



OXFAM GREAT BRITAIN

Report on:

**Landless and near landless farmers in
two provinces of Tra Vinh and Dong Thap:
Problems and Solutions**

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Introduction

OBJECTIVE OF THE SURVEY

According to many previous survey reports, the problem of landless and near landless farmers in Mekong Delta that were serious in 1998 seemed to be increased but slower in recent years in the surveyed areas. Most of them are very poor. The report by University of Economics (Hanoi) has revealed that “In 1997, 5.69% of population in 12 provinces of Mekong Delta are landless and 8.71% with very little land and the problem is worsening”. Attributed to the problems are many factors, including historical, socio-economic ones. The Communist Party and the Government of Vietnam have issued policies and taken measures to solve the problem. However, these policies and measures are limited to solving the dilemma.

Due to this situation, the Farmer’s Association has conducted the project “Survey on landless and near landless farmers in Tra Vinh and Dong Thap provinces; recommend supported projects and solutions for the poor farmers”. The project is funded by Oxfam GB and carried out by staff of Vietnam Farmer’s Association and by staff of Farmers Associations in two provinces.

The objectives of the survey is to find answers to the following questions:

1. How is the current situation of landless and near landless farmers in Tra Vinh and Dong Thap provinces?
2. What are the policies available to support the landless farmers and how effective they are?
3. What are recommendations to the Communist Party and the Government in order to solve the problem?

The report represents the result of the survey and recommendations of solutions for the landless households that were collected by the survey.

Part I

GENERAL SITUATION OF THE SURVEYED AREA

This survey was conducted in Ham Giang, Dai An and Don Chau communes of Tra Cu district (Tra Vinh province) and My Tho and Nhi My communes of Cao Lanh districts (Dong Thap province).

The Mekong Delta, called name of the Southwest part, consisting of 12 provinces, is influenced by Tien Giang and Hau Giang rivers and a network of a number of interconnected canals. The nature blesses the Delta with fertile soil and favourable climate but the geographical and soil differences have affected on social, economic situation of each province or area. The Delta can be divided into the following distinguished areas:

- Those of Tien Giang, Vinh Long, Can Tho and An Giang provinces with fertile soil and fresh water.
- The majority of coastal provinces of Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu and Ca Mau peninsula where the soil is silt-sandy, and salt intrusion.
- Those of Dong Thap province and part of Long An and Tien Giang provinces where the soil is acid phosphate. It is the lowland area and prone to flood for 2-3 months a year. The area produces most rice in the country.
- The coastal area of Ca Mau and Kien Giang provinces where there are forests.

Mekong Delta is the rice basket of the South. In some recent decades, profit from fruit trees and aquaculture production has increasingly accounted for a high ratio in their income. In addition, services have also increasingly developed. After the reunification, co-operative model was implemented in a reasonable short period of 1982-1986 and then land was then returned to farmers. Farmers in Mekong Delta are hard working, tolerant and revolutionary.

Tra Vinh Province

Tra Vinh has the area of 236 930 hectares, borders Tien river to the North, Hau river to the South, East Sea to the East and Vinh Long, Ben Tre provinces to the West. There are 1 town, 7 districts, 9 townships and 72 communes with the total population of 918,000 in 170,000 households. The population density is 410 people per square kilometer. The majority of the land is salt- intruded and not very fertile. Cultivation land accounts for 60% of total natural land. Population growth rate is 1.59%. There are 46,460 households (or 22.56%) are classified as poor. The poor landless farmers account for 9.58% or 16,750 households.

Tra Cu District

Tra Cu is located in the South West of Tra Vinh Province, 32 km from Tra Vinh Town. The district is consisted of 14 communes and 1 township with the area of 36,735 hectares and the population of 165,340 people in 35,050 households. Alluvial land accounts for 73% of the area. Most of the land is alluvial and that affects negatively the agriculture production. Tra Cu is considered a poor district of the province, with 10 extremely poor communes. The recent survey conducted by MoLISA has shown that 27.13% of the households are poor. Most of them have no land or little land.

Ham Giang Commune

Ham Giang commune is classified as an extremely poor commune. It has 10 villages with the population of 14,180 people. Out of the total area of 3,316 hectares, agriculture land accounts for 2,470 hectares, which makes the 1,500 square meter per household. Poor households amount to 31.56% in 1996, 32.14% in 1999, 24.77% in 2000 and 27.31% in 2001. The landless farmers account for 15.41% of the total households and the percentage of near landless farmers is 8%.

Don Chau Commune

The commune has the area of 2,950 hectares, of which 1,244 hectares is for rice and crops, 870 hectares devoted to aquaculture production. The total population is 4,134 people in 2,340 households. 680 poor households were granted a “poor household certificate”. Most of the poor households are landless.

Dai An Commune

This remote commune has the area of 113 hectares of which 1,010 hectares of agriculture land. The total population is 10,103 with 2,019 households. There are 444 poor households that are higher than the number of landless households. 275 landless farmers were found in 2001.

Dong Thap Province

Dong Thap has the area of 322,918 hectares. It borders Cambodia to the North, Vinh Long to the South, Long An and Tien Giang to the East, and An Giang and Can Tho to the West. The province is consisted of 9 districts and 2 towns and has the total population of 1,563,500 people. The population density is 470 people per square kilometer. There are 290,320 households, 85% of them are farmers. The population growth rate is 1.45%. Dong Thap is one of the rice bowl in the region. Aquaculture ranks second to the rice. Boats are main transportation means in the province, although roads have been constructed. Average area of agriculture land per capita is 1 hectare. However, much of property has lost to the recent floods. The poor in remote and isolated area face greater difficulty. On the other hand, significant numbers of farmers own 5-10 hectare of land.

The survey conducted by MoLISA (Dec.2000) showed 14.69% of households were poor and the highest rate belongs to Tan Hong (24.9%) and Hong Ngu (23.53%). Poor households have, on average, 1.250 square meters of agriculture land.

Cao Lanh District

Cao Lanh is an agricultural district, most of its income stems from rice and fruit trees. The district has 40,120 households with the population of 192,900 people. There are 18 communes and 1 township. The district is prone to long and large scaled flood that seriously affects the production and lives of the habitants. The poor households account for 12,53% or 5031 households (according to MoLISA survey in 2000).

My Tho Commune.

This is a remote commune. The habitants live on the sides of canals. The commune has the area of 2386 hectares of which agriculture land 1952 hectares. There are 4 villages, 1,438 households with 7,588 people of which 251 landless households account for 7.3% of the total agriculture households but only 103 landless households are considered poor ones. There are about 5.2 people per household, the population density is about 320 people per square kilometer.

