) and to their parents (when analyzing inter-generational mobility) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Analytical framework



Next, the study monitors and analyses the facilitating role of education in social mobility in two directions (two assumptions):

- The link between education and employment and income. Better education (knowledge and skills) can create better jobs and higher incomes and promote upward social mobility. ("Education assumption": the correlation between education and income is increasing).

- The relationship between the family's socio-economic status and children's education. Children of well-off households can access better educational quality than those of disadvantaged households. The gap in education can reduce upward social mobility of vulnerable groups. ("Income assumption": the correlation between the family's socio-economic status and children's education is increasing).

In the process of verifying the education and economic assumptions, the role of relevant policies is partially visible. For example, educational support policies for disadvantaged groups (support for students of poor and near-poor families, loans for students, investment in school infrastructure, support for teachers in ethnic minority areas, etc.) may or may not help bridge the gap in education between children of well-off households and those from poor households.

In addition, education also interacts with many other factors in affecting social mobility. The following factors are monitored, analyzed and illustrated by small-scale questionnaire data, case studies and personal stories in surveyed areas: family background; living places; community factors; markets; and the role of voice and power.

4. Data sources and methods

This study combines longitudinal quantitative and qualitative methods through the use of three layers of data:

- **Quantitative data at national level (large – n):** analyzing the repeated survey samples in VHLSS statistics in the 2004-2014 period[7]. After every two years, 25 percent of households in the VHLSS samples are replaced. Therefore, this study analyzes two survey samples repeated in 2004-2008 and 2010-2014.
- **Household questionnaires:** 600 household questionnaires were delivered using a random systematic sampling method at surveyed sites with a large ethnic minority population.
- **Case studies (real-life tracking stories):** Intensively tracking a small group of purposefully selected young people and their families in surveyed areas.
    - + Conducting in-depth interviews according to anthropological methods (observation and participation)
    - + Contact and interview by telephone
    - + Group discussions, semi-structured interviews and use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools such as community profiles, mobility mapping, listing and ranking...

First, the large – n VHLSS data is analyzed to give an overview of the main findings on social mobility in Vietnam in the past 10 years. Then, small-scale household questionnaire data and case studies are used to explore and clarify trends and factors affecting social mobility in three surveyed provinces.

5. Field surveys in three provinces

Three provinces were selected for the survey: Lao Cai, Nghe An and Dak Nong, based on the diversity (from low to high) of socio-economic development, the coefficient of inequality (Gini), the poverty rate, and commitment/willingness to join the study. In each province, 4 communes/wards (8 villages) were selected for survey questionnaires and 2 communes/wards and 2 villages for in-depth surveys. 4 out of 6 villages selected for the in-depth questionnaire survey in this study are multi-ethnic areas:

- Vach hamlet (Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai) consists of Tay and Kinh people
- Day 1 hamlet (Ta Van commune, Lao Cai) includes Giay people, Hmong people and a few Kinh people.
- BuKoh village (Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong) includes M'nong people, Kinh people and some ethnic minorities migrating from the North.
- Residential Group 5 (Nghia Duc ward, Dak Nong) consists of Kinh, M'nong and some ethnic minorities migrating from the North.

Survey sites reflected a diversity in people's socio-economic development and livelihoods, with priority given to poor localities with a large ethnic minority population.

[7] Analyses of 2004-2014 VHLSS data conducted by Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016) serve as a background report for this general report.

Fieldwork was conducted for more than one month (from March 2 to April 9, 2016). The research team completed 600 household questionnaires, including 25 questionnaires per village in 24 villages in 12 communes (2 villages per commune) in the monitoring network. In each of the 6 villages for in-depth survey, two group discussions were conducted with the village's core group and youth group to grasp the overall situation in the community and identify cases for in-depth interviews according to the anthropological method (observation, participation). In total, 12 group discussions and 85 in-depth interviews with locals, including 47 men and 38 women, 59 people aged 16-30, and 26 interviewees aged 31 or over. The research team chose 34 individuals for in-depth monitoring in the following years. (See Annex 1 for detailed information about the sampling methods and survey sites).

Applying anthropological research methods (observation, participation) in field surveys helps researchers listen to the voices of insiders (emic) and learn each individual's perspective and experience of social mobility in different social settings (time, space, community, economic, cultural), thereby providing in-depth qualitative information to answer the "why" and "how" questions that quantitative data cannot explain. Anthropological methods play an important role in longitudinal study on social mobility.

III-RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Perceptions about social mobility

From the people's view, social mobility is a multidimensional concept.

There has been no previous research conducted in Vietnam on people's perceptions of social mobility. Some studies on social mobility were conducted (Tuong Lai, 1995; Bui The Cuong, 2010; Do Thien Kinh, 2003, 2012, 2014; Trinh Duy Luan, 2004); however most of them addressed the issues of social stratification and differentiation between the rich and the poor.

In the three surveyed provinces of this research, people interviewed consider upward or downward mobility of an individual or a household, comparing children with parents (expressed as "life goes up / down") from many dimensions. The dimensions most mentioned are income, occupation, education and health, living conditions and their voice in the family and community.

> *"Our income has become better, but I'm still worried about my children's unstable career. Since my husband passed away, my family hasn't been short of money because we don't have to spend money on medicine. My eldest son has applied for a job as a driver, but the younger one remains unemployed. We are standing still, not moving upward."*
>
> (Female, Tay ethnic group, Vach hamlet, Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai)

> *"My family is still poor compared to Kinh people, but we're doing pretty well compared to other Hmong people. I have a stable job (homestay service)[8], live in harmony with my husband, do business together and respect each other. Every time I buy something for children, my husband would say nothing because he knows that I buy the right thing. I'm quite satisfied with that. But my mother's life is not as good as mine."*
>
> (Female, Hmong ethnic group, Day 1 hamlet, Ta Van commune, Lao Cai)

Even within the same community, awareness of social mobility can differ from each family and social group to another, and even between generations in the same family, depending on their circumstances, preferences, experience and future vision. Positive feelings are recorded more often among the rich, the young (under 30), those with higher levels of education (from high school upward), those working in non-agricultural jobs, and those living in stable residential areas. Poor people, elderly people, those with low levels of education, workers in the agricultural sector, the unemployed and those affected by migration and resettlement have more negative views.

> *"Resettlement is favorable for the younger generations but difficult for the older generation aged 50-60 like us. It is easier for young people to get around with more convenient roads. Lao Cai has now become a construction site with numerous employment opportunities. The elderly like us face a lot of difficulties with no farmland and children's education burden...it is not so difficult for families with both young and old people, but it is for those with old people only."*
>
> (Male, Tay ethnic group, Vach hamlet, Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai)

Parents care more about income and occupational stability. For parents, children's immediate higher income and occupational changes have yet to be considered upward

[8]Homestay is a type of exploration tourism. When traveling on a homestay, instead of staying at a hotel or motel, you will be right in the home of the locals to have a closer and more realistic view of their own way of life and culture.

mobility, but the stability of income and jobs is the most important factor. Therefore, it is not highly appreciated if young people work in factories or are self-employed (small scale) instead of working for State agencies or big private businesses near home. Transition from agriculture to migration for employment as low-skilled workers in the garment, leather and footwear industries is not stable. Moreover, the risks to agricultural production are occurring more often, such as price fluctuations (such as prices of rubber and coffee in Dak Nong), extreme weather and climate change (drought in Dak Nong, cold weather with cardamom in Lao Cai, etc.) further deepen the bias towards occupational stability that is prioritized among middle-aged and older people.

> *"My children are working for private companies in Hanoi with a monthly salary of VND 5-7 million [$220-$310]. In my opinion, that is not stable. All families in this village have to combine doing something outside to earn a few hundred thousand dongs and raising pigs and chickens at home for additional earning, and growing vegetables to eat as well."*
>
> (Male, Tay ethnic group, Thac hamlet, Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai)

The younger generation is more interested in seeking employment opportunities to raise income and improve living conditions. For example, in Kim Lien village (Ngoc Lam commune, Nghe An), in the context of resettlement, middle-aged and elderly people felt satisfied with their children's better schooling and health care, but they still regretted the life in their original village, which seemed to be more stable with dozens of hectares of forest land and a few dozen buffalos and cows, with no worry about what to eat. But young people interviewed prefer the resettled life with more opportunities to seek jobs (being employed on site, working away) and get higher cash income as well as better living conditions (roads, cultural exchange, etc.).

> *"I think living conditions, with electricity and convenient travel, are now better than previously. It is easier to find jobs here. There is more land in my home village, and it is easier to catch fish and crabs there. But young people like me find it miserable if that life remains unchanged."*
>
> (Male, Thai ethnic group, Kim Lien village, Ngoc Lam commune, Nghe An)

Ethnic minorities have a pragmatic view on social mobility. While the Kinh care more about non-agricultural income, occupations, and high status, ethnic minorities think about very practical issues to enhance their life quality, both mentally and materially. Ethnic minorities in worse-off areas such as the majority of Thai people in Kim Lien village (Ngoc Lam commune, Nghe An) responded that upward mobility means having "more farming land and more buffaloes". In relatively better-off communities such as Giay people in Day 1 hamlet (Ta Van commune, Lao Cai) and Tay people in Vach hamlet (Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai), the people's understanding of social mobility includes the factors of employment and voice in the family and community.

The majority of people think their current living conditions are better than before. Over 2/3 of respondents answered to the questionnaires that their lives are now better than their parents', and less than 1/10 of them said that their lives are getting worse. The proportion of respondents answering that their lives are "better" than their parents is directly proportional to the income of their households: this ratio is the lowest in the poorest quintile (56 percent) and highest in the richest quintile (91 percent). Most people who graduated from upper secondary school and above feel that their lives are better than their parents (Table 1). In-depth interviews also show that the majority of young people believe that their lives are much better than their parents'. Their most apparent feeling is that it is easy for youngsters to find a job, resulting in higher income.

Table 1. Children's perception of their lives compared to their parents' (%)

	Better	Same	Worse	Don't know/ no response
Quintile 1 (poorest 20%)	56	25	19	0
Quintile 2	68	21	10	1
Quintile 3	73	17	8	3
Quintile 4	81	13	6	0
Quintile 5 (richest 20%)	91	7	2	1
Under 30	63	20	16	1
Age from 31 – 60	76	16	7	1
Over 60	82	12	6	0
No formal education	74	18	7	1
Lower secondary graduate or less	70	17	12	1
Upper secondary graduate or above	93	5	2	0
Not working	82	13	3	3
Agriculture	72	18	10	1
Non – agricultural	84	11	5	0
Living in resettlement area or new residential area	69	18	13	1
Living in established residential area	75	16	8	1
Average	74	17	9	1

Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

In summary, the perception of social mobility varies greatly among the communities in the surveyed areas. The most fundamental aspects of social mobility are centered around income, employment and occupational issues. Those are also the focused social mobility dimensions for measurement and analysis in this report.

2. Social mobility trends in Vietnam

2.1 Intra-generational mobility trends

The rate of occupational mobility in Vietnam is low. About 79 percent of agricultural workers in 2004 continued to work in agriculture in 2008, and this ratio was 83 percent during the 2010-2014 period. Meanwhile, fewer than 8 percent of agricultural workers moved to the industrial or service sectors during either the 2004-2008 or the 2010-2014 period (Table 2).

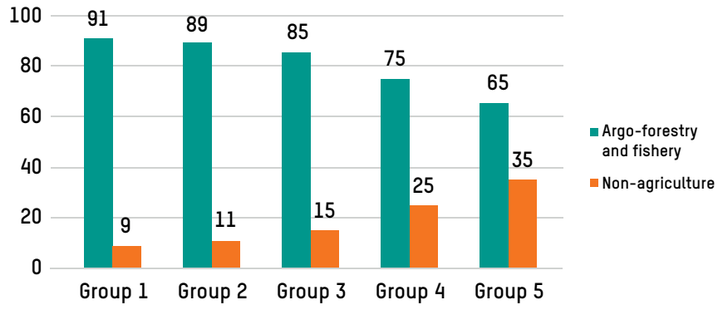
Table 2. Movement from agriculture to industry and service and to "not working" (%)

	Stay in agriculture		Move to industry		Move to service		Move to "not working"	
	2004-2008	2010-2014	2004-2008	2010-2014	2004-2008	2010-2014	2004-2008	2010-2014
Urban	71	72	6	12	11	7	12	9
Rural	79	84	9	7	7	5	6	4
Kinh/Hoa ethnicgroups	74	78	11	9	9	7	7	6
Ethnic minorities	90	91	3	5	3	2	5	2
Male	78	84	11	8	6	5	5	3
Female	79	82	6	6	8	6	7	6
Average	79	83	8	7	7	6	6	5

Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2010-2014

The percentage of laborers in the survey samples currently working in the agricultural sector is very high, averaging over 80 percent, decreasing from the highest quintile to the lowest quintile (the difference between the two groups is 26 percent). This confirms that the sluggish job mobility over the past few years in the surveyed areas is consistent with national VHLSS data (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of agricultural/non-agricultural workers by quintile (%)



Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

Opportunities to shift jobs in peri-urban areas are higher than in purely agricultural localities, but the ability to switch depends on conditions (education, relationships, age, etc.) and occupational selection by local people. In Residential Area No. 5 (Nghia Duc ward, Dak Nong), youth still works in agriculture as the area has urbanized, but agricultural production conditions are more and more difficult.

Compatible with VHLSS data analysis, occupational mobility is not clear among many young people with high educational attainment in the surveyed areas. This means that having high qualifications does not necessarily mean finding the right job. This result is consistent with the results of VHLSS data analysis. The number of graduates from higher levels of education is increasingly high, while the number of skilled jobs increases less quickly, leading to increasing difficulty in finding suitable employment. In Dak R'Tih commune (Dak Nong), local statistics in early 2016 show that there were currently 42 unemployed youth who have graduated from vocational training facilities, colleges, or universities.

Doing secondary jobs such as small-scale production (carpentry, masonry) or small-scale trading is not a frequent development path for people interviewed, as only a handful of people in each village follow this path (generally wealthier households). As local needs are limited, too many people doing secondary jobs will lead to over-supply. Success in secondary jobs depends heavily on personal factors such as skills, capital, relationships and risk-taking spirit. In every community, there are such only a few individuals with these characteristics.

