

IMPACT OF LAND ACQUISITION ON SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS OF RURAL WORKERS IN NGHI SON ECONOMIC ZONE, THANH HOA, VIETNAM

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Abstract

Nghi Son Economic Zone, a central economic hub in Vietnam, has experienced significant growth in its industrial and service sectors. This growth has drawn a large workforce from surrounding regions. This research investigates how land acquisition within the zone has affected the social and occupational landscape for rural workers in Thanh Hoa Province. The study will analyze the vocational structure of rural workers before and after land acquisition and clarify their career transition process in this context. To achieve the research objectives, we use quantitative methods and qualitative policy analysis, including collecting and analyzing statistical data on the socio-economic situation, and labor structure in the research area, conducting survey interviews with representatives of 400 households whose land was acquired to learn about changes in their lives, work, and income; and analyzing relevant policies of the Party and State related to land acquisition, compensation, resettlement support, and job creation to inform potential solutions. From the analysis, evaluation, and research, it proposes solutions to minimize the negative impacts of land acquisition, ensure social security, and contribute to improving people's lives and livelihoods. The research has scientific significance in supplementing land policies and labor restructuring studies. It is of practical importance in perfecting land policies and laws, contributing to the country's sustainable development.

Keywords

occupational structure, land acquisition, rural labor, Nghi Son economic zone

Problem statement

Vietnam's Nghi Son Economic Zone, founded on May 15, 2006, under Decision No. 102/2006/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister, aims to be a multi-faceted economic center. The zone's strategy centers on fostering the growth of core industries, including petrochemicals, high-grade steel, machinery, shipbuilding, power, construction materials, consumer goods, and export-oriented manufacturing. The development and utilization of the Nghi Son seaport are integral to the zone's objective of producing competitive goods, increasing exports, and expanding into international markets.

The extensive and rapid growth of the Nghi Son Economic Zone has resulted in the conversion of significant agricultural land, impacting the occupational makeup of the local rural workforce. This has manifested as a decline in agricultural employment and a corresponding rise in non-agricultural jobs. Furthermore, the internal composition of agrarian labor has shifted, with fewer workers engaged in cultivation and animal husbandry and a more significant proportion involved in agricultural support services.

The shift in rural labor's socio-occupational makeup has created challenges for the affected population. Displaced agricultural workers, often lacking the necessary skills and education for other sectors, have struggled to find stable non-agricultural jobs after losing their land. This precarious situation has increased unemployment, underemployment, and financial instability.

To understand and address these challenges, research must examine how land acquisition within the Nghi Son Economic Zone has impacted the socio-occupational structure of rural workers. Analyzing the pre- and post-acquisition employment landscapes will be crucial for developing practical solutions to support the affected population and minimize the adverse effects on their livelihoods.

Research overview

A 2010 study by Moges Gobena found that land acquisition in Ethiopia significantly affected farmers' livelihoods, impacting their food security and the sustainable management of natural resources. After the research process, it was concluded that to create a win-win situation, it is necessary to ensure the participation of stakeholders, environmental impact assessment, and policies to support livelihoods and create jobs. Kathy Le Mons Walker also showed that the confiscation of agricultural land disrupted traditional livelihoods and foundations for survival, leading to protests from farmers, although they were ultimately unsuccessful. These reactions stem from farmers' concerns about their livelihoods when they no longer have land to produce, becoming a new class of people with "three no's": no land, no jobs, and no social security (Kathy Le Mons Walker, 2008, after Nguyen Van Suu, 2010).

Both K. Marx and Halbwachs recognized the importance of land to farmers regardless of the impact of economic, industrial, and service factors. Separating land from farmers will cause difficulties in their livelihoods and spiritual values (Bui Quang Dung, 