Nhi My Commune

The total area is 2,598 hectares of which agricultural land accounts for 2,089 hectares, the average foodstuff is estimated at 1500 kg per capita per annum. There are 4 villages, 2180 households including 199 landless households but only 106 ones are poor households. The commune population is 12080 people with about 5.5 people per household, population density is about 460 people per square kilometer. At present, the population growth rate is 1.43%.

Part II

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

1. Research questions

Survey tools were developed to find answer to the following questions:

1. How is the current situation of landless and near landless farmers in Tra Vinh and Dong Thap provinces?
2. What are the policies available that support the landless farmers and how effective these policies?
3. What are recommendations to the Communist Party and the Government in order to solve the problem?

2. Methodology

Definition

Landless farmers are those living in rural area and having production skills as a farmer but currently do not possess any agriculture land.

Near landless farmers are those living in rural area and having production skills but currently possessing an area of land that is not sufficient for agriculture production-less than 2000 square meters.

Methodology

The survey has applied both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Qualitative methods: individual interview and group interview were employed, in combination with seasonal mapping and historical chart. In addition, two meetings were organised in Cao Lanh and Tra Cu. Each meeting is participated by provincial technical staff and district authorities and technical staff of concerned institutions, communal authorities, heads of villages and some landless farmers. Secondary data were also collected from statistic unit of People's committee and other institution for comparison and cross checking purposes.

Quantitative methods: the questionnaire was developed to collect data. These data help cross check with those collected by qualitative methods.

3. Surveyors

Key members include 7 staff members of Central Farmer's Association and 2 staff of Provincial Farmer's Association and 1 staff member of District Farmer's Association.

Data collectors were selected from district and commune staff. They were trained in interviewing and recording skills for 3 days. All the data collectors followed all the guidelines throughout the survey.

4. Sample size and target population

Subject	Cao Lanh	Tra Cu	Total
1. Poor landless or nearly landless farmers	153	223	376
2. Better-off landless farmers	21	19	40
3. Landless farmers working for other farmers	31	46	77
4. Farmers hiring laborers	11	29	40
5. Poor landowners	21	21	42
6. Farmers bought back their land and still poor	8	5	13
7. Farmers bought back their land and escape poverty	7	12	19
8. Male/female groups	8	16	24
9. Commune officials and village heads	13	16	29
10. Commune leaders and technical staff	13	21	34
11. District leaders and technical staff	6	4	10
12. Provincial leaders and technical staff	6	6	12
Total	298	418	716

5. Reporting

This report was compiled based on the findings of the survey and conclusions of the survey team. The report also incorporated comments from Oxfam GB project officers and representative and was endorsed by Project Steering Committee and Project Advisory Board. The report was also circulated among relevant institutions and officials for comments before being finalised.

Part III

FINDINGS

A. PROGRESS AND CAUSES OF LANDLESSNESS

1. The situation of land allocation during and after co-operative period in two surveyed provinces

Before 1975, there was private ownership of land in Mekong Delta, therefore, many households in rural areas did not have land for agricultural production.

During the period 1979-1986, the co-operative model was introduced and land was reallocated to each household on the basis of number of people in the households and number of people that were currently in labor force. Many people having land just cultivated on a small area. The recommendation at present is that for those whose land was allocated to right people, then the new owner has to reimburse labor output to the old owner and continue cultivation, for those whose land was not allocated to right people, then, the new owner has to return land to the old owner. In fact, a number of farmers returned land to the old owner and became landless again. In Cao Lanh, for example, 20.6% of farmers do not have land because they had returned it to the old owner.

From 1986 to when the Land Law was effective (1993), many farmers sold their land with or without official contract. The number of landless farmers increased and, whereas, many managed to collect a lot of land for large-scale production.

1. The landlessness situation before and after 1998

Hanoi University of Economics conducted a survey in Tra Vinh and Dong Thap in May 1998. The following table reflects the changes that took place between 1998 and 2000:

Number of landless households

Province	Rate of landless households	
	1998 (Uni. of economics)	2000 (Provincial statistics)
Tra Vinh	12,6%	9,85

Dong Thap	7,16%	6,71
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It was reported that landless or little land problem had worsened during 1993-1998. In Tra Vinh, for example, 9.3% of households were found landless in 1993 but after 5 years it reached 12.6%, which was equivalent to 21,400 households and 20,500 households in Tra Vinh and Dong Thap respectively and landlessness situation, since 1998 has still increased but at lower rate.

Table 1 Progress of landless problem

Year	Tra Cu		Cao Lanh	
	No	%	No	%
Before 1997	67	<u>68.4</u>	66	<u>83.5</u>
1998	23	23.5	7	8.9
1999	4	4.1	4	5.1
2000	2	2.0	2	2.5
Since 2001	2	2.0	0	0.0
Total	98	100.0	79	100.0

In recent years, the landless problem is decreasing gradually. The reasons could be that: Farmers have applied new technology, higher effective productivity rather than selling their labor; some landless households were given loans by the government to buy back their land; service and vocation sectors in the area are not developed to create jobs for the landless farmers, but land price is getting higher so they tend to keep the land, except for those are in extreme difficulty.

2. Causes of landlessness

The leading cause is that the households own no land or little land before 1998 (due to the above cause). 59.4% of landless farmers in Tra Cu and 52.4% in Tra Vinh fall into this category. This is a typical characteristic of landlessness in two provinces' inland area, where there is no high-risk production such as shrimp feeding.

A family member's sickness or having an accident that force them to sell land is another cause. This is the case of 15% of landless households in Tra Cu and 10.7% in Cao Lanh. This rate would be higher if one compares the number of households selling or mortgaging their land due to their sickness with the number of households owning land but forced to sell or mortgage it. This indicates that sickness is a big burden for poor farmers and is one of the common causes of landless problem.

Selling land to pay back the loan borrowed for production is not a common cause. This is especially the case of those investing in high-risk income generating activities such as duck, fish and shrimp feeding. If they lost the crop, very few will be able to overcome. They will neither be

able to pay back the loan nor can borrow another loan to continue their production. This forces them to sell their land.