Slow skill shifts. On a national scale, in both periods (2004-2008 and 2010-2014), only roughly one-fifth of unskilled/traditional workers moved to skilled manual work ("blue-collar") or non-manual work ("white-collar") (Table 3). The proportion of unskilled/traditional ethnic minority workers moving to skilled workers was very small. This could be because in recent years, Vietnam's economic structure has still focused on low value-added sectors that do not require high levels of education and skills.

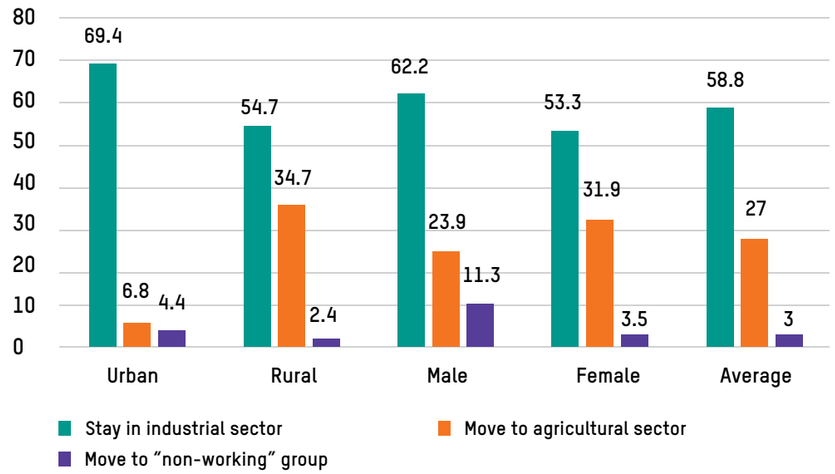
Table 3. Mobility of the group of unskilled/traditional laborers (%)

	Stay in unskilled work		Move to blue collar work		Move to white collar work		Move to "not working"	
	2004-2008	*2010-2014*	*2004-2008*	*2010-2014*	*2004-2008*	*2010-2014*	*2004-2008*	*2010-2014*
Urban	69	59	13	15	5	18	13	8
Rural	80	78	12	15	3	4	5	4
Kinh/Hoa ethnic groups	75	68	15	19	4	8	7	5
Ethnic minorities	92	89	2	8	2	1	5	2
Male	74	75	18	17	3	5	5	3
Female	82	76	7	13	4	7	7	5
Average	78	75	12	15	3	6	6	4

Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

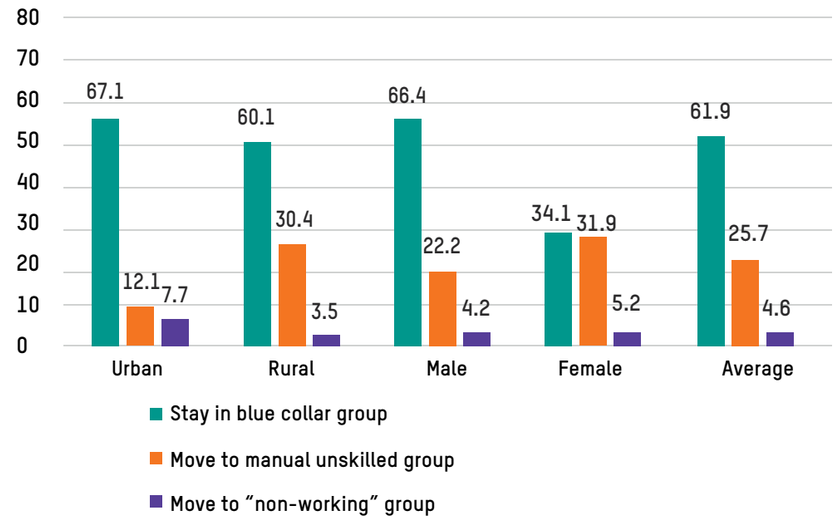
Remarkably, a significant proportion of workers moved from industry to agriculture and from skilled jobs (blue collar) to manual/traditional jobs. The limited opportunities for skilled jobs and the psychology of not wanting to make long-term commitments to low-skilled industrial areas among young people may be reasons that have led some skilled workers to move from the industrial sector to the agricultural one, or from skilled ("blue-collar") work to unskilled/traditional work (Figure 4 and 5).

Figure 4. Movement from industrial sector to agriculture and "not working", 2010-2014 (%)



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

Figure 5. Labor movement of blue collar workers to manual unskilled work, 2010-2014 (%)



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

Research in the three studied provinces shows that ***the shift of the industry and skills appear unsustainable, while the shift from agriculture to industry, from manual/ traditional jobs to low-skilled jobs is not necessarily a positive shift.*** In the surveyed villages/hamlets, youth usually migrate to work as unskilled/low-skilled workers in garment, footwear, and assembly factories for a while (ranging from several months to several years) and then return to live in their localities due to harsh working conditions at companies and responsibilities to their families (caring for parents, getting married, nursing children) (Box 1).

Box 1. "Men in this village usually work far away only for a few years then return to their homes"

D., born in 1995, is an ethnic Thai living in Kim Lien village (Ngoc Lam commune, Nghe An). In 2013, after D. finished high school, his brother was in an accident, so D. did not study further. He stayed at home and supported his parents in farm work (cultivating rice, cassava, acacia and tea) and took responsibility for the village's Youth Union work. In early 2015, he went to Laos together with a relative to work as a welder on a hydropower project. Income in Laos was quite high compared to local employment, at around VND 300,000 ($13) a day with free meals. Every month, with around 25 working days, D.'s income reached over VND 7 million ($320). However, after 3 months, as rice harvest time arrived, D. had to leave to go home to help his parents. During his time in Laos, excluding expenses (for passport, travelling, initial shopping (blankets) and food consumption, D. sent home around VND 6 million ($265). He shared:

> *"I prefer working in Laos than for a company [in Vietnam], as after working in Laos for several months I can take some time off and come back home to help my parents. My friend in Ma village worked for a company and didn't get any time off until the Tet holidays. After he took a month or two off, the company didn't take him back, and he had to find another job elsewhere without any benefits."*

D. intends to go back to Laos after the rice harvest (around May-June) and work there until the end of the year. He plans to spend 6-7 months working in Laos each year, combined with farming at home, hoping that in the next 5 years he will have enough savings to run a farm.

> *"I just want to earn more money to rent land from State-run farms to do agriculture in the next few years. Men in this village only work far away for a few years then they come back. No one has left parents at home. Going outside may not be as good as what our parents have created for us at home."*

Many ethnic minority people such as D. highly regard kinship and village relationships. They enjoy living among communities and joining community activities more than living in urban areas. In Ngoc Lam commune, Nghe An, many young people return home from migration because for them, migration for employment is only for experience; they still prefer to live and work in their homeland (Box 2).

Box 2. "Working as a worker in the south is not an improvement"

Mr. N. comes from a Thai household with large productive forest land in hamlet 8 (Thanh Son commune, Nghe An). Apart from the land of his ancestors, he also bought a few hectares of land, so he currently has around 6-7 ha of acacia and bamboo plantations. In addition, his family has more than 5 sao (2500m2) of farmland and a large garden surrounding his house. Despite busy agricultural work, N. failed to convince his two boys to become farmers. After graduating from lower secondary school, both chose to migrate to the south instead.

V.N., his youngest son (born in 1992) followed friends heading to Binh Duong in early 2012. Thanks to his friends' referral, he applied for a job as worker in a seafood processing company with a monthly income of nearly VND 5 million ($210). Each month he sent his parents about VND 1.5 million ($66). A few months later, he moved to work in a garment company with a little lower salary than his previous company. After working for the new company for only a few months, in mid-January 2013 he took a bus back home to spend the Tet holidays without permission from his company, knowing that this meant he had quit his job. According to V.N., he and his friends chose to go back home early to enjoy Tet holidays and return to the company late, regardless of whether the company would accept them to continue to work or not. During the first lunar month of the new year, if the village has weddings or engagement ceremonies, young people often stay at home and then return to work after that.

> *"My friends and I only work till Tet comes. If we stay close to Tet, we will receive a bonus of several hundred thousand dong, but at that time catching a coach back home is very difficult. Sometimes the tickets would cost more than two million dongs ($88). Coming back home early, we can also help our parents as Tet only comes once each year. Thai people always organize weddings in the early days of the new year. We will go back to work only after finishing the weddings at home. If we didn't stay home to attend, when we get married our friends wouldn't come."*

After returning home to enjoy Tet and attend several weddings of his friends in his hometown for more than a month, V.N. intended to re-apply for a new job in Binh Duong in March 2013. His older brother said he would rather go to Laos and work for a cattle farm. Convinced by his parents and brother, V.N. stayed at home for a year. Later that year, he announced he would run a tea planting pilot on an area of one hectare. He bought a coffee watering machine in Gia Lai to irrigate his tea and read a lot of information on Google about tea cultivation techniques.

After Tet in 2014, his brother was back home, and V.N. went back to Binh Duong and worked for a garment company. He did not switch his insurance from his old to new company. Each month he still paid a social insurance fee, but besides a health insurance card, he did not know about insurance premiums and did not want to register, thinking that "I will just work for a few years and then go home permanently, regardless of insurance." In early 2015, his older brother went to the south to work in a factory, so V.N. returned home to care for his family's bamboo and acacia trees, while doing hired work around the village (loading cassava, foraging, etc.). In early 2016, he got married. The couple expects to build a shelter in the forest to care for acacia and raise goats, pigs, and chickens. They also want to borrow money to run a farm.

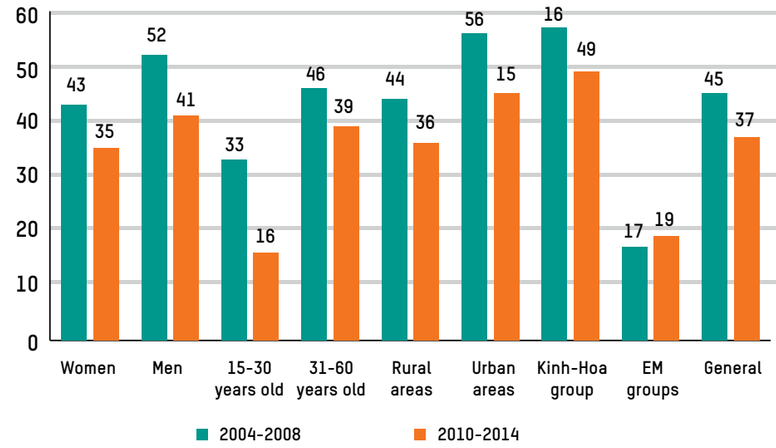
Neither V.N. nor his parents consider going to work in the south as a way to have a higher standard of living than others. Before V.N., many people in the village also went to the south to work and then returned home to live at an average level compared to their peers. V.N. wanted to go to the south to experience city life, communicate with multiple friends, and enjoy the southern climate. But for him, earning a living from the hills and forests seems more sustainable. He shared his thoughts:

> *"I don't think that going to the south as a worker is making my way up. People heading to the south come back to the village after several years, not bringing much but just enough to cover the family's work, build a new house, buy motorcycles, and equip their families. Here people must own a large area of land to move upward. If each youth has 2-3 hectares of land for bamboo and acacia planting, then life will be better."*

Intra-generational income mobility is rather high but has slowed down in the past 10 years. Measurement of intra-generational income mobility can be the measurement of definite or indefinite income. In this research, indefinite income mobility (more widely used) is employed by means of statistical analysis of income quintiles.

VHLSS statistics show that during 2004-2008, 45 percent of households in the poorest group in 2004 moved up to higher groups in income quintiles after four years. In 2010-2014, the proportion was 37 percent. The slowdown is more clearly demonstrated among younger people. 33 percent of the poorest households headed by people aged 15-30 entered higher income groups in 2004-2008, but only 16 percent did so between 2010-2014. Meanwhile, the respective proportions of the 31-60 age group in the two periods were 46 percent and 39 percent. The poorest ethnic minority quintile maintained upward income movement during 2010-2014 compared to 2004-2008, although low compared to the Kinh and Hoa groups (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Proportion of households in the poorest quintile moving to higher income quintiles (%)



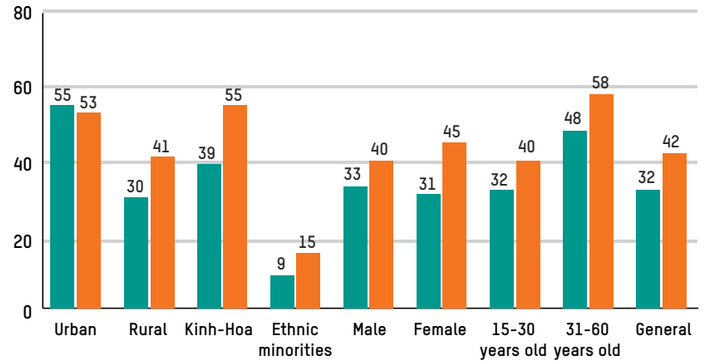
Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

Intra-generational income mobility is uneven among population groups. The most notable disparity is between the majority Kinh ethnic group and ethnic minority groups. Figure 6 shows that while 49 percent of the poorest households headed by Kinh (or Hoa) in 2010 entered higher income groups by 2014, only 19 percent of ethnic minority-headed households did the same.

2.2 Inter-generational mobility trends

2.2.1 Mobility in occupation and skills has become more common in the past 10 years but is uneven across ethnic groups. Regarding occupational mobility, VHLSS data shows that 42 percent of people aged 15-60 whose parents were working in the agricultural sector were themselves working in non-agricultural sectors during 2010-2014. This was 10 percent higher than in 2004-2008. The mobility rate from agriculture to non-agriculture was higher among urban residents, women, adults and the Kinh and Hoa groups than rural people, men, young people and ethnic minority groups. The homogeneity of the economic structure in rural and mountainous areas was the main reason for these disparities (Figure 7).