Table 2.1. Causes of landlessness

Causes	Tra Cu		Cao Lanh	
	No	%	No	%
1. Did not own a land before	111	<u>59.4</u>	132	<u>52.4</u>
2. Sold land and adopted another activity	5	2.7	4	1.6
3. Lack of production experience	5	2.7	6	2.4
4. Requisitioned by the Government	2	1.1	4	1.6
5. Mortgaged due to health problems, accidents	28	<u>15.0</u>	27	<u>10.7</u>
6. Lack of capital	2	1.1	5	2.0
7. Recently moved out of parents	8	4.3	10	4.0
8. Recently immigrated	2	1.1	1	0.4
9. Paid private loan	13	7.0	4	1.6
10. Paid bank loan	0	0.0	1	0.4
11. Mortgaged a second time after buying back	2	1.1	0	0.0
12. Old owner took back	4	2.1	52	20.6
13. Wanted to work for another farmers	1	0.5	2	0.8
14. Others	4	2.1	4	1.6
Total	187	100.0	252	100.0

Selling land to engage in another activity is the case of 2% of landless farmers. Many big families just cultivate in a small area, from 1000-2000 square meters. Income generated is too little to cover the investment together with low rice price that force them to adopt another activity with higher yield. Out of whom, few has succeeded, some wish to come back to agricultural production but do not have land. Nevertheless, this is not common.

B. LIFE OF LANDLESS FARMERS

1. All most of all landless farmers are laborers. They are employed to do very simple work that does not require skills. They are trapped in a vicious circle of landless households.

Landless farmers earn living by selling their labor. 71.3% of landless farmers in Tra Cu and 82.5% in Cao Lanh are laborers. The majority of them don't have a permanent job but seasonal one, depending on labor demand. They are hired to prepare the land for the next cultivation season, to transfer the rice seedlings, to harvest rice or to transport rice from the field to home... They spend the rest of their time doing anything for their living. Some borrow a loan and start looking for job opportunity in other province. There are more job opportunities in Cao Lanh than Dong than Tra Cu, nearly 50% landless farmers are able to find a job all year around in Cao Lanh, while only 18.3% in Tra Cu able to do so and 23% with seasonal job.

Less than 10% of them are involved in service sector or set up their own small business. Only few leave for job in the city since they are not skillful, not qualified or don't know anybody in the city. Many families don't want their daughters to work in the city because of the bad reputation.

Landless employees are not paid appropriately. A female employee in Cao Lanh is paid 15,000-18,000 VND a day, and a male employee can earn as much as 25,000-30,000 VND a day. An equal or lower rate is applied in Tra Cu, female employee is paid only 10,000- 15,000 VND a day. Wages are negotiated between the employer and the employee, depending on the local rate. 49% of employees in Tra Vinh and 17.5% in Cao Lanh complained that their wages are still low.

Incomes from selling labor which can be higher or lower than that of producing rice on their own land, depends on the location of the land, cultivation area and the technique applied. Only minority of farmers thinks that the two can generate equal income. The majority states that income from employment is "always lower than that of producing rice on my own land, even if we lack of appropriate technique, it is more stable". However, in Cao Lanh there are more land with higher labor demand, some people think that they can earn more from working on somebody's the field than working on their own without skills and appropriate technique and technology or if "the land is too small, employment will give them higher income"

All think that income from employment is not only unstable but also difficult to save. They are paid on the daily basis and it is sufficient only for daily expenditure and they are not able to save money. "I work all year around but I cannot buy a 1000 square meter cultivated area. When I get sick and need money, I have to borrow from others."

2. Living condition of landless poor farmers

All most of landless farmers are poor and live in difficulty with cramped and dilapidated poor houses. Due to low living standard and big debts, they are not able to build new houses.

3. Children of landless farmers face difficulty in education

Table 8: Drop- out and low attendance situation

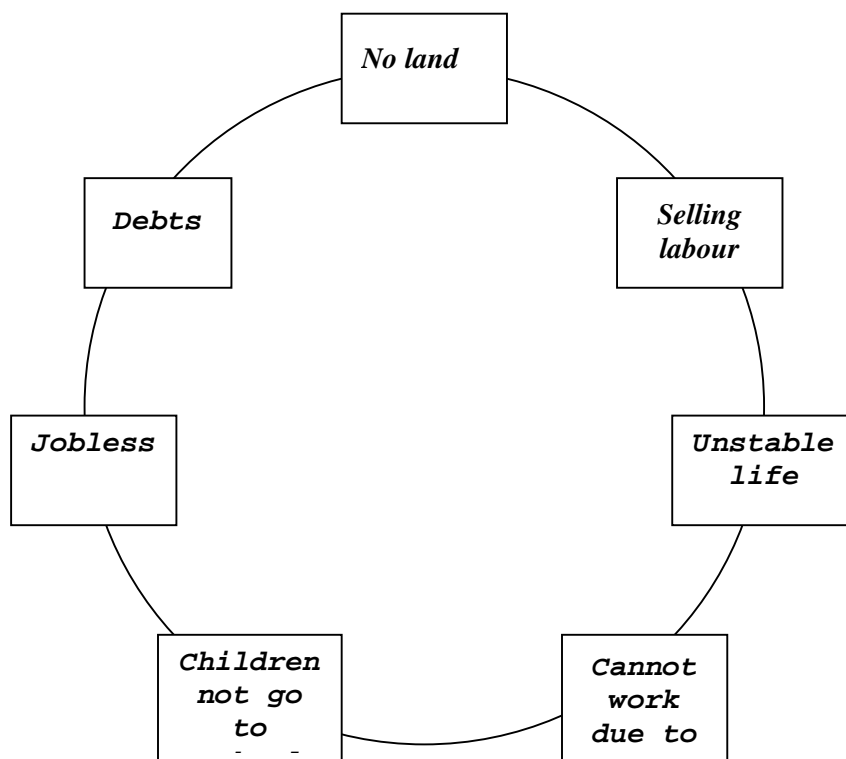
Schooling status	3 communes in Tra Cu		2 communes in Cao Lanh	
	No	%	No	%
6-15 year old children	368	100.0	307	100.0
Drop out	81	<u>22.0</u>	48	<u>15.6</u>
Do not go to school	77	<u>20.9</u>	55	<u>17.9</u>

High proportion of children aging 6 to 15 years old born in landless farmers do not go to school or unable to finish school. This shows obstacles in providing vocational training and creating job for landless households' children.

The main reason of children quitting school is that they have to help their parents earn for living. 59.3% of landless parents in Tra Cu and 59.7% in Cao Lanh have their children stop schooling to help them earn for living to support the family. The benefits of schooling are intangible while earning living is an immediate issue at the moment. Therefore, some families decide to send their children to school for a few years, just for them to be literate, not for higher education in longer future.