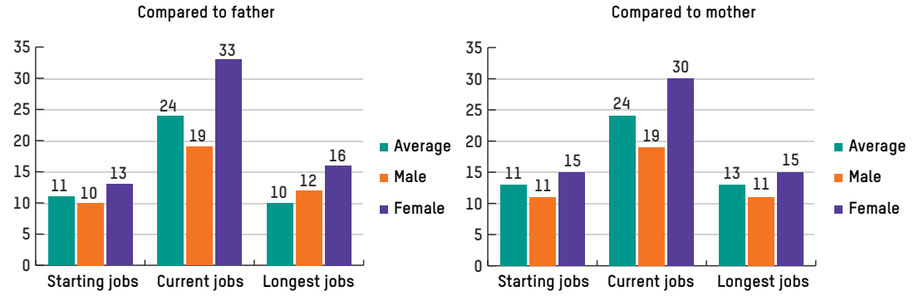
Figure 7. Intergenerational movement out of agriculture, in 2004 and 2014 (%)



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

In three surveyed provinces, the proportion of children with occupational shifts compared to their parents is not high. If parents have unskilled/traditional jobs, children will likely follow that path. At present, only more than 1/5 of children of unskilled/traditional workers are working in different job sectors from their parents. When comparing between children's starting jobs and jobs done for the longest time, this percentage is much lower, at just above 10 percent. According to calculations, women have a higher chance than men to have occupational shifts compared to their parents (Figure 8).

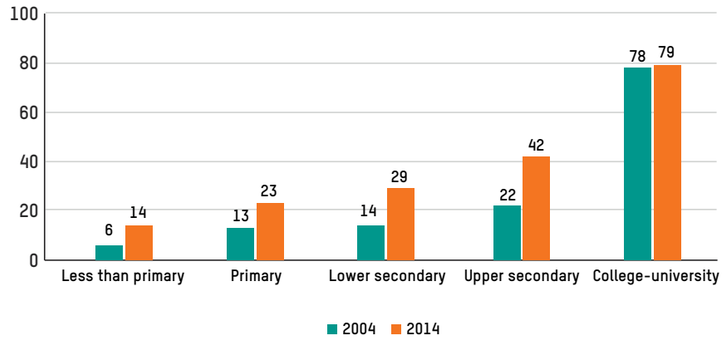
Figure 8. Percentage of children who have shifted from their parents' unskilled/ traditional occupations (%)



Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

2.2.2 In terms of inter-generational skill mobility, the higher educational attainment children have, the more skill mobility opportunities they have compared to their parents. Figure 9 demonstrates that for children whose parents are unskilled/traditional manual workers, 79 percent of those graduating from college or higher and 42 percent of those with upper secondary diplomas had skilled jobs in 2014. The role of upper secondary education in inter-generational skill mobility was more conspicuous in 2010-2014 than in 2004-2008.

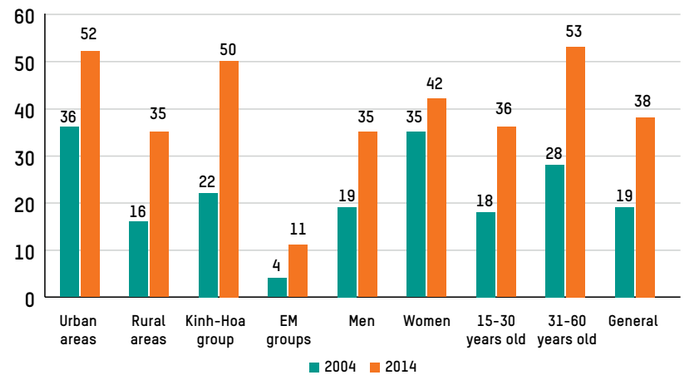
Figure 9. Intergenerational mobility from unskilled labor (parents) to skilled labor (children) by children's educational attainment (%)



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

The extent of intergenerational mobility in skills also varies. According to VHLSS data, there is a great disparity in mobility between urban and rural areas, between men and women, between age groups and particularly between the Kinh and Hoa groups and ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minority people whose parents do unskilled/traditional jobs are unlikely to find skilled jobs themselves (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Intergenerational skill mobility from unskilled workers (parents) to skilled workers (children), in 2004 and 2014 (%)



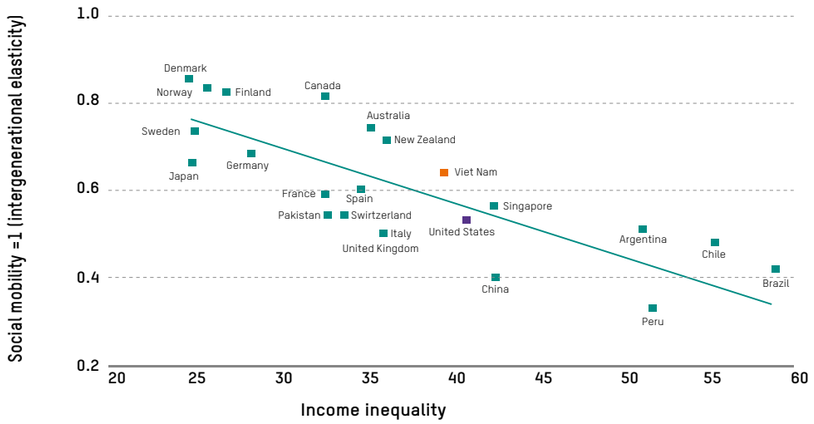
Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

2.2.3 Inter-generational mobility trends in income

Intergenerational income mobility measurement is the definite measurement for income mobility (comparing the definite income of children to that of parents). This trend is defined by the intergenerational income elasticity coefficient between children and father/mother (calculated based on the higher income earners). The coefficient calculated in VHLSS samples over 2004, 2008 and 2010 is 0.36, which means that if parental income increases by 1 percent, the income of the children will go up 0.36 percent. A higher inter-generational income elasticity coefficient means lower inter-generational income mobility, and vice versa. In the 2004 VHLSS sample, the inter-generational income elasticity coefficient was 0.35, and it was 0.31 in 2014. ***Thus, inter-generational income mobility in Vietnam in the past ten years showed modest improvement.***

Transnational comparisons show that Vietnam is on the same trend with many other countries on the Great Gatsby Curve (Corak, 2013a and 2013b; WB, 2013): high income inequality is associated with low intergenerational mobility and vice versa. According to this chart, the income mobility of children compared to their parents in Vietnam is at an average level, equivalent to Germany and Japan; higher than that of the UK, the US, Singapore, Argentina, China and Brazil; and lower than in Canada, Australia and Nordic countries, etc. (Figure 11).

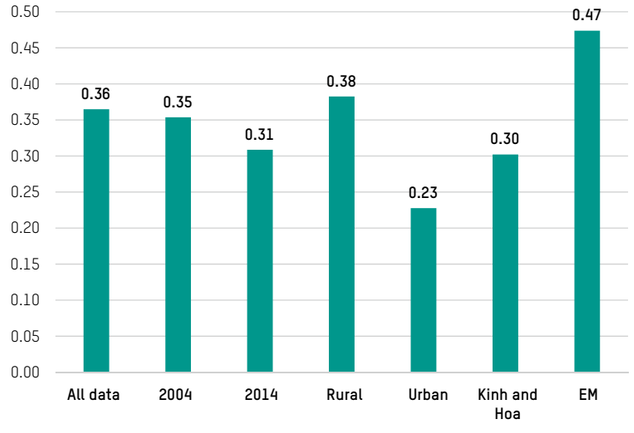
Figure 11. Relationship between income inequality and intergenerational social mobility (Great Gatsby Curve)



Source: Corak, 2013a and 2013b; WB, 2013; Nguyen Viet Cuong, 2016

Income mobility is higher in urban areas than in the countryside and higher in the Kinh and Hoa groups than in ethnic minority groups. The inter-generational income elasticity coefficient in urban areas is only 0.23 compared to 0.38 in rural areas, while the coefficient is 0.30 in the Kinh and Hoa groups compared to 0.47 in ethnic minority groups (Figure 12).

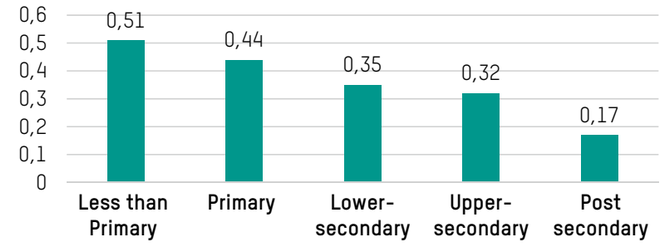
Figure 12. Intergenerational income elasticity between urban – rural areas and ethnic groups



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

The higher children's educational attainment is, the more likely they are to move to a higher income quintile compared to their parents. According to Figure 13, the highest inter-generational income mobility is seen among children graduating from college or higher levels (the inter-generational income elasticity coefficient is 0.17) and the lowest is among children who did not complete primary education (inter-generational income elasticity coefficient of 0.51).

Figure 13. Intergenerational income elasticity coefficient by educational attainment of children



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

Inter-generational income shifting in the three surveyed provinces is reaching a limit. If young people continue to rely on agriculture with no breakthroughs in occupation and skill mobility in the coming time, their income will be less likely to outstrip their parents', especially because arable land per person is declining (since parents have to split the land for many children).

> *"In the past, we had to eat cassava and sweet potatoes. We were illiterate. But now my children have graduated from lower secondary school and gone to Con Cuong district for their business. They have a better life. But I am concerned about my grandchildren. I would be satisfied if they do as well as their parents."*
>
> (Male, 25, Thai ethnic group, hamlet 8, Thanh Son commune, Nghe An)

Household interview data also show that, even though the majority of people surveyed express their belief in their children's economic improvement (income and assets) in the future, their level of confidence is not high. Only about one-fifth of respondents expressed "total confidence" in their children's improvement (Table 4).

Table 4. People's belief in their children's future economic improvement (%)

	Total confidence	Confidence	Little confidence	No confidence	Do not know/No response
Quintile 1 (poorest)	29	32	28	0	11
Quintile 2	25	38	21	3	14
Quintile 3	16	54	15	2	13
Quintile 4	20	48	18	2	13
Quintile 5 (richest)	16	51	17	0	17
Under 30	19	35	13	2	30
Age from 31 – 60	22	48	21	1	9
Over 60	22	43	27	0	8
No formal education	18	45	24	2	12
Lower secondary graduate or less	22	43	19	1	15
Upper secondary graduate or above	32	49	7	0	12
Not working	8	64	23	0	5
Agriculture	23	42	20	1	13
Non - agricultural	15	51	12	0	22
Living in resettlement area or new residential area	28	37	22	1	12
Living in established residential area	19	47	19	1	14
Average	21	45	20	1	14

Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

However, income mobility also depends on regional context. Inter-generational mobility is quite high in areas where there are opportunities to diversify livelihoods outside agriculture and low in areas where livelihoods are based primarily on agriculture. In transition and suburban areas, with many opportunities for off-farm employment, most children will earn higher incomes than their parents, as in the cases of Ta Van and Duong Cam commune (Lao Cai), Cam Son and Thanh Son commune (Nghe An), Nghia Duc and Buk Sor commune (Dak Nong). In purely agricultural locales such as Hop Thanh and Sa Pa (Lao Cai) and Ngoc Lam (Nghe An), land per capita is declining due to household splitting. Without any breakthrough model in agriculture or big ideas that change people's risks of natural disasters or price structures, the chance that children will have a better life than their parents is lower (Table 5).

Table 5. Perception of respondents' lives compared to their parents in surveyed sites (%)

		Better	Same	Worse	Don't know/ no response
Transitional, urban areas with more employment opportunities	Cam Duong (Lao Cai)	92	6	2	0
	Ta Van (Lao Cai)	90	10	0	0
	Cam Son (Nghe An)	78	18	4	0
	Thanh Son (Nghe An)	69	10	22	0
	Nghia Duc (Dak Nong)	82	12	6	0
	Buk Sor (Dak Nong)	74	14	8	4
Agriculture only areas	Hop Thanh (Lao Cai)	60	34	6	0
	Sa Pa (Lao Cai)	66	22	10	2
	Ngoc Lam (Nghe An)	56	22	20	2
	Thanh Son (Nghe An)	70	16	14	0
	Dak R'tih (Dak Nong)	80	16	4	0
	Quang Tan (Dak Nong)	70	18	10	2

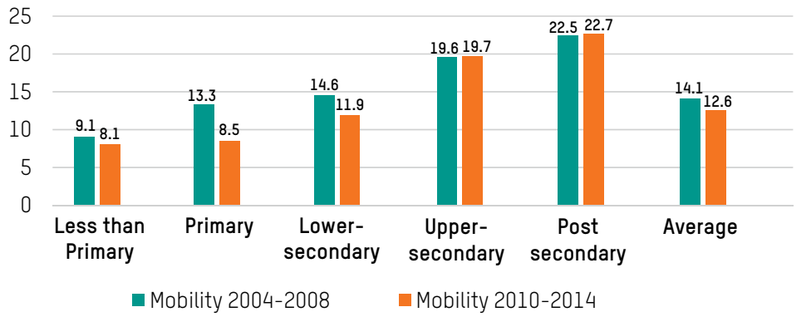
Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

3. Factors influencing social mobility

3.1 Education

Educational attainment is an important factor to promote income mobility. National statistics show that households headed by people with higher educational attainment are more likely to move from the low-income quintile to higher-income groups. Analysis of VHLSS data shows that 23 percent of households headed by post-high school graduates moved from the 40 percent lowest income group to higher income groups in 2010-2014. In contrast, for households headed by high school graduates, the rate was only 8 percent (Figure 14).