3. Difficulties in healthcare

Landless families are easy to get into debt when a family member gets sick as they cannot cover the cost of medical care. When having health problem, they take care of themselves at home or go to a pagoda for herbal medicine, few think of going to hospital, as they are afraid of getting into debt. Some families who are partially exempted have to sell their labor for covering the rest of cost. Some borrow money and go to a private clinic and pay back the loan by selling labor in next season.



Vicious circle of landlessness

4. Social evils

The interview showed that landlessness, unemployment and depress have led to alcohol consumption among men. The survey did not identify any correlation between landlessness and other social evils such as gambling, prostitution or drug abuse in surveyed households.

Actually social evils is a sensitive issue in the survey. There are some families who send their daughters to work in the city as a maid, a cook or shopkeeper...

5. Poor entertainment

Many landless farmers have no choice but staying at home (Tra Cu 54.7%; Cao Lanh 33%). Only 12,2% in Tra Cu and 41.4% in Cao Lanh watch television, because they don't have a TV or electricity. Only 17% in both districts listen to radio. They hardly go to any performance. Their limited access to media certainly hinders their application of technology in production.

6. Gender discrimination against employment and schooling

32.4% heads of poor landless households are women in Tra Cu, this rate in Cao Lanh is 18.9% (were interviewed) answered that: **Woman-headed landless household faces much more difficulty than man-headed one.** Firstly, income of woman-headed households is usually lower than that of man-headed one as women are not able to do heavy work and have difficulty in finding a job. A single woman is usually not as good as a man at earning for living, arranging work. "If there is a man in the family, it will be easier because men are more resourceful than women". Therefore, single female header are often depressed "living by myself is so difficult, if I got sick, there is no body to rely on".

Although there is no unequal treatment between boys and girls, **more girls tend to drop out of school than boys.** Parents usually need their daughters to take care of housework because "boys like playing only, and they usually forget housework". Girls are easily to feel inferior, shameful, especially when they don't have things such as books, clothes, and bicycles that their peers do.

Women face more difficulty finding a job and earn less than men. It is more difficult for them to find a job and they are paid lower. In Cao Lanh, for example, a female employee is paid only 15,000-18,000 VND a day, while a male employee wage is as much as 25,00-30,000 VND per day. This unequal payment stems from the thought that men are able to do heavier task such as digging a canal, carrying rice etc. Therefore, there are fewer job opportunity for women.

7. Landless farmers feel inferior and less often discuss their problem with local authorities

Poor landless farmers tend to accept their fate. They don't have any recommendations to the local authorities. Many reported that they did not want to discuss with local authorities about their problems because "don't know how to discuss it".

C. SITUATION OF POOR HOUSEHOLDS NOT BELONGING TO THE FOLLOWING CATOGORIES: LANDLESS, LITTLE LAND OR THREATENED TO LOSE THEIR LAND

1. Reasons of poverty among land owners

Most of them have a big family, average land allocation per head is 0.5-1.5 square meters. In some households, there are children or old people who are unable to do field work. While, land in Tra Cu is not very fertile, so the yield is not high, some households "get only 80- 90 kg/crop so can not get out of poverty". The *second* reason is that they lack investment fund and have to get high interest loan, thus they can't save money. Most of them get loans from Bank for Agricultural & Rural Development, the National Employment Supporting program but because of lacking capital and they were in debts in the past. The *third* reason is that they lack of updated technology that results in loss. A few families "cultivate two season crops per year but the yield is still not sufficient to cover the investment cost in land improvement because of lacking experience".

2. Apart from working on their own field, they still have sideline jobs for more income

Because of those mentioned reasons, even owning a land, they still have to do sideline jobs for extra income. These include small trading, weaving of baskets, catching shrimps, and fish or sending their children to work outside the home as landless families do.

3. Children of poor landowners face the same difficulty as those of landless families.

Since their income is not stable, these families owning 2000 square meters still face difficulties with their children's schooling or when a family member gets sick. Only a small number of them can manage these constraints thank to farming.

4. Although they wish to keep their land, this group face the risk of losing their land if they are not given technical support and investment funds.

It is common fear among the poor landowners that they would lose their land. It is in fact quite easy to happen if they continue to lose crops due to technique and capital shortage, let alone unexpected events like natural catastrophe or illness. Therefore, they wish to be supported in terms of training in new technology and loans. If the Government do not have supporting policies that helps these poor landowners, the number of landless farmers will increase.

D. WELL-OFF LANDLESS HOUSEHOLDS

In fact, a small number of farmers are well off even though they don't own land. Though it is not common at all, it proves that owning a land is the only key to a stable life and buying back the land is not the only solution.

1. Well-off landless households are usually involved in small trade or other services. Most of them live near a market or township, and are rarely found in rural areas.

Table 4 Main occupations of well-off landless households

	Tra Cu	Cao Lanh	Total
Occupation	No	No	No

Farm employee	6	1	7
Services	11	0	11
Agriculture and service	2	0	2
Off-farm employee	0	2	2
Opening small shop	18	15	33
Other	5	4	9
Total	42	22	64

The have lost land in the first place under special circumstances such as loss of crops, diseases, or they have small land. They sold land to change another income generating activity. They open a small grocery shop, coffee shop, selling fruits, candies, sweets, producing ice, candies, motorbike taxi (xe om), trading fish etc. Some shop owners still seek fieldwork for more income. These people are found in or near township areas rather than pure rural areas. In other words, not all poor landless farmers can easily escape their current poverty and get better off.

2. These households have high and stable income

All households interviewed have high and stable income. The lowest income from a coffee shop can be as much as 8-10million VND per year. A grocery shop can yield 16-20 million VND. Those producing ice and candies can earn 30-36 million VND. Motorbike taxi service can even generate 7-8 million VND, excluding the income by other members of the family. Those who open small shop and take sideline jobs can gain profit of 10-12 million VND per year.

3. They are confident in their lives

These families stated that they have made a lot of efforts, worked very hard and economize all expenses in order to escape the poverty. Some of they were poor families before, but they manage to get better off because they borrow small loans to start husbandry (pigs, fish) and small shop. With the current level of income, they don't meet any difficulty with their children's schooling or diseases. Even if the supporting policy for landless farmers does not benefit them, they will not have any difficulty. And they are quite confident to continue their presently stable life .

4. Their concerns and wishes are different from those of poor landless farmers.

These farmers are not concerned about hunger eradication and poverty reduction policies because they have escaped poverty and do almost off-farm work. Their wishes are restricted to borrowing loans to expand their business and tax reduction to increase profit. Those still selling labor along with opening small shop or doing farm work in small scale, wish to borrow loans for investment in their production. Only half of interviewees still wish to own a land to cultivate.

E. HOUSEHOLDS THAT HIRE LABOURERS (EMPLOYERS)

1. Reasons for hiring laborers

In surveyed area, there are 3 types of households who need extra labourers: those owning large land, those providing agricultural services, and those carrying out home industry. The main reason is that they don't have sufficient labour themselves and they have to meet with the deadline.

Not all households hiring labourers collect land. Those doing farming have more than 2 hectares of land and do not have enough hands to do farming or in case they want their children to concentrate on studying, not working on the field, they have to hire extra people, almost seasonally. Those households possessing an agriculture machine can provide different kinds of services such as land preparation, rice harvest, irrigation... for villagers also need extra labourers. Large factories like mill plant need help with heavy work all the year around. Producers of sugars or candies require extra hands to help with both heavy and petty work.

2. There are no differences between wages of landless farmers and landowners. But there are gaps between job opportunities and wages between men and women.

The employees reported that there no discrimination, everybody is paid equally for the same kind of job. The rate is negotiated between the employer and the employee based on local line.

The employers usually think that "a male employee is able to do a variety of tasks, even heavy ones, thus they are certainly paid better" and they "prefer to hire a male employee". Farmers only hire a female employee for picking grass, rice cutting in the field. The employers don't care whether their employees are landless or land owners.

3. Most of them need only simple labourers and do not transfer technology

Farmers hire labourers to do spraying, to pick up the grass, to transport rice. The employers are in charge of technology themselves. According to a employer, if they hire a skillful employer "it is easier for us but we have to pay higher". Some families owning a machine need skillful employee but "*it is not available locally, only one is able to do so*".

Part IV

IMPACT OF POLICIES SUPPORTING LANDLESS FARMERS

1. Government supporting policies of hunger eradication and poverty reduction for the poor are implemented in Tra Cu and Cao Lanh districts in Tra Vinh and Dong Thap respectively.

Table 5: measures taken to help landless farmers in 5 communes

Contends	Households
1. Job creation	4500 labourers
2. Loans to buy back land plus training	250 households
	4500
3. Free trading/service for income generation	818
	4200
4. Farmers employ labourers	-
5. Appealing to community support to the poor landless	9615households
	-
6. Exemption of school tuition and medical care cost	5.000
7. Hunger relief (regular and accidental)	6000
	1305
8. Implement National Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction program	
9. Follow degree 135 of the Gov.	
10. Implement job creation program	

All the supports that poor landless farmers get are those targeting the poor in general. The majority of them were awarded with a land certificate. They also get finance supports from program 135, Bank for the Poor, National Fund for Job Creation, program 2308 (cooperated between Vietnam Farmers' Association and The Bank for Agricultural & Rural Development).

2. The number of poor landless farmers that get a bank loan to buy back their land are better-off than before, a big proportion of them managed to escape poverty.

Bank loans to buy back the land actually support poor landless farmers now. 107 households in Tra Cu were lent 292 million to buy 37.42 hectares of land. According the Ham Giang Commune People's Committee 16 out of more than 470 landless households received loans to buy 6.1 hectares of land, 22.72 hectares of land was lent to 74 landless farmers for cultivation.

In Cao Lanh, 115 landless farmers borrowed 609 million VND to buy 37.79 hectares of land since September 1998, according to data of the district Farmer's Association. People's Committee of My Tho Commune reported that 16 out of 98 landless farmers borrowed the loan and until now 11 of them have managed to get out of poverty.

3. Local Government's supporting activities

Policies that targeting the poor in general

There are several initiatives to help the poor in Tra Cu such as women's credit group, revolving fund, movement of capital support, day for the poor. District Youth Union initiated a movement that promotes household economy development among their own members. District Farmer's Association developed projects helping their members buy back the land. Other local measures include loan to create more job opportunities, changing local economic structure, and exemption of healthcare cost and school tuition for the poor.

Staff of Dong Thap Farmer's Association reported that the province has the policy to create more employment opportunities for the poor, giving loans, and giving priorities to the landless farmers when implementing a policy. The Association also organizes training course of farming production or request those better off to help training the poor landless farmers or to build houses for them.

Policies that targeting the poor landless specifically

In Tra Cu, large landowners were asked to lend part of their land to the landless to grow rice or crops. According to a staff of Dong Thap Farmer's Association, the province has a policy to give loans to the landless to buy land for cultivation.

Welfare policies

The survey showed that the poor landless get the support mainly in form of welfare. Only a quarter of all households were given an investment loan for production and less than 1% were

given a loan to buy back the land. Many households reported that they received free Iodized salt, small sum of money from local authorities as hunger relief. A few were helped to upgrade or restore their house.

The survey reported that those above mentioned policies have reduced the poor landless households' burden. However, only small number of the landless households was given a loan. This rate in Cao Lanh is 19.5% while that of Tra Cu is 23.8%.

In terms of efficiency, thanks to these loans they are “*able to invest in production, able to buy transportation means during the flood season*” and “*it has initially helped solve part of their problem*”.

From the point of views of the local officials, loan has contributed to the poverty alleviation among the poor and eased difficulties faced by the poor landless farmers.

According to a District staff member in Tra Cu, the Central government policies have “*changed the face of rural area, reduced difficulties of the poor landless farmers and as a result, 480 households managed to get out of poverty in 2001*”. An official of Don Chau Commune People's Committee said that these policies have “*reached the poor timely*”, especially credit project helping people buy their land back, giving loans to raise husbandry, hunger eradication and poverty reduction credit scheme. All these have reduced the number of poor households from 985 in 1995 to 679 in 2001.

Cao Lanh district officials thought that above mentioned measures “*have helped some poor households get over the poverty line*” and gradually have more stable lives. Farmer's Association of Cao Lanh District estimated that 43 out of 115 households getting a loan managed to escape the poverty in 2001.

However, the officials also think that the implementation of these policies is not coordinative, the fund is limited and it does not generate the desired effects.

4. Roles of local authorities

Farmer's Association has introduced several initiatives such as loan for buying back the land, investing in production, restoring the foundation of their houses, training course on production. Women's Union has set up support group that members help each other and credit scheme, promoting family planning. Red Cross works with other charity organisations to help the poor... Staff member of Government institution and organisations have suggested several effective solutions to help for the poor landless households.

5. Support from other organisations

Often mentioned are helps of other farmers in the community. These include lending money, giving rice free of charge, or helping rebuild houses. And they can ask for help from their relatives who work and live in other provinces.

6. Efforts of the farmers themselves

In fact, it is difficult to struggle for living by themselves so it is necessary to ask for Government and community's support.