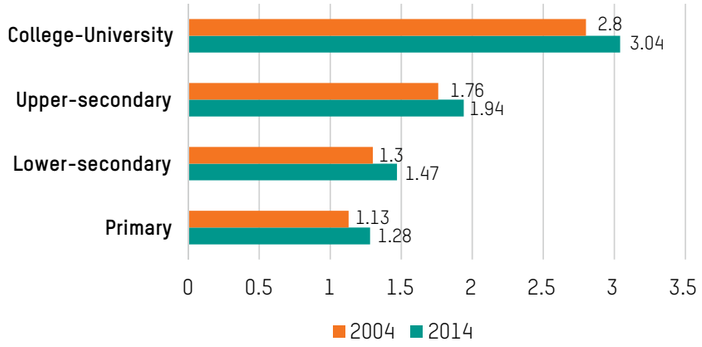
Figure 14. Percentage of people from the poorest 2 quintiles moving up to other income quintiles (%)



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

The educational attainment of the household head is proportional to the household's per capita income, an effect that is more conspicuous in 2014 than in 2004. In 2004, the average per capita income of households headed by college/university graduates was 2.8 times higher than that of households headed by a person who did not graduate from primary school; this rate was 3.04 times in 2014. This shows that the income return on education is increasing over time (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Ratio of average per capita income compared to households headed by people who did not complete primary education, 2004 and 2014



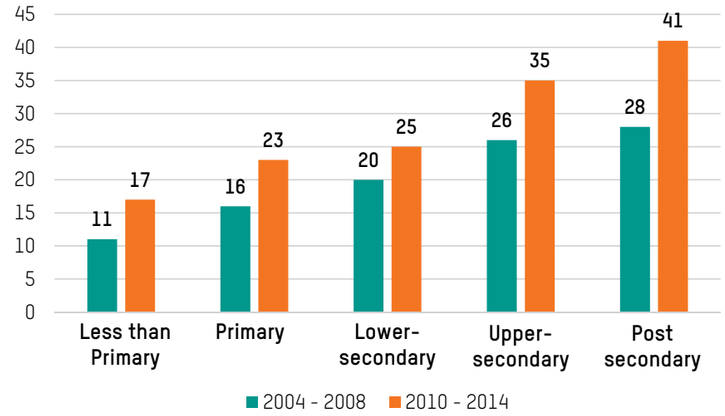
Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

Households headed by people with higher educational attainment have a higher probability of upward income mobility and a lower probability of downward income mobility. Thus, education plays an important role both in increasing households' ability of upward mobility and reducing their downward mobility probability (Annex 2, Table 2.1).

Educational attainment has a clear relationship with laborers' access to salaried jobs. College and university graduates and those with vocational certificates are more likely to find salaried jobs than others. Among salaried workers, income is proportional to their educational level. College-university graduates have the highest income, approximately 106 percent higher than those who did not finish primary education (VHLSS sample, 2014). Each increased year in schooling leads to an average increase of about 5 percent of salaries and wages (Annex 2, Table 2.2).

Educational attainment promotes skill mobility. People with higher educational attainment are more likely to move from unskilled or traditional labor to skilled labor. 41 percent of unskilled workers (aged 15-60) with college/university education in 2010 moved to skilled labor four years later; 35 percent of workers with upper secondary education did the same. Meanwhile, only 17 percent who did not complete primary education were able to move to skilled labor. This trend was more conspicuous in the 2010-2014 period than in 2004-2008 (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Rate of people moving from unskilled to skilled labor (%)



Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

Research in three provinces also shows that the majority of people have confidence in the long-term role of education in social mobility. In the surveyed areas, the majority of respondents believe that higher levels of education will help to increase income of their children in the long run, as well as increase opportunities to find stable jobs. Many parents, despite seeing difficulties for children to find jobs, still try to take care of children's education because "being educated would generate better results". These parents usually follow closely their children's education, make financial and time investments for their children, while helping to motivate their children when they are unemployed, or employed but not gaining expected results. Compared to high earners, the lowest-income group trusts as much or more in the long-term role of education to upward mobility. In the perception of poor parents, education is a "lifesaver" that helps their children, since they are not able to rely on agriculture and do not have favorable conditions to do business or services, even though looking for a job in the immediate future is not easy (Table 6).

Table 6. Perceived links between education, income, and job opportunities (%)

	Better education leads to better income (% agreeing)	Better education leads to better job opportunities (% agreeing)
Quintile 1	90	90
Quintile 2	82	82
Quintile 3	84	87
Quintile 4	84	89
Quintile 5	81	89
Under 30	80	85
Age from 31 – 60	85	87
Over 60	78	89
No formal education	81	80
Lower secondary graduate or less	87	90
Upper secondary graduate or above	84	93
Not working	80	85
Agriculture	85	87
Non - agricultural	78	89
Living in resettlement area or new residential area	82	92
Living in established residential area	85	86
Average	84	87

Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

Perceptions of education and its effects are different among ethnic groups. For the Giay, it is the ability to speak Vietnamese and have at least a lower secondary school degree that enables them to get a job in Sapa town. A certificate in cooking, tour guiding, or housekeeping can get them a job at a hotel or a travel company in Sapa, or even start their own travel business. Meanwhile, in the perception of Hmong people, especially women, the most relevant educational factor is the ability to speak English (they may not be fluent in Vietnamese) to become tour guides for Western tourists and then proceed to offer homestay service.

> *"Giay people here always try to send their children to junior or upper secondary school, or even to colleges and universities. They think parents should try their best for their children's learning, and after graduation children can do what they want. The Hmong are different. They do not put pressure on their child to study. But the Hmong speak English very well. I finished twelfth grade, but I can't speak English fluently. But Hmong sisters who haven't even finished primary school can speak fluently. They have worked as salespersons for several years and then become tour guides. After saving money plus getting financial support from their families, they open homestays."*
>
> (Male, Giay ethnic group, leader of Day 1 hamlet, Ta Van commune, Lao Cai)

3.2 Family and community context

The higher the socio-economic status of the parents, the higher educational attainment of the children. Evidence shows that economic conditions and educational attainment of parents have a great influence on children's access to education. This correlation is increasing over time. The more affluent families are, the more likely children are to have high educational attainment. The college-university graduation rate among children of the richest group is higher than in the remaining quintile groups. This trend was more evident in 2014 than in 2004, and not beneficial to the poor group (Table 7).

Table 7. Income of households and children's highest educational attainment (aged 15-60) in VHLSS 2004 and 2014 (%)

Children's highest educational attainment: VHLSS 2004						
		Yet to finish primary school	Primary school	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Higher education
Average income per capital by income quintile - VHLSS 2004	Quintile 1 (poorest)	25.8	35.4	31.5	7.2	0.2
	Quintile 2	13.6	30.8	39.3	15.5	0.8
	Quintile 3	10.0	26.2	42.2	19.5	2.2
	Quintile 4	7.5	20.3	37.9	30.7	3.6
	Quintile 5 (richest)	4.0	14.1	31.3	37.4	13.1
	Average	10.8	24.1	36.5	24.0	4.6
Children's highest educational attainment: VHLSS 2014						
		Yet to finish primary school	Primary school	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Higher education
Average income per capital by income quintile - VHLSS 2014	Quintile 1 (poorest)	13.9	25.3	40.5	18.6	1.7
	Quintile 2	5.6	19.2	37.8	32.2	5.2
	Quintile 3	4.7	17.5	32.3	37.9	7.6
	Quintile 4	3.0	11.7	29.6	41.5	14.2
	Quintile 5 (richest)	1.1	6.3	21.8	38.7	32.1
	Average	5.1	15.3	31.7	34.8	13.2

Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

Parents' levels of education also play an important role in educational attainment of children. Among fathers who did not finish primary education, only 15.5 percent and 2.2 percent of their children had completed upper secondary or tertiary education in 2014, respectively. Meanwhile, among fathers who graduated from college or university, 47.5 percent of their children have also completed tertiary education (Table 8).

Table 8. Highest educational attainment of fathers and children (aged 15-60) in VHLSS 2004 and 2014 (%)

Children's highest educational attainment: VHLSS 2004						
Father's highest educational attainment: VHLSS 2004		Yet to finish primary school	Primary school	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Higher education
	Did not finish primary school	28.5	39.5	22.1	9.0	0.9
	Primary school	9.8	34.1	35.4	17.7	3.1
	Lower secondary	3.3	13.9	48.5	29.8	4.5
	Upper secondary	1.4	8.0	40.3	41.8	8.5
	Higher education	1.3	3.8	26.6	46.5	21.9
	Average	10.8	24.1	36.5	24.0	4.6
Children's highest educational attainment: VHLSS 2014						
Father's highest educational attainment: VHLSS 2014		Yet to finish primary school	Primary school	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Higher education
	Did not finish primary school	16.1	35.0	31.2	15.5	2.2
	Primary school	4.6	20.4	39.8	28.0	7.1
	Lower secondary	2.1	8.4	33.9	43.6	12.0
	Upper secondary	1.4	4.3	21.6	50.1	22.7
	Higher education	0.2	0.3	16.6	35.4	47.5
	Average	5.1	15.3	31.7	34.8	13.2

Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

Family economic condition is the most important factor for a well-paying job. In the context of scarcity in employment opportunities for local highly-skilled jobs, in addition to education, the economic condition of a worker's family is a critical factor to get a "good" job. According to interviews with most people in surveyed sites, "a well-off family" is the most important factor to find a "good" job, followed by "efforts to study" and "an education degree". However, upper secondary school graduates highlight "efforts to study" as the most important factor, considerably higher than "a well-off family", showing that educated people trust in education in getting a job. Because of the low number of people having positions in organizations, agencies and companies (considered as having high social status), most people do not highly value the "family's social status" factor in getting a job (Table 9).

Table 9. Most important factor for a "good" job (%)

	Well off family	Family with social status	Family with wide social network	Support from relatives	Support from fellow villagers	Individual efforts to study	Education degree	Good individual network	Other
Quintile 1	39	7	7	4	0	26	15	2	0
Quintile 2	35	1	3	2	0	46	10	3	1
Quintile 3	49	3	6	1	1	26	13	3	0
Quintile 4	33	4	6	2	1	35	17	1	1
Quintile 5	34	8	3	3	1	25	24	0	3
Under 30	37	5	4	1	1	34	16	1	1
Age from 31 – 60	37	3	6	2	1	31	17	3	1
Over 60	45	11	2	4	0	28	11	0	0
No formal education	44	3	4	2	0	30	14	1	1
Lower secondary graduate or less	36	4	5	2	1	32	17	2	1
Upper secondary graduate or above	20	11	9	4	0	38	18	2	0
Not working	47	5	5	0	0	26	13	3	1
Agriculture	39	3	5	2	1	33	15	2	1
Non - agricultural	26	12	7	6	0	26	23	0	0
Living in re-settlement area or new residential area	37	10	7	5	1	24	14	3	0
Living in established residential area	38	3	5	2	0	34	17	2	1
Average	38	4	5	2	1	32	16	2	1

Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

The reality in the surveyed areas shows that better-off families can easily draw on connections to find jobs for their children. In contrast, poor families who have been trying to invest in their children's education face difficulties in turning learning into employment opportunities (Box 3).

Box 3. "She has several degrees but is still a fitness coach"

Mr. M., in Vach hamlet (Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai) has two children, and both are facing difficulties in their lives despite having degrees. His son Q., 29 years old, graduated from a vocational school. Y., his daughter, is a university graduate in accounting and Chinese language. After graduating in 2008, Q. was a worker for a private company in Lao Cai City with a monthly salary of about VND 4 million ($177). Y. could not find a job despite the fact that she holds a bachelor's degree (with distinction) and a Chinese certificate. In 2012, Q. saw that his salary was low and he had no opportunities for advancement, so he decided to quit his job and open a bookstore in the commune center together with his sister. The store operated for one year and then shut down because of inefficiency. Later, the two continued to invest in growing roses on their family's farm land, however, due to improper soil, the flowers were not beautiful. After more than a year they gave up this work to find other jobs. Q. asked a family member to find a job for him as a technical worker in a large plant in Tang Loong Industrial Zone at a cost of VND 20 million ($885). Y. decided to go to back school to learn about fitness; she rented a house near the commune People's Committee to open a fitness center and sell cosmetics.

M.'s family has been happier since his eldest son got a "stable" job but they are still concerned for their youngest child. M. is trying to "look for a job" for his daughter, but the chance of success is not clear. He shared:

> *"Several years ago, my family hardly ever smiled, as my children's lives were so difficult. My son is now paid more than VND 6 million ($265) a month and he can take care of his sister, helping remove a burden for me. I sympathize with my youngest child most because she hasn't found a stable job yet. She has several degrees but is still a fitness coach. She got married. Her husband was in Si Ma Cai but he abandoned her as she did not have a stable job. I'm still looking around to ask about a job for her. If I do not have enough money [to pay bribes], I must try to borrow from my relatives to help her, but it is not easy, even if you have enough money."*

Social and community capital owned by ethnic minority communities have a great significance in mobility of individuals and households. Multiple forms of mutual support among people in the community in difficult times are a key factor enabling social mobility, as in the cases of the Giay in Lao Cai, the Thai in Nghe An and the M'nong in Dak Nong. In particular, social capital and community capital plays a positive role in social mobility in hamlet 8, Thanh Son commune, Nghe An. This social capital takes two dominant forms of revolving loan funds to finance children's study and associations for migrants to support each other when working away from home (Box 4).

Box 4. The role of social capital in hamlet 8's social mobility (Thanh Son commune, Nghe An)

Loan funds help people overcome difficulties and cover children's education

Hamlet 8 has a strong revolving loan fund movement. About 30 years ago, the movement started with a revolving fund for building houses, drawing the participation of the whole village. If one household in the village wanted to build a new house, each household contributed 50 pieces of palm leaves for roofing and labor to help build the house. When tile-roofed houses began replacing thatched houses, villagers formed a "cement fund" and a "tile fund". In addition, there are also rice funds: (each household pays 100 kg of rice into the fund, so with 10 members, the winner each year will get 2 tons) and a "wedding fund" (whenever there is a wedding, villagers contribute 5 kg of sticky rice and VND 100,000 ($4.5) each). In recent years, "cash funds" have also formed, with 10-15 households each contributing VND 500,000 ($22) per year. Currently, the village has four cash funds. Anyone who needs cash in advance can make a "withdrawal", commonly with an interest rate of 20 percent that is shared equally among other members. According to commune and village leaders, the revolving fund movement is sweeping across the commune. In villages with better conditions, locals contribute a larger amount of money to the funds (for example, there is one village fund with a monthly contribution of VND 1 million ($45). The majority of households in the village are involved in one or several funds with different monthly contributions. These are used to take care of major family events (medical treatment, marriages, etc.) or to cover tuition fees for children.