7. Households managed to buy back the land and its effectiveness

7.1 *Those bought back land but are still poor*

People give the following reasons for this situation:

- The common reason is that land bought back is still small to feed a big family. They face similar problems of those owning a small land (3000-8000 sqm)
- Lack of capital for production because they are given to loan for buying back the land or restoring their houses' foundation, therefore not eligible to other credit schemes.
- Lack of appropriate technology to cultivate two crops instead of one as before per year or to farm shrimps, fish in the hope of gaining more profit. These usually require a big capital and it means loan.
- There are old or sick people, and big proportion of their income is spent on medical care.
- Prices of products such as rice, fish, pigs continuously decrease over the last 2-3 years, and their income shrinks accordingly.
- They were in debt before buying back the land. Due to low income, they have to pay interest for private loan and unable to get out of poverty.

7.2 *Those bought back the land and managed to get out of poverty*

The key factors contributing to the success are that these households applied appropriate technology, have small size family or do not have health problems. In addition, they are better at managing the production activities and economising their expenditure, "*having to economise their expenditure in order to save money for production*". Therefore, they don't need big initial capital. Realising the importance of technology they are willing "*to attend training on agriculture extension*". Some borrowed soft loan from the bank instead of high interest one from private source, therefore they can save more money.

Only few of these farmers were interviewed during the survey. It is recommended that further research involving more these farmers should be done on this topic.

Part V

SOLUTIONS TO GRADUALLY STABILISING AND IMPROVING THE LIFE OF THE POOR LANDLESS FARMERS

A. WISHES OF THE POOR LANDLESS HOUSEHOLDS

Most of them expressed the needs for a land and the needs for the government support.

80% of landless households in Tra Cu and 90% in Cao Lanh wish to have a land for their production. In order to do so, they expected help from the government. This tendency is more stronger in Tra Cu with 54.9% of the landless households expressing the wish for a full loan to buy back the land, and 17.4 wish to get partial support of the government to do so, while these rates in Cao Lanh are 24.8% and 11.1% respectively. 44% of the interviewed in Cao Lanh expressed that they wanted to move to a new economic zone.

B. RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS AND THEIR FEASIBILITY

This situation analysis has shown that a feasible solution to the landlessness problem in Tra Vinh and Dong Thap should meet the following criteria:

- In accordance with the Government policies
- Feasibility in terms of finance
- Appropriate for the capacity of implementers at different levels, particularly grass root level and those directly involving in hunger eradication and poverty reduction.
- Meet the demands and suitable with the capacity/skills of landless farmers and low risk.
- Do not create expectation of help from outside among poor people
- Show the results after a few year (around 3-5 years)

- Limit the corruption/misuse opportunities
- Do not create more gender inequality
- Do not affect the environment in a long or short run.

The following recommended solutions are the result of survey findings and discussion at the formal meetings organised in Cao Lanh and Tra Cu.

1. Land related solutions

1.1 Loan to buy back the land

This is the most mentioned solution. The local authorities will consider the needs, conditions of each landless household, who really wishes to escape out of poverty by farming production to make loan recommendations to the Bank. They will get a big loan at low interest for at least 5 years to buy back the land. There will be measures to preventing them to resell the land.

This solution has been implemented in the surveyed locality since 1999. The result shows that only few people were able to get this kind of loan (133 in Tra Cu and 144 in Cao Lanh). Of them only 35% have managed to get out of the poverty after 5 years. Therefore, the following points should be considered:

- Criteria selection should be clear, i.e. those wish and will be able to generate income after buying back land.
- How much land should be bought back. Because a family with 5-6 members will not get out of poverty by cultivating on a 2000-3000 sqm of land. If they buy more than that, they may not be able to pay back the loan.
- Land is just a factor. Others should be also considered, such as capital, technology, price of products, disasters and weather conditions. Therefore, this solution must go with other solutions *effectively* such as capital loan, agriculture extension, and well taking care of product consumption or price subsidy.
- If there are many people unable to pay back the loan, will the bank continue to provide the loan to the other?
- There is one more limitation: those families sold their land (mortgaged at high price, or equal to the market price) will not be able to buy it back.

1.2 Persuade other land owners to lend the land to the landless

It is quite common in Tra Vinh but there is no condition that forces a farmer to lend their land to another farmer, except if they are willing to do so. Factors contributing to the success include the good relationship between the borrower and the lender, type of land (fertile or not), what to do in order to make profit. Besides, capital, technology of the borrower and the price of the products also affect the extent of the success. Therefore, this solution should be considered as a complimentary to other solutions instead of the key one.

1.3 Establish a new economic zone

In Tra Cu, most of the landless farmers do not think about this solution while 44.4% in Cao Lanh want to move to a new economic zone. This long-term solution will release the land constraint, reduce poverty pressure at the locality. We have a lot of experiences in this area and can control risks. However, land must be available in the new zone and the new occupation can't be too different from the current one. Presently, land is not available in Tra Cu, and even in Cao Lanh, there is still no opportunity of establishing a locally new economic zone.

1.4 Training in husbandry and cultivation techniques

This was frequently mentioned in the two surveyed districts' and provinces' plans. It is true that farmers should be transferred technology and learned new experience in order to increase the yield. However it should be taken into account the quality of the training and how the farmers apply what they have learned. Obviously, those lack of knowledge, and appropriate technology and other reasons have lost land; once they gain it back, they should have capital, updated knowledge, appropriate technology of farming, and good experience of successful farmers in order to generate income. Therefore, this has emphasised the importance of technology transfer to landless farmers after they get their land back.

1.5 Make full use housing land

Some landless farmers own large housing land with a big garden. The gardens are left uncultivated, they don't want or don't know how to and even don't have condition to cultivate on their garden. They would need initial 'push', probably called the guidance of seedlings, capital to start cultivation on their garden.

2. Non land related solutions

2.1 Loans to open a shop or start small business

This solution is very meaningful to those with little land or no land and those don't have land but have a lot of labour. Small land will bring little income for these families. If they have to borrow private loan at the interest of 10-15%, they will "*enrich the lenders only*". The loan will help some households easily start their sideline jobs such as weaving, small business. However, the survey showed that only 6.5% of landless farmers in Tra Cu and 4.4% in Cao Lanh were engaged in small businesses. There is also a problem of limited demand of any service or product. Therefore, this solution cannot be applied to all the landless farmers.

2.2 Develop agricultural services affordable for landless farmers

This will help the farmers buy agricultural materials at reasonable price, reducing possibility of getting a high interest private loan to buy these materials. Favorable conditions may include low price (no profit), buy on credit, and that they can buy even if they haven't paid back the last purchase due to loss...in order to enable them to improve production and save money easily. However, landless farmers will not need the materials. Thus, the farmers in Dong Thap need boats, those in Tra Cu would need weaving materials like bamboo, rattan...in accordance with each sideline job. This kind of scheme should generate enough benefit to maintain itself or

management, transportation and storage costs should be subsidised. The Farmer's Association can take this responsibility.

2.3 Develop small scale industry to create more jobs

The advantage of this solution is to create jobs for the landless farmers, especially when there is not much field work. However, the small enterprises are underdeveloped in rural areas, especially in remote ones. The market is stable and there is no guarantee of materials input for continuous production. Besides, if the weaved products are to be exported, highly skillful workers are required. Only a well-designed project will be able to open a new 'path' for the landless farmers who want to engage in such kind of business.

2.4 Develop industrial zone to attract workers

Both provinces have developed a project to establish industrial zones. If the project is implemented, it will create significant number of jobs. However, the landless farmers may not possess required skills or qualification. For example, 58.03% of the jobless in Tra Vinh are illiterate or have not finished the fifth grade and 35.42% have only finished primary school. It may be difficult for them to find a job in a factory.

2.5 Free vocational training (in short and long term) for poor households

This is a promising solution in short or long term. The idea is that children of landless farmers, those were able to finish at least ninth grade, will be trained in a particular job. Training fee can be paid or partially paid by the government. Whether they can find a job after training is another question. According to the 2001 report by Tra Vinh province, jobs were created for 669 labourers (not only for landless farmers) of which 623 are labourers and only 23 labourers are higher education.

2.6 Develop infrastructure

Development of infrastructure will promote and provide favorable conditions for the economic development of the whole region, creating jobs at the spot during the construction of the works and enabling a better access to education, cultural and social activities. Once the infrastructure is improved in Cao Lanh and Tra Cu, transportation facilitate schooling, and medical care, goods distribution will be obviously better.

3 Capacity building for the staff and the community

3.1 Build the determination to fight the poverty

This solution seems not related to economy but will have long term effects. Supporting policies for the poor are necessary, showing the preeminence of our society. The positive side of these policies is that it creates expectation and strengthens the determination and self-confidence of the people to escape poverty. Among solutions to landlessness, only 2.6% of landless farmers in Tra

Cu and 2% in Cao Lanh believed that they would be able to make money to get the land back, while 72.3% and 35.8% in Tra Cu and Cao Lanh respectively expected help from the government. It is significant to motivate the determination of the poor people.

3.2 Strengthening the capacity of poverty alleviation staff

The problem is that the capacity of poverty alleviation staff of concerned institutions/ organizations, particularly at grass roots level is very weak. Most of the responsible staff are unaware of the causes of landlessness problem and do not have specific statistics. There fore, it is necessary to strengthen their capacity in order to meet HEPR demand in general and HEPR for landless farmers in particular.

4 Land policy related solutions

4.1 Prevention of land transfer/sell

It is proposed that households owning less than 5000 square meters of land will not be allowed to sell it and households owning more than 3 hectares of land will not be allowed to buy land in order to limit the number of landless farmers.

- 1.2 Give lands of state owned farms what are not working efficiently to landless farmers and these farmers become staff of the state farm or turn it into a economic zone, in accordance with current policies of the Government.
- 1.3 Give high priority in terms of land in line with Land Law and Decree 64 by the Gov to the poor landless farmers in general when implementing any HEPR or job creation program.
- 1.4 Issue open policies that promote private business, services and farming where there are a lot of landless farmers, in remote areas, and border... By doing so, employment opportunities will be created for landless farmers.
- 1.5 “*Working*” for an employer should be considered a necessary service. And there should be a policy to protect the rights and benefits of the employees. Vietnam Farmer’s Association and other groups are responsible for propaganda
- 1.6 Policy to attract and create enabling working environment for International Development Organisations to help landless farmers.

Part VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Conclusions

1.1 Situation of landless farmers

Landlessness in Mekong Delta progressed mainly before 1997. Since 1998, there are still landless farmers but the landlessness has slowed down thank to the Communist Party and Government's policies encouraging science- technology development, economic structure transfer and intensive cultivation... that increase the productivity per square meter; the farmers realized that higher income from doing agriculture activities rather than working as employees and the value of land increases. Going along with are the Government supporting policies that help a number of landless households buying back their land. However there are high number of households with little land (under 2000sqm) are on the verge of losing their land and fall into landlessness and poverty.

Most of the landless are poor households with very low income (compare with average poor households). To earn living they almost have to *work* for other landowners, but the employment is seasonal and not stable. They cannot afford government medical care, even if they are partially exempted. They don't invest in children's schooling as they need the children's help with housework. Most of them are victims of high interest private loans in Mekong Delta. They feel inferior and pessimistic about their future.

1.2 Causes of landlessness

The landlessness in the two surveyed areas have a historical root. Around half of the current landless farmers had no land or very little land before 1998. 10.7%-15% of landless farmers have forced to mortgage it due to disease burden. Old owners taking back the land is also another

significant reason. Very small number of farmers sold their land because of lacking experience, and wishing to work for another farmer or to change to another activity.

1.3 Impacts of policies targeting the landless

Our Party and the government have worked out many supporting policies for the poor, particularly the National hunger eradication and poverty reduction program targeting the poor have been implemented in the areas. These policies are well appreciated by the people and they have helped some of them. However, the implementation of these programs is not well coordinated. Some landless farmers have not benefited from any of such program. These programs are not very effective in help the poor landless. Part of their hardship was relieved but long-term living condition has not yet improved.

Policies targeting specifically the poor landless are few. In Tra Vinh and Dong Thap, there is investment to help the poor landless such as giving loans, come from the local budget to buy the land back, persuading the land owners to lend part of their land to the landless, capital loan for production, technology transfer via agriculture extension program, vocational training, stud animal provision for farming etc. In fact, very small number of landless farmers have bought their land back and two third of them still live in poverty. Others have better incomes but not yet get over the poverty line

Support of the mass organisations is restricted to propaganda of policy implementation, hunger relief, guiding and guaranteeing with loan procedure, training in new techniques targeting the poor in general. These activities have shown some effectiveness in stabilize people lives.

2 Recommendations

The majority of the landless farmers wish to stabilize the livelihood by having lands back to continue their farming. This is not an optimal solution and is difficult to put into practice because of the limited land, population growth and the increase in current land price. Besides, a number of comprehensive measures are needed to solve the problem. We would like to recommend the followings.