> *"I've relied on the funds to construct my new house and take care of my two children. I pay 100,000-200,000 dongs per month into each fund or contribute per rice crop or annually. I think joining small-scale revolving funds is mainly about helping each other, not for my personal interests."*
>
> (Male, Thai ethnic group, hamlet 8, Thanh Son commune, Nghe An)

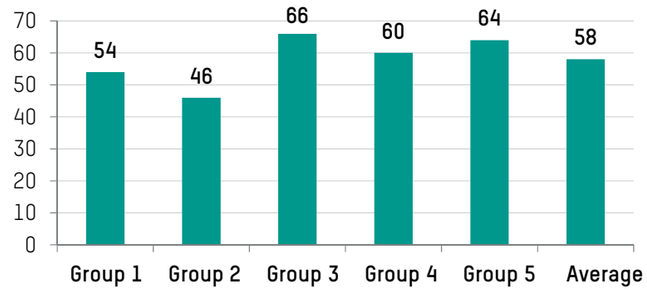
Villagers support each other in migration to the south

In hamlet 8, there are a few dozen young people who have migrated for work to several southern provinces, not to mention several youths in the neighboring hamlet 6 (Bong village) that previously was part of the same village as hamlet 8. For youth in hamlet 8, migration opportunities are plenty. After finishing lower secondary school, youth who want to migrate just raise the issue to friends in the village and they can find a job. Earlier migrants often support those who want to follow them, especially in the initial period of their work. Migrants also help each other when facing difficulties in daily life. In Binh Duong province, there is a linked group consisting of young people from both villages 8 and 6, and they often hold collective activities on weekends.

> *"Villagers' support helped me find a job in the south. Sisters, brothers and friends allowed me to stay with them for the first month. When I started getting my salary, I took care of myself. At weekends, we gather to eat and sing together. In Binh Duong we are as happy as at home."*
>
> (Male, Thai ethnic group, hamlet 8, Thanh Son commune, Nghe An)

In the surveyed areas, a significant proportion of the respondents, whether rich or poor, highly praised role models in their extended families or clans who have jobs and earn good incomes through studying (Figure 17). Parents often refer to these examples to encourage their children to try to learn for a better life in the future.

Figure 17. Percentage of people saying that clan role models influence parents and children's awareness of education (%)



Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

3.3 Capacity in diversifying livelihoods and applying local advantages

Agricultural development is important for ethnic minorities in increasing their income. Agricultural income based on utilizing local land potentials, intensifying crop yields and converting crop and livestock structures plays an important role in the upward mobility of households[9]. Comparing the income structure of households between quintile groups in three surveyed provinces shows that the ratio of income from agriculture exhibits the biggest difference (Figure 18).

"In 2010, my parents grew coffee in a natural way, with yields depending on weather conditions, but now, they have been trained to apply scientific and technical advances, including bud breaking, pruning work and fertilizing. The output per hectare was not so high before, a ton if we were lucky, a few hundred kilograms if not. But now it is three or four tons per hectare – that's pretty good!"

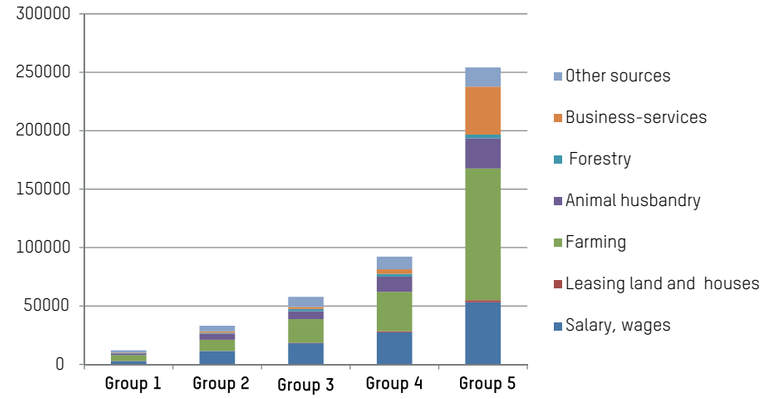
(Male, M'nong ethnic group, BuKoh hamlet, Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong)

"Previously with no artichoke and vegetable cultivation, people could only rely on rice farming and thus were poor. In recent years, artichokes bring in much higher income compared to rice farming, while vegetable cultivation is even more effective than artichokes, increasing farmers' income. As for my family five years ago, we could only have money to spend for Tet by selling pigs and chickens at the end of the year, but now, we only need to sell artichokes to get money."

(Male, Hmong ethnic group, Ma Tra hamlet, Sa Pa commune, Lao Cai)

[9]Andrew Wells-Dang in the background study of the World Bank's Poverty Assessment Report has specified that successful pathways of ethnic minorities are developing industrial crops and intensive agriculture, followed by diversification in both agriculture and trade-service, and ultimately education for children (WB, 2012).

Figure 18. Income sources of surveyed households by quintiles (VND)



Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

In Nghe An, planting commercial timber is a preferred option of many ethnic minority households. In recent years, output of the industrial forestry sector (most commonly acacia trees) is easily sold at high prices; this encourages many ethnic minority households to invest in acacia planting. In the surveyed areas of Nghe An province, acacia planting and collection has developed into a production chain with income generation in all steps: clearing/burning land, planting, thinning, applying fertilizer, weeding, cutting trees and removing bark. Some ethnic minority households who own large areas of land in the community have become rich thanks to acacia.

"Out of eight villages in my commune, there are only three Thai villages, while the remaining five are Kinh villages. Kinh live in places with better access to roads, more opportunities to communicate, and trade a lot, making many people rich. Our Thai villages are next to streams and springs. If we open shops, we can only sell products to the villagers. But the Thais have many forests. A family even with just two or three hectares is already better off. A few years ago, Thai villages were a lot worse off than the Kinh's, but now I see they are about the same."

(Male, Thai ethnic group, hamlet 8, Thanh Son commune, Nghe An)

"We're growing acacia in groups. When the acacia is ready to harvest, they call one of us and then the whole team starts to work. One team is responsible for the whole process of cutting, removing bark, and loading on trucks. Our wages are calculated by tons of timber. We are hired not only when harvesting acacia but also when clearing land for cultivation, planting, pruning, and weeding."

(Male, Thai ethnic group, Kim Lien village, Ngoc Lam commune, Nghe An)

Local non-agricultural jobs help to improve income in areas with little farming land. Agricultural land, either for short-term or long-term crops, is no longer expanding and is even at risk of shrinking for many reasons such as division of household plots, in-migration, and conversion of land use purposes (ex. land clearance for construction projects). In recent years, a number of ethnic minority communities have changed their economic structures, and non-agricultural sources have gradually replaced agriculture as the main source of household income. This is the case for many ethnic minority communities in Lao Cai province (Box 5).

Box 5. Non-agricultural employment promotes income mobility when there is no agricultural land

Prior to 2008, Vach hamlet (Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai) depended entirely on agriculture. Its 60 households had more than 10 hectares of farming land, growing 2-3 rice crops or 2 rice crops combining one corn crop. In 2008, more than 80 percent of the village's farmland was expropriated for the Noi Bai - Lao Cai Expressway project. About 20 households in the village now have no farmland, over 20 households have lost most of the farming area, and only about 10 households have maintained their farmland. Currently, most of the village's households do not see agriculture as the main livelihood, because of limited farmland and diverse non-farm jobs in the locality. Instead, they take numerous local non-agricultural jobs such as masons, porters, drivers, or workers in industrial parks. As assessed by the local residents, the income from these occupations is not as high as expected but it is still much higher than farming.

> *"Everyone my age who isn't lazy goes out to work. The daily wage from construction work is nearly VND 200,000 (about $9), while working as a salesperson brings in over VND 3 million ($135) a month. Meanwhile, the total revenue from one sao [360 square meters] of rice fields is no more than VND 1 million ($43.5) after three or four months, not to mention the expenditures for ploughing, cultivating and fertilizer, meaning we are working at a loss. Only old people stay home and do farm work, just to secure enough rice for daily meals without having to buy it outside".*
>
> (Male, Tay ethnic group, Vach hamlet, Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai)

Local non-farming jobs diversify livelihoods and increase cash income; thus, non-farm work improves household conditions compared to households that depend on agriculture alone (Box 6).

Box 6. Life is easier thanks to non-farming jobs

Previously, the family of S., 67, a Giay man in Day 1 hamlet (Ta Van commune, Lao Cai) was well-off with much farmland. After selling off more than half of the family's farm land due to drug addictions of two sons (who have since died), S. still has enough farmland to sow 15 kg of rice seeds. So far, his family's economy has not seen much change and is mostly self-sufficient. Enough rice is harvested for the whole year, corn serves livestock farming, and vegetables are grown for daily use. Each year, he raises 1-2 pigs for the Tet holiday and several chickens for meals. Earlier, he also raised a buffalo, but after it died, he did not continue. Until 2015, the family's cash flows mainly came from cardamom (about 20 kg per year), but this year, unfavorable weather conditions may cause a great reduction in cardamom output. Meanwhile, over the past 10 years, many households in the village have changed markedly in lives by moving to homestay service or doing small business (carpentry, selling in the commune or Sapa Town, catering, etc.). Compared with other families in the village, S. finds that his family's condition has gotten worse.

> *"More than 20 years ago, I was made captain of a cooperative covering most of the village's farmland. Now my family is a poor household, my children were drug addicts, my wife also died. Here now people almost all turn to running homestays. It is still difficult for my family to shift into this service. In this village, only those who still depend on rice farming are poor."*

In late 2015, S.'s youngest son and his wife got jobs in a hotel in Sapa town. S's son, born in 1993, graduated from lower secondary school and his wife, born in 1994, completed 4th grade. Since then, S.'s family life is slightly improved. His son is a guard, with a monthly salary of VND 3.5 million ($155). His wife works in the kitchen, with a salary of almost VND 3 million ($135) per month. The income of the couple is the main source of S's family income.

> *"Since my youngest son and his wife work for the hotel, our life has been much better, with enough money to spend. We have no labor to do farming, but we use the money earned from their hotel jobs to hire others to help out with farming. I hope they continue to have stable jobs like this. Only depending on rice farming will make us poorer than others."*

In Lao Cai province, doing business in community-based tourism has become a way of improving income and living conditions for many households. Some Hmong women in Day 1 hamlet shifted from working as street vendors to a tour guide and homestay business. This has helped to improve their confidence and status in the family, becoming more respected by their family members and community (Box 7).

Box 7. From a street vendor to a homestay owner: Social mobility of a Hmong woman

Ten years ago, P. (born in 1990) was a street vendor in Ta Van commune. At present, she is the owner of a busy homestay in Day 1 hamlet. Since Sapa tourism began to flourish again in the early 1990s, Hmong girls in Ta Van and neighboring communes started working as street vendors at 9-10 years old. They sold brocade items made by their mothers or the children themselves in their spare time. At age 12, when she was in 3rd grade, P. followed her friends to sell products in the center of Ta Van commune. She gave her daily earnings, about VND 10,000 (less than $0.50), to her parents for household spending. After two years, she quit school to get married.

P.'s husband, T. is one year older than she is. He studied to 2nd grade but is illiterate in Vietnamese. The two ethnic groups in Day 1, Giay and Hmong, have a similar number of households (over 40 households each). The Hmong have a higher number of poor households. T.'s parents are among the best-off Hmong couples in the village due to their large fields and stable revenues from cardamom. For three years after their wedding, P. continued to work as a street vendor. With six years of experience, her English improved significantly, from only saying "hello" and "buy for me" to communicating fluently with foreign guests. In 2008, a friend introduced her to a travel agency to work as a tour guide in Sapa town. Her job was to meet customers in town and guide them to join walking tours. Wages were paid on a daily basis. At the beginning, each day she was paid VND 200,000 (about $9), but later the money was gradually reduced as there were many other Hmong girls with fluent English also working as tour guides. When his wife was at work, T. stayed at home with their children and occasionally earned extra income as a motorbike taxi driver.

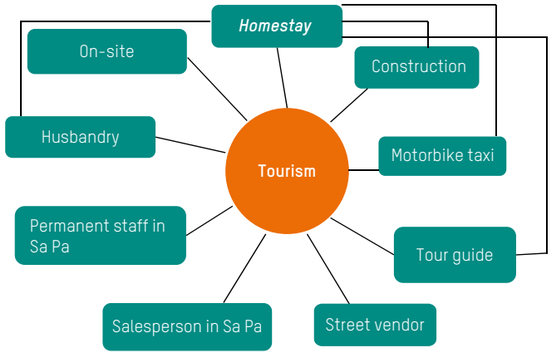
In 2011, for the first time P. brought a European tour group to stay at her house. Although at that time there was no bathroom, guests still enjoyed staying at her home. This initial success brought about a burning desire for P. to open a homestay. In 2013, P. decided to quit her job as a tour guide to open a homestay. Her decision was supported by her husband and parents-in-law. Her family sold a buffalo for VND 25 million ($1,100) and a small piece of land for nearly VND 30 million ($1,330). This, plus the couple's accumulated savings during the past years, was used to build a toilet (at a cost of VND 45 million, or about $1,990) and buy blankets. Running a homestay requires many skills, including cooking and decorating guest rooms with flair. Despite never taking a training course on community-based tourism, P. learned from the experience of many other homestay households during her five years working as a tour guide, especially from Giay people in her village. Managing a homestay requires a high ability to build relationships. Hmong households operating homestays in Day 1 village usually have wives who used to be/are tour guides, with the ability to search for and take guests home. However, maintaining a stable number of tourists is not easy, while hotels and travel agents are creating pressure to lower prices of homestays. P. and other homestay owners have to accept to host many different types of customers with different prices to sustain operations. While P. focuses on receiving and taking care of tourists, her husband does other work in their family and assists her in serving clients (driving a motorcycle to pick up food delivered by travel agencies or hotels from Sapa, taking care of their children, chopping firewood, etc.).

The homestay brings P.'s family revenue of about VND 300,000 ($14) every day after deducting expenses. For her family, this is a significant step forward in both profession and income. The couple said that they consider themselves better off than their parents in income and occupation. T. shares about the current life of the couple:

> *"Previously, my father had a lot of land but generated no income. Working in the rice fields wasn't a comfortable life. We're now running a homestay, every day we have money, we hire people to work in our fields, and we have enough money to buy things for our children too. My wife and I are better off than our parents. I do not compare us to the Kinh, but when compared to other Hmongs, we are more comfortable. My family is also as wealthy as Giay people."*

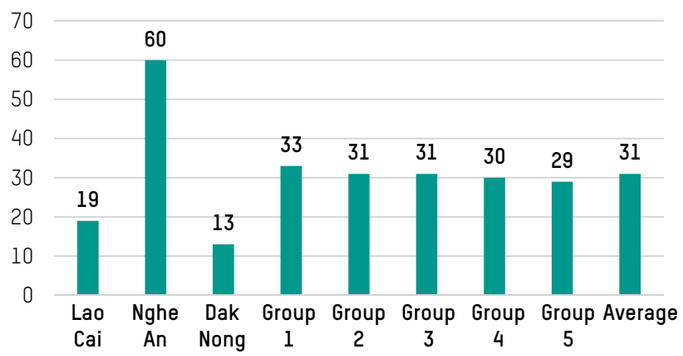
Young people in Day 1 hamlet do a lot of complementary work related to tourism, leveraging their geographical advantages and ethnic cultural capital (Figure 19). Tourism jobs can vary among different ethnic minority groups. Many Giay people work as security guards or hotel and restaurant staff in Sapa, while Hmong often work as tour guides, motorcycle taxi drivers and in recent years, homestay service providers.

Figure 19. Tourism-related professions of youth in Day 1 hamlet (Ta Van)



Migration for employment is a flexible solution to increase income in the short term in areas with little chance of local employment. In areas where all agricultural land has been allocated and with few local non-agricultural employment opportunities, youth often consider migration for employment in the short term. About 30 percent of survey respondents in this study have family members working far away[10]. For ethnic minority youth, the decision to go work in other provinces is similar in different quintile groups, but with large variations in total numbers depending on the conditions of each community (Figure 20). Among the surveyed areas, the two Thai communities in Nghe An province have the highest percentage of people working in other provinces, while the two M'nong communities in Dak Nong province have the lowest rate.

Figure 20. Percentage of households in the surveyed areas who have members working in other provinces (%)



Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

[10] According to the World Bank and VASS (2015), ethnic minorities make up 7.6 percent of the total number of long-term residents and 11.3 percent of the short-term residents in Binh Duong province (the province with the highest number of migrant workers in Vietnam).

However, for many young people, this situation is only temporary. For example, in hamlet 8 of Thanh Son commune, Nghe An province, most Thai youths who were interviewed worked in a company for no more than one year. They migrated to the south after the Lunar New Year and returned home at the end of the year. During their stay at home for about a month, they support their families in several chores and participate in community activities (mostly weddings). In case of sudden family needs, they can extend their stay and work at home. When returning to the south, many look for new companies. All five people interviewed in hamlet 8 who work in other provinces said that they will not be migrant workers in the long term. This is an example of a short-term and flexible livelihood strategy for the poor in general and ethnic minorities in particular.

4. Barriers to social mobility

Low quality of higher education is a key factor hindering ethnic minority children from gaining access to skilled jobs. Of 42 unemployed young people in Dak R'tih commune (Dak Nong), two have completed full-time higher education. Of the rest, about a half graduated from vocational facilities requiring a lower secondary completion certificate for admission; a quarter graduated from three-year colleges after transferring from the vocational training system; and the remaining quarter graduated from universities after part-time courses. According to the commune officials, the training quality of such facilities is often not high; graduates usually seek local jobs in the public sector. Very few intend to reach the high-skill labor market in urban areas.

> *"In the past, few people went to study [at college/university]. Now it's easy, so many people go. Tertiary vocational schools and colleges even recruit students for teacher training who have only finished 9th grade. But when they go home after studying, they can't find jobs".*
>
> (Male, M'nong ethnic group, Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong)

> *"In recent years, it is easy for children here to go to higher education. They get enrolled just after finishing lower secondary school, and then after three years they get a vocational certificate. In the past, it was easy to apply for a job, especially for those graduating with certificates in preschool and primary education. But now, it is difficult to get a job, but still easy to be enrolled. The children in such schools only hope for a job here [in the commune government], otherwise they stay at home to do farming, as it is very difficult to go to Buon Me Thuot or Saigon to look for a job."*
>
> (Male, M'nong ethnic group, official of Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong)

> *"My eldest daughter after graduating from junior secondary school took a law training course in the vocational school in Buon Me Thuot. After three years studying there, she will transfer to college level. After finishing, she can go home to look for a job in the commune office or do farming with us. Many people in our commune have not found a job after finishing school. It's increasingly difficult."*
>
> (Female, M'nong ethnic group, BuKoh hamlet, Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong)

The great disparity in access to education between the poor and the rich adversely affects social mobility of the poor. Analysis of VHLSS data on the highest educational attainment of household members shows that there is still a big gap in access to education at upper secondary level and higher education between the poor and the rich, between the Kinh and ethnic minority groups. The proportions of ethnic minority people with the highest level of college-university graduation in 2004 and 2014 were 0.9 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively, while these figures for Kinh (and Hoa) people were 5.1 percent (2004) and 11 percent (2014) (Table 10).

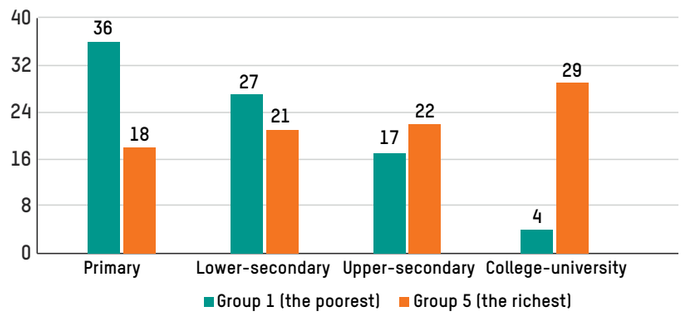
Table 10. Educational attainment in 2004 and 2014 by ethnic group (%)

	Average		Kinh/Hoa ethnic groups		Ethnic minorities		Poorest quintile		Richest quintile	
	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014
Yet to finish primary school	17.9	14.1	15.2	10.7	38.7	34.2	34.5	31.3	8.5	4.9
Primary school	25.7	22.6	25.3	21.9	28.5	26.7	31.5	30.2	17.9	13.8
Lower secondary	33.8	31.1	35.0	32.1	24.6	24.6	27.8	28.5	29.6	25.0
Upper secondary	18.0	22.5	19.4	24.3	7.4	11.4	6.1	9.3	29.8	29.5
Higher education	4.6	9.9	5.1	11.0	0.9	3.1	0.1	0.7	14.3	26.8

Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2010-2014

Research in three provinces also shows the difference in education costs is evident at higher school levels. The number of people attending upper secondary schools in the poorest quintile is lower but not significantly lower than that in the richest quintile. Out of every 18 people studying at upper secondary schools, there are 10 people from the richest group and 8 people from the poorest group. However, the difference in the proportion of people attending higher education (college/university) between the richest and the poorest group is wider compared to secondary education (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Highest educational attainment of people from the poorest and richest income quintiles (%)



Source: Data from household interviews in surveyed areas, 2016

In academic environment that includes both Kinh and ethnic minority students, disadvantaged ethnic minority parents and students have clearer experience about the gap between the rich and the poor in education (Box 8).

Box 8. Experience of inequality in education of a M'nong parent

Schools are a place where disadvantaged ethnic minority children feel clearly inequality both between the rich and the poor and between the Kinh and ethnic minorities. K.'s family, an ethnic M'nong family in Residential Area No. 5 (Duc Nghia ward, Dak Nong), has two school-age children. The oldest is a 6th grader in a class with mostly Kinh students and only two ethnic minorities. His youngest child is in kindergarten and also the only ethnic minority child in class. K.'s livelihood is based primarily on revenues from 1 hectare of wheat planting (2 hours' motorcycle driving away from his home) and money earned from hired work. Previously, he worked as a commune official, but he quit. His wife currently works as a semi-specialized commune official, with a monthly allowance of more than VND 1 million ($45).

Mr. K shared that he noticed his disadvantages compared to parents of the majority ethnic group, even though teachers and schools do not have overtly discriminatory attitudes. This disadvantage is clearly felt in "socialized" activities of the school. Earlier this year, his eldest child's school organized a camp. Each student in the class had to contribute VND 500,000 ($23). This was a large amount for K.'s family. He phoned to ask his child's teacher to reduce the amount to VND 300,000 ($14). Although the teacher agreed, K. felt this request was a shame to his family. Or at the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, during a parents' meeting for his youngest child, each student was "recommended" to contribute VND 3 million ($135) for school construction and equipment. This was a huge amount for K. as his family's net income from a hectare of wheat reaches less than VND 10 million ($440). At that time, he got up to speak, but he was overwhelmed by ideas from Kinh parents accounting for the majority. He shared:

> *"The school called for a VND 3 million ($135) contribution at the beginning of the school year. I stood up to speak, but Kinh parents were in favor, so I shut up. They are the majority, so I should have to listen to them. Having no money, I had to borrow it. I would be embarrassed not to contribute."*

Another key barrier to social mobility is that many agricultural policies are implemented ineffectively, affecting the ability and opportunity for poor people to increase their income. As reflected by local people, production development support policies seem not to be connected with the needs of people with declining living standards or those in danger of falling behind. Training courses and agricultural encouragement models are said to create more access for better-off groups than disadvantaged ones.

The selection of new seedlings in many places is based on the views of officials and outsiders, rather than insiders. Especially, there are many shortcomings in land and forest allocation policies that lead to differences in areas of land used for cultivation of cash crops and commercial tree production affecting inter-generational income mobility in ethnic minority areas. In areas with high cash crop production (coffee, pepper, cashews, etc.) such as BuKoh village (Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong), inequality in land tenure is growing. Kinh people with better economic conditions bought land from local ethnic people, leading to the situation that one household could have 5 ha of land, while another household has less than 1 ha. In other areas, differences in allocation of forest land arising from land policies several decades ago have helped children of those with larger land areas become wealthier, but also make those with less land clearly feel difficulties for their children. With less land, they have fewer opportunities in agriculture, as they mostly rely on wage labor to live (Box 9).

Box 9. Land allocation, opportunities and barriers to social mobility in Khe Han village, Nghe An

Up to 30 years ago, Thai people in Khe Han village (Chau Hanh commune, Quy Chau district, Nghe An) understood forest land in traditional institutions of two main categories: community forests (the majority) and household forests (including forests near residential areas). People considered common forests as supply sources of wood for constructing houses, firewood, daily food (bamboo shoots, wild vegetables), and medicines (honey, medicinal plants). Only some species of bamboo were harvested for sale. Most people did not get rich from the forest; they focused on clearing more rice fields to provide food for their families.

Since the implementation of the land and forest allocation policy[11], forest land has concentrated in the hands of some households. Most people do not see much benefit from forest resources, so they do not want to get more land. Meanwhile, the first four extended families who were the core farmers that established Khe Han received large forest plots. Some people had up to several dozen hectares. They also encouraged their relatives to get more forest land. After a few years, many households who had received forest land but did not see any chance for profit, or lacked capital to plant trees, sold their land. In a few other cases, land selling was due to unexpected risks.

Since 2009, the acacia planting movement has thrived. Forest land that was previously used for natural forest or rice cultivation has become valuable thanks to the transition to acacia. On average, each hectare of acacia is sold to buyers for around VND 40-50 million (equivalent to $1,760-2,200). Some households who self-organize harvesting acacia and rent trucks to transport timber to mills can earn better prices. From cultivating acacia, households with large areas of land have become wealthier. They built better houses, purchased equipment and invested in their children's education. Those who sold their land previously feel regret. Some want to buy land, but currently very few people want to sell, or they sell land at high prices that is located far away from the village.

Currently, for children of households owning less land, migration and local wage work are the two top options. Those who have finished lower secondary school or higher head to the south or northern provinces to work in factories. Those with less education work as masons in Hanoi, gold mining, or migrate to China. Households with less land feel pessimistic because they have not found out a local path to stability for their children. They clearly notice their disadvantages in their children's process of building careers and developing their lives compared to those with more land.

> *"D.'s child (from a family with 40 hectares of acacia) will apply to work for a state agency after graduating from university. If he's not successful, he will go back home and hire others to work for him. My son can only finish lower secondary school, because I don't have money. If he likes, he can become a worker for a few years, or stay at home to plant acacia and wait for others to hire him for acacia harvesting. We have no better choice. It's too bad that my parents didn't think carefully. The State allocated land, but they didn't take it. Now there's no more land left."*
>
> (Male, Thai ethnic group, Khe Han village, Hanh Chau commune, Nghe An)

[11]The policy "to have every plot of land, every hill attended to" was adopted under the Party Central Committee's Directive 29, dated November 12, 1983. Government Decree 163/ND-CP dated November 16, 1999 allowed land allocation and leasing of forest land to organizations, households and individuals for stable, long-term forestry purposes.

Risk in agriculture is also an important factor that impedes income mobility. In the Hmong, Giay and Tay communities in Lao Cai and the two Thai communities in Nghe An, those whose living standards have worsened are those depending purely on agriculture in shrinking land areas (due to household splitting and selling land, etc.), no breakthrough in seedlings/technologies/values, and increased risks due to weather, compensation for land loss, and price volatility. In Thanh Son commune, Nghe An, many crops of high economic value, such as coffee, pepper, cardamom, medicinal materials, etc. are facing with climate- and price-related risks (Box 10).