D. LAND RELATED SOLUTIONS

1. The government should issue a policy that supports the households in need and are able to borrow the loan for buying back the land and continue their production on that land.

Around 50% of landless farmers, who have lost land under some special circumstances have labour force and skills. If they are helped to buy the land back they will be able to get out of poverty. Such a credit scheme will require a huge fund and the payback time is long, and is probably beyond the ability of the province. At the current price of 3-4 million per 1000 square meters, each household will need to borrow 15-20 million VND for at least 5 years. Then they will still need another capital loan from the Bank for the Poor to invest in production for better success and avoid the possibility of borrow from private source at extremely high interest in the rural areas.

This solution accept to miss some households who wish to buy the land back but do not have necessary working skills or technology. This solution also means providing welfare instead of helping them continue farming to families that have old people sick or too few labourers.

2. Local government of the two provinces should develop criteria to select the households with potential to get out of poverty, develop classification procedure and credit scheme project to be submitted to the central government for funding.

Once the project is approved and funded, the local government should prepare well and select right beneficiaries, based on previous experience. Special attention should be paid to selection criteria and procedure.

3. Develop new economic zone for landless households who have labour force and skills

Helping landless farmers resettle in the new economic zone is the ‘pathway’ to who wants to live on agriculture. It depends on the land availability of each province and the regulation ability of the central government. Therefore, a new economic zone for landless farmers with labour force and technology is an appropriate solution.

E. NON LAND RELATED SOLUTIONS

1. The government should evaluate the impact and maintain the National hunger eradication and poverty reduction program.

The amount of funds mobilised from different sources for poverty alleviation is rather huge. The two survey provinces recommended evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the program in order to withdraw lessons learned for implementation in the future. So that, there will be more households able to access the fund.

2. The government continues its support to develop industrial zones, build infrastructure, organise vocational training, and create enabling environment for small and medium sized enterprises to develop in order to create more employment opportunities.

Establishment of industrial zone, vocational training and promotion of small and medium sized enterprises to create more jobs in Mekong Delta will require both master plan and policies as well as sufficient information and detailed plan for each province and sector. Therefore, this should be done in a national level project with several components for each sector.

3. Provincial government of Dong Thap and Tra Vinh should carry out feasibility study and formulate projects to promote co-operatives. These co-operatives help farmers with the production and selling their products.

Consumption of products and profitable production are the key factors to helping the farmers escape poverty. Co-operative is one way to help the landless farmers and protect their rights and benefits. The Vietnam Farmer’s Association can play an important role in this process.

4. Local government of Dong Thap and Tra Vinh and Provincial MoLISA should develop a plan to organise vocational training with priorities given to children of landless farmers.

Children of landless farmers hardly benefit from vocational training program as they are usually not qualified enough. To overcome this problem, there should be a training program specially designed for them.

F. CAPACITY BUILDING FOR STAFF AND THE FARMERS

1. The government should develop capacity building project for poverty alleviation staff at provincial, district levels and carry out democracy mechanism at grass roots levels.

Strengthening the capacity of poverty alleviation staff to better implement the programme in a synchronous way will be a long term solution. There is a need for a project to build capacity for each province with different phases. Besides, attention should be paid to promoting democracy at grass root level and allow more participation, communication, dialogue between the landless farmers and the local authorities, so their needs can be heard.

2. Provincial government should assess the capacity of staff involved in hunger eradication and poverty reduction and formulate projects to build their capacity as well as promote administrative reform process and allow more participation.

Building capacity programme should be based on existing situation/reality. Apart from national capacity building programme, each province should have their own program well adapted to suit the local situation and also have long-term objectives; work out training curriculum, organise training courses, result-based evaluation of training should be taken care of. Training should be designed in such a way that allows experience exchange, discussion, problem solving skills, participation rather than lecturing for improving knowledge.

3. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of the two provinces should develop a plan to recruit more grass root agriculture extension staff, improving the capacity of agriculture, forestry and aquaculture staff and technology transfer to poor landless farmers should be also considered.

The technology transfer is effective only when the technology itself is applicable and appropriate for the capacity of the poor. The communication skills of the extension staff also play an important role in the process.

4. Mass organisation, Farmer's Association and Women's Union in particular should plan to build the capacity of their staff so they can help build the will, determination and confidence of the landless.

1.1. Train mass organisation staff to mobilise the landless and to build their self- confidence via practical activities.

1.2. Activity of the Farmer's Association should always go along with other social economic activities, farmers' economic benefits, particularly the poor so that it can attract a lot of

attention of the farmers and is often of their concern. In order to be successful in mobilising and convincing farmers, there should be specific, effective and persuasive pilot model, demonstration, and training that can bring about benefits to farmers. In this light, the survey on “Situation of the farmers with little or no land and solutions” points out some findings and issues that can be taken for further research in the future by the Farmer’s Association.

- 1.3. It is proposed that the Farmer’s Association develop a pilot project. Lessons learned from implementing the pilot project will help build a better intervention, policies that targeting the poor landless.

This draft report is collected in 19 documents from 1990 to 2001 with practical research survey to find the solutions in 5 communes, 2 districts in Tra Vinh and Dong Thap; making pilot project that support landless farmers overcoming their difficulties, stabilising their living. Therefore, the data may not comprehensive, detailed enough to represent for all landless farmers in Mekong Delta.

Vietnam Famer 's Association recommend participants joining in the draft report, writing discussion and representing at the workshop.

Annex

Annex 1:

Conducted Survey model

Subject	Dong Thap			Tra Vinh				Total
	Nhi My	My Tho	Total	Ham Giang	Don Chau	Dai An	Total	
Poor landless or nearly landless farmers	74	79	153	79	76	68	223	376
Better-off landless farmers	10	11	21	0	10	9	19	40
Landless farmers working for other farmers	15	16	31	19	11	16	46	77
Farmers hiring labourers	5	6	11	19	5	5	29	40
Poor landowners	11	10	21	0	11	10	21	42
Farmers bought back their land and still poor	3	5	8	0	4	1	5	13
Farmers bought back their land and escape poverty	2	5	7	0	3	9	12	19
Male/female groups	4	4	8	4	8	4	16	24
Commune officials and village heads	7	7	14	6	6	4	22	30
Commune leaders and technical staff	6	6	12	6	7	8	15	33
District leaders and technical staff			6				4	10
Provincial leaders and			6				6	12

technical staff								
Total	137	149	286	133	141	134	418	716

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