Box 10. Income mobility via agriculture is increasingly difficult: the case of hamlet 8 (Thanh Son commune, Nghe An)

The lives of 84 households in hamlet 8 (Thanh Son, Nghe An) are based mainly on rice cultivation and forest plantations. On average, each household in the locale has about 5 *sao* of farmland, divided into many small pieces. Its agricultural production is dependent on seasonal rainfall, with about 1/3 of its farmland capable of cultivating only one seasonal crop. Since the early 2000s, farmers in hamlet 8 have eagerly adopted the movement to use hybrid rice seeds. Changing varieties plus investing in fertilizer have helped significantly increase yield. From 2005-06, the village's rice yield reached about 5 tons/ha for single-crop rice paddies and about 8 tons/ha for double-cropped paddies. However, in the last 5 years, local yield was almost unchanged, even worsened due to restrictions on irrigation and disaster risks. In addition, stocks of the local "mét" variety of bamboo were largely destroyed in 2013 due to diseases. Thanh Son commune authorities planned to cultivate tea trees in the hope of creating a breakthrough in livelihoods, but experimental models by two households in Hamlet 8 have failed.

The majority of young people with education (graduating from lower secondary schools or above) do not want to stick with farming. They choose to work far away from home (working abroad or heading to the South for job opportunities) to temporarily escape from agriculture. According to estimates by the village leaders, about three-quarters of households in Hamlet 8 have children migrating for employment. This creates a shortage of a healthy, educated local labor force, which is a major obstacle to restructuring and increasing value added for crop and livestock farming.

> *"I'm determined to leave for a few years and then come back home to get married. After getting married, if we have chance to leave we will leave together, if not, we will do something else at home. We cannot depend on growing rice cultivation at all. Out of our 6 sao of rice land, we can only cultivate one crop on more than three sao. The situation will be even worse when there is drought. My family also has more than 1 ha of acacia, cultivated by my parents and younger brothers. After I come back from the south, I will enroll in a vocational training course then follow this profession. That's just my desire, it is also conditional on fate."*
>
> (Male, Thai ethnic group, hamlet 8, Thanh Son commune, Nghe An)

The stereotypes ("labeling") of the majority towards minority groups adversely affect ethnic minority people's awareness and social mobility opportunities. In many surveyed multi-ethnic villages, the prejudice of the majority group against ethnic minorities is quite clear. For example: among Giay people towards Hmong people in Day 1 village (Ta Van commune, Lao Cai) and among Kinh people towards M'nong people in BuKoh hamlet (Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong) and Residential Unit no. 5 (Nghia Duc ward, Dak Nong).

Giay people in Day 1 village, as stated by communal officials and Giay people themselves, are not so different from Kinh people in the "level of development". But Hmong people in Day 1 hamlet are "labeled" by Giay and Kinh people as having no knowledge of livelihoods, no care for their children and deprived lifestyle. In fact, Hmong people interviewed in Day 1 village have business plans and organize labor in their own way to match with family circumstances. According to them, the number of poor households with no knowledge of livelihoods accounts for a very small proportion. This mainly arose from their having little farmland (because parents have so many children), preventing them from accumulating assets. For instance, C. (born in 1986) came from a poor family (his father died when he was a child). He and his wife have done different jobs to ensure their children's education and develop the family's economy. His wife was a street vendor in Sapa combined with working as a tour guide. He bred sows and pigs at home (his family is raising two sows, with an average litter size of 8-10 piglets for a potbellied sow. His family keeps all the piglets to feed instead of selling them). C. took advantage of each meter of farmland near home to grow vegetables to feed pigs. He took over housework and cared for children to facilitate his wife's working away. In addition, he worked as a motorbike taxi driver during his leisure time. In mid-2016, his family built a new house for homestay guests, while leasing the old one to lowland Kinh people for regular monthly income. According to C., his Hmong peers in the village have also managed to find ways to improve their lives.

> *"I breed sows because they are easily bred and can give birth to piglets, so I do not have to spend money on buying piglets from others. My wife works as a salesperson and a tour guide for immediate earnings, and I breed pigs to cover big affairs. My village peers also do the same. For example, S. serves as a tour guide, but he also does farm work and grows vegetables as well. It is not like what [Kinh] people say that Hmong people spend all of what they earn."*
>
> (Male, Hmong ethnic group, Day 1 village, Ta Van commune, Lao Cai)

In BuKoh village and Residential Unit No. 5, M'nong people who get employed instead of working in the fields are considered "not hard-working in business", while Kinh people who are good at pepper and coffee cultivation are considered "youth role models". M'nong people are labelled by the majority of Kinh people as "lazy at work" and "having no idea about business".

> *"Rubber prices decline but hard work can still bring in a few hundred thousand dongs per day. However, instead of working, young people like to drink and indulge themselves in playing. Some even sell their parents' land to buy motorbikes."*
>
> (Female, Kinh group, hamlet 5, Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong)

> *"I once hired Hmong people to do casual jobs.They arrived at work late but left early. There is no discipline at all."*
>
> (Female, Kinh group, Residential Unit 5, Nghia Duc ward, Dak Nong)

> *"I hate my neighboring Kinh household. They make fun of my family for not knowing how to do farm work. The two families were close when they first arrived here, but then they changed. They say that my children are bad at school and that my family grows coffee for fun and do not know how to take care of coffee plants."*
>
> (Female, M'nong ethnic group, BuKoh hamlet, Dak R'Tih commune, Dak Nong)

There are many implications of prejudice against ethnic minority people, one of which is recorded in the surveyed areas: limited participation and voice in local activities, adversely affecting ethnic minority people's access to social services and income/livelihood enhancement programs/projects. Hmong people in Day 1 hamlet are often less involved in the village's common activities, programs and projects. The village has over 40 Hmong households and 50 Giay households, but village meetings usually see the attendance of only 10 Hmong households while Giay households boast relatively full attendance. As for programs and projects in the locality, only when the village leader singles out households and activities/obligations for engagement do they respond. The households themselves rarely give any questions or contribute any ideas. Almost no Hmong people participate in vocational training classes held in the commune and village. When asked why, an official of Day 1 hamlet attributed it to the "low engagement of Hmong people". In fact, Hmong people in the village are still negatively labeled, have not been motivated and enabled to express their voices confidently, thereby joining actively and effectively in activities with the Giay in the village.

IV-POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study shows education plays an active role in occupation and skill mobility. Upper secondary school graduation is the main factor that provides an admission ticket to skilled jobs and hence higher income. However, the parents' economic conditions and educational attainment have a great influence on their children's access to education, and this correlation is growing over time. Therefore, improved access to upper secondary education for poor students should be a main policy focus. There should be more effective supportive policies for upper secondary schools to increase enrollment rates among ethnic minority students, e.g. expand the network of upper secondary schools in ethnic minority areas, improve supports for ethnic minority students and teachers.

In addition to reducing gaps in access to education, policy measures should address quality disparities in education among the children of the rich and the poor, between the Kinh and ethnic minorities, and between better-off and disadvantaged areas. These measures need to start from early learning phases (kindergarten) to the higher levels. Addressing language barriers for ethnic minority children is an important issue, example, through the development of a multilingual learning environment, and by increasing the number and quality of local ethnic minority teachers.

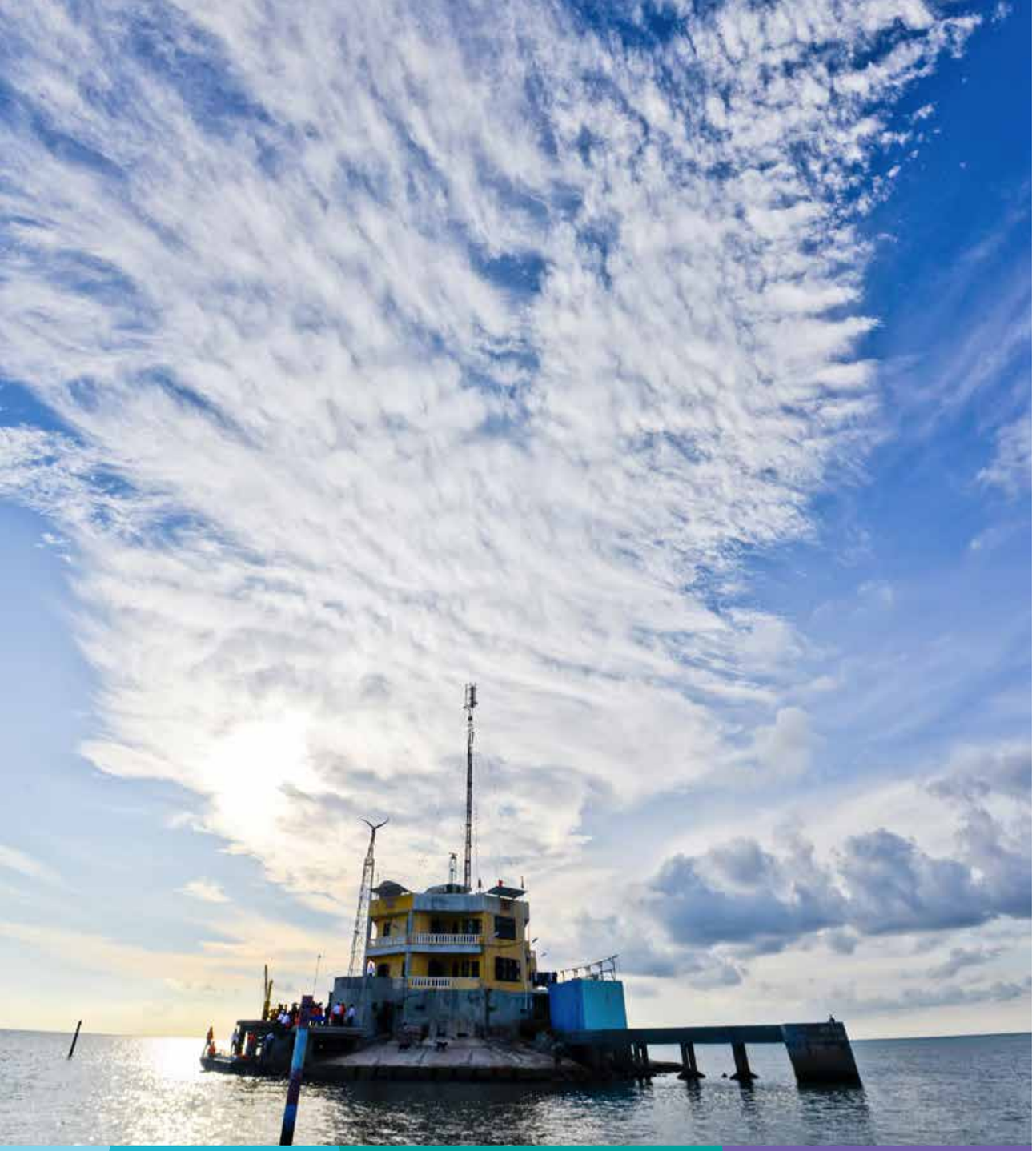
The role of higher education in occupation and income mobility persists, but at a diminishing rate over time. Many poor families have invested heavily in higher education, but their children have been unable to find high-paying jobs, becoming a burden for the household. Early career orientation, selection of education level and development of job-based skills, including soft skills help to improve social mobility. Higher education and vocational training should be linked to the labor market needs.

Agriculture accounts for a large share in the income structure of many households, making an important contribution to household income mobility. However, the path of upward mobility through agricultural development is showing signs of slowdown and risks. In the coming time, Vietnam's agriculture needs to be transformed in the direction of increasing value added. It is necessary to change some agricultural policies such as supports for production expansion, agricultural extension, and risk management in agriculture, among others. Vietnam needs a new development strategy, which places more emphasis on farmers, adjusts land policies in favor of farmers and adopts sustainable agricultural solutions.

Migration for employment is a short-term livelihood strategy to increase income in many parts of Vietnam. There are, however, no mechanisms to support appropriate labor mobility to increase efficiency and mitigate risks, such as information support, support for women migrant workers, enhancement of skills to work in industries, or development of social networks. Addressing these policies will contribute to increasing social mobility opportunities from the agricultural to non-agricultural sectors.

Young people are the driving force for the upward mobility of families and society, playing a critical role in inter-generational social mobility. However, no effective policy support system is in place yet for the youth in general and poor/ethnic minority youth in particular. It is necessary to develop a policy system in support of livelihoods for young people, especially poor youth. Support policies for young migrant workers should become a highlight of livelihood support programs for young people in mountainous and ethnic minority areas in the coming years. In order to increase inter-generational mobility and reduce chronic poverty, it is necessary to have innovative solutions to promote non-agricultural employment for young people.

For poor people and ethnic minorities, improved opportunities for income, skill and occupational mobility should be a focus of poverty reduction policies towards sustainable and inclusive development in the coming time. Breakthrough policies are needed to: i) improve access and quality of education for children of poor households and ethnic minorities; ii) increase opportunities and access to employment services, vocational training, livelihood diversification and employment for poor people and ethnic minorities; iii) promote the important role of social capital and community capital and its support mechanism; iv) minimize prejudice and discrimination towards ethnic minorities.



V-CONCLUSION

This study shows three major trends in social mobility in Viet Nam: i) Occupational mobility is slow, with the majority remains in agriculture, very few laborers move to industry and service sectors; ii) Skill mobility is ineffective with very few qualified and skilled workers; iii) income mobility, although showing strong progress in the past, has slowed during the past decade.

These trends require transformation of the growth model, fueled by productivity growth rather than cheap labor and resource depletion. This is the cornerstone of social mobility, which provides opportunities for more skilled and well-paid jobs. An increase in desirable social mobility in Vietnam will only be possible if policies take greater notice of the key role of education, vocational training quality, the added value of agriculture, a support mechanism for migrant workers, and reduced disparities between urban and rural areas and between Kinh and ethnic minority groups.

Finally, monitoring social mobility trends should be based on social perceptions of this issue. Each community, group of households, family and individual has their own perception of social mobility and chooses their own path based on their circumstances. The path of social mobility of ethnic minorities is not necessarily identical to the majority groups12. Based on people's understanding of their own dynamics for upward mobility, appropriate support can be devised and a high consensus among the people can be reached.

[12]The constraints and disadvantages of ethnic minorities slow down their upward mobility as compared to the Kinh. Therefore, in order to narrow the gap between ethnic minorities and Kinh people, it requires more creative solutions that go beyond common models in specific contexts (community-based tourism is an example).

ANNEX

ANNEX 1. Sampling methods and Survey areas

Surveyed sites

The surveyed sites in this project are selected using the "typification" methodology, similar to the observation site selection methodology in the Young Lives Project (Nguyen, Ngoc P., 2008), with consideration to Oxfam's observation site selection methodology in the Vietnam Poverty Policies Monitoring and Analysis Project.

The surveyed sites selection methodology relates to the intended selection of a small sample size, considered as "typical" for the certain population. This sample at these surveyed sites will be monitored repeatedly using the same approach for an extended period of time. In this study, one surveyed site equals a commune or ward.

Three regions were selected out of the seven regions of Vietnam, with more emphasis on the following poor areas: Northern mountains; North Central region and Central Highlands. One province is selected in each region, which typifies that region's socio-economic development level, Gini coefficient, poverty rate and commitment to participate in the survey. As a result, three selected provinces are Lao Cai (North-Western region), Nghe An (North-Central region) and Dak Nong (Central Highlands).

Table 1.1. Basic information about surveyed provinces

Province	Population	Income per capita (thousand VND/year)	Human Development Index	Gini coefficient	Poverty rate (%)	Ethnic minority population (%)
Lao Cai	663,037	14,087.65	0.670	0.4784	59.6	70,00
Nghe An	3,020,407	18,346.53	0.715	0.4420	40.0	13,37
Dak Nông	564,380	21,717.35	0.710	0.4412	27.4	31,27

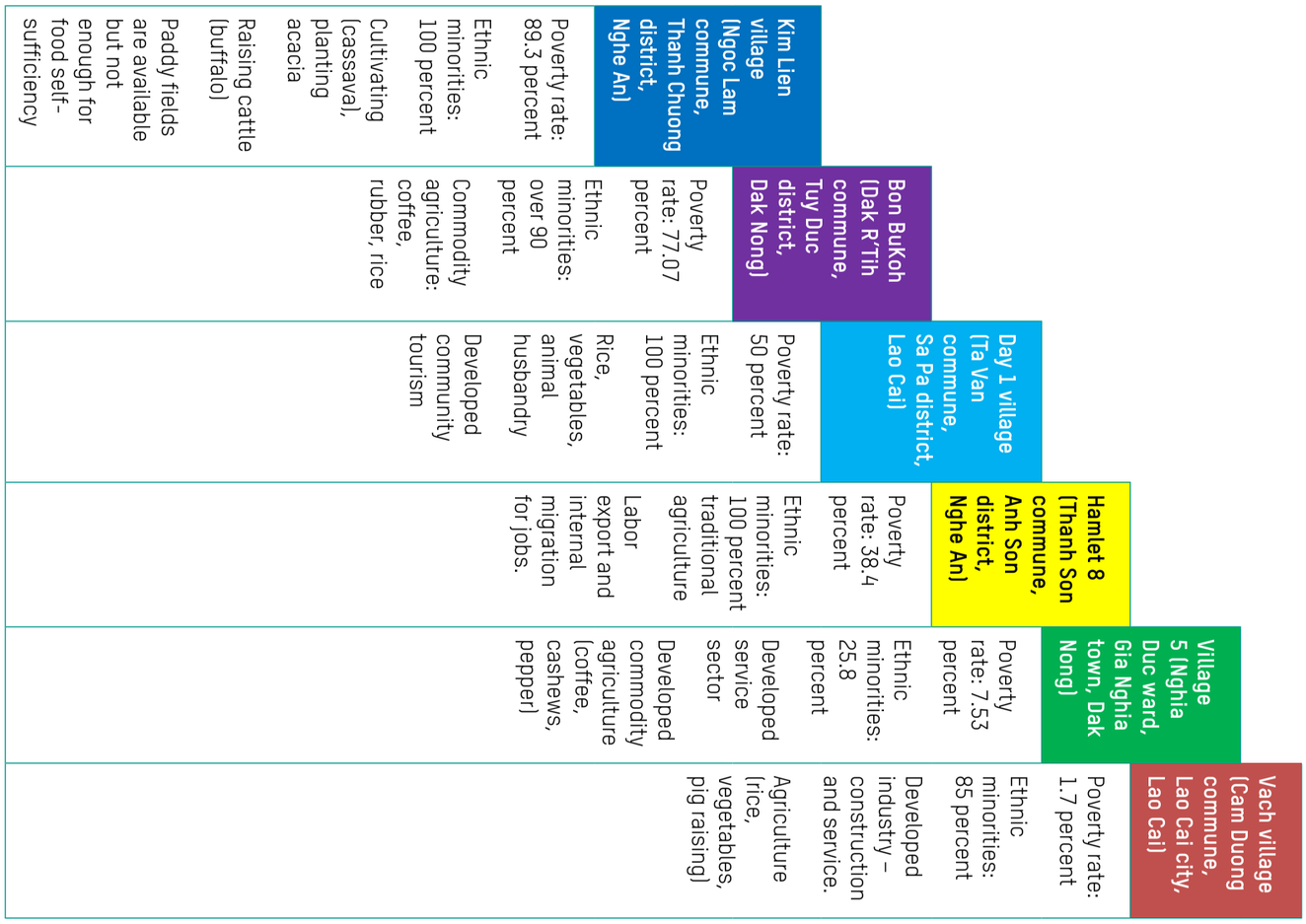
Four communes/wards (eight hamlets) are selected in each province, using questionnaires, and two communes/wards were selected for in-depth interviews, to reflect the diversity in development and socio-economic levels, with priority given to poor areas and communes with many ethnic minority inhabitants. Details about the communes are in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2. Basic information about surveyed communes

	Lao Cai				Nghe An				Dak Nong			
	Cam Duong commune, Lao Cai City (better off)	Ta Van commune Sa Pa district (poor)	Hop Thanh commun Lao Cai City (average)	Sa Pa commune, Sa Pa district (poor)	Ngoc Lam commune, Thanh Chuong district (poor)	Thanh Son commune, Thanh Chuong district (poor)	Thanh Son commune, Anh Son district (average)	Cam Son commune, Anh Son district (better off)	Dak R'Tih com-mune, Tuy Duc district (poor)	Nghia Duc ward, Gia Nghia town (better off)	Buk Sor commune, Tuy Duc district (average)	Quang Tan, commune Tuy Duc district (poor)
Number of households	1411	727	978	874	1080	1199	790	1328	2356	1154	2900	3000
Poverty rate (by late 2015)- %	2.48	72.48	17	65.0	79.5	75.31	37.5	15.0	58.38	1.99	25.93	50.2
Distance to district center	7 km	9km	17	5 km	25 km	40 km	30 km	20 km	20 km	0	0	28
Ethnic minority households - %	45 % (Tay)	100% Hmong Dao Day	85% Tay, Sa Pho, Day	97% Hmong	Almost 100% Thai	98.83 % Thai	48% White Thai	26.1% White Thai Thai Thanh	70% (60% M'nong, 10% are northern ethnic minority migrants)	4.41% M'nong, northern ethnic minority migrants	31.45% M'nong, northern ethnic minority migrants	68% M'nong, northern ethnic minority migrants
Communes in Program 135	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Main livelihoods	Agriculture	Agriculture: wet rice, community tourism	Agro-for-estry: rice, vegetables, gourd duck farming	Agricul-ture: rice, vegetable, artichoke, orchids	Agriculture: water rice, raw material cassava, livestock farming Migration for employ-ment (Laos, China)	Agro-forestry: forest plantation, tea plantation, and animal husbandry	Agro-for-estry: wet rice, forest plantation Migration for employ-ment in the South and labor export	Agriculture: wet rice, tea, corn	Agri-culture: coffee, rubber, wet rice	Agri-culture: rubber, coffee, pepper, cashew	Agriculture: coffee, pepper, sweet potatoes Trade - services	Agri-culture: coffee, rubber, cashew, wet rice

Six villages and hamlets were selected for in-depth interviews according to their poverty rates, ethnic minority populations, and openness in economic structure (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Villages for in-depth interviews



Questionnaire sample

The questionnaire focuses on household income, education and occupation, the level of attention to children's education by their parents, jobs of household members, and respondents' perceptions of social mobility. The survey team completed 600 household questionnaires in 12 communes in the monitoring network, 50 questionnaires per commune (2 villages, 25 questionnaires/village). Villages were selected randomly, and households for questionnaire surveys were selected using a systematic random sample (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3. Major characteristics of 600 households through questionnaires

	Sample
Number of questionnaires	600
Ethnic group (head of household)	
Kinh	12%
Ethnic minorities (mostly Hmong, Tay, Thai, M'nong)	88%
Near poor/poor households by end of 2015	
Poor	37%
Near poor	16%
Not poor	47%
Type of housing	
Living in established residential area	79%
Resettlement, new residential area	21%
Gender of respondents	
Female	45%
Male	55%
Age of respondents	
Under 30	24%
From 31-60	68%
Over 60	9%

In-depth interviews

One in-depth discussion was organized with a core group, and another with a group of youth in each of the 6 selected villages to obtain general information on social mobility and identify illustrative cases for in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviews were organized in two steps:

- Step 1: in-depth interviews with multiple subjects to select illustrative cases of youth with commitment to the study.
- Step 2: in-depth interviews using anthropological methodology (observation and participation) to collect in-depth data on the young people and their families' movements.

In total, 12 group discussions were organized with 85 in-depth interviews, including in-depth interviews of 34 illustrative youth for further tracking in subsequent years.

ANNEX 2. Some regression analysis tables

Table 2.1. Regression analysis of the role of education for household income mobility in the period 2010-2014

Explanatory variable	Moving from the bottom quintile in 2010 to the higher quintiles in 2014	Moving from the bottom two quintiles (bottom 40%) in 2010 to the higher quintiles in 2014	Moving from the top two quintiles (top 40%) in 2010 to the lower quintiles in 2014	Moving from the top quintile (top 20%) in 2010 to the lower quintiles in 2014	Absolute change in per capita income during 2010-2014 (Fields & Ok factor)	Relative change in per capita income during 2010-2014
Heads of households without education (not completed primary education)	*Reference*					
Heads of households completing primary education	0.0011	0.0125	-0.0321	0.0916	950.32	0.0295
	(0.0638)	(0.0287)	(0.0316)	(0.1267)	(770.97)	(0.0756)
Heads of households completing lower secondary education	0.1078	0.0609*	-0.0175	-0.1144	705.57	-0.0358
	(0.0735)	(0.0352)	(0.0325)	(0.1081)	(447.25)	(0.0646)
Heads of households completing upper secondary education	0.1060	0.1182**	-0.0770**	-0.1894	1,497.65**	-0.0780
	(0.1436)	(0.0596)	(0.0371)	(0.1225)	(629.51)	(0.0715)
Heads of households holding a bachelor's degree	0.2276	0.1639***	-0.1086***	-0.1684	2,558.29***	-0.1484**
	(0.1546)	(0.0420)	(0.0314)	(0.1023)	(572.05)	(0.0721)
Constant	0.5351***	0.0683	0.1709**	0.5565**	6,403.48***	0.8131***
	(0.1784)	(0.0814)	(0.0756)	(0.2259)	(1,515.47)	(0.1667)
Number of observations	403	1.084	1.084	326	1.813	1.813
R-squared	0,177	0,078	0,136	0,120	0,045	0,018

Standard deviation, in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2010-2014

Table 2.2. Regression analysis of the role of education in access to wage employment and income from salaries of people aged 15-60

Explanatory variable	Independent variable "has wage employment"			Independent variable "log annual income from wage employment"		
	VHLSS 2004	VHLSS 2014	Combined VHLSS 2004 and VHLSS 2014	VHLSS 2004	VHLSS 2014	Combined VHLSS 2004 and VHLSS 2014
Not yet completed primary education	Reference					
Completed primary education	-0.0839***	-0.0670***	-0.0668***	0.2102***	0.2443***	0.2101***
	(0.0114)	(0.0129)	(0.0128)	(0.0329)	(0.0322)	(0.0321)
Completed lower secondary education	-0.1142***	-0.0893***	-0.0888***	0.2153***	0.3885***	0.3520***
	(0.0120)	(0.0138)	(0.0137)	(0.0363)	(0.0336)	(0.0332)
Completed upper secondary education	-0.0392**	-0.0295*	-0.0310*	0.5043***	0.4900***	0.4283***
	(0.0156)	(0.0164)	(0.0160)	(0.0425)	(0.0391)	(0.0385)
Hold a tertiary education degree	0.3834***	0.3474***	0.3428***	1.1919***	1.0648***	0.9839***
	(0.0169)	(0.0155)	(0.0148)	(0.0456)	(0.0375)	(0.0370)
Hold a technical degree	0.2699***	0.1661***	0.1634***	0.4137***	0.3124***	0.3087***
	(0.0145)	(0.0153)	(0.0152)	(0.0355)	(0.0293)	(0.0296)
Completed primary education × 2004 dummy variable			-0.0161			0.0341
			(0.0170)			(0.0468)
Completed lower secondary education × 2004 dummy variable			-0.0250			-0.1127**
			(0.0180)			(0.0507)
Completed upper secondary education × 2004 dummy variable			-0.0056			0.1298**
			(0.0220)			(0.0589)
Hold tertiary education degree × 2004 dummy variable			0.0494**			0.3014***
			(0.0207)			(0.0569)
Hold technical degree × 2004 dummy variable			0.1101***			0.1172**
			(0.0208)			(0.0458)
2004 (2004 = 1, 2014 = 0)			-0.0696***			-1.7130***
			(0.0150)			(0.0443)
Constant	0.3291***	0.4103***	0.4059***	6.9215***	7.8009***	8.2756***
	(0.0361)	(0.0451)	(0.0297)	(0.1144)	(0.1172)	(0.0855)
Number of observations	21,089	19,199	40,288	8,649	9,031	17,680
R-squared	0.160	0.181	0.175	0.355	0.352	0.629

Standard deviation, in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Source: Nguyen Viet Cuong (2016). Estimates from VHLSS 2004-2014

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This report is part of a document series compiled to provide information for public discussions about development and humanitarian policies.

For more details about the issues presented in this report, please send email to Mr. Hoang Xuan Thanh (thanhhx@gmail.com) or Mr. Nguyen Tran Lam (Lam.NguyenTran@oxfam.org).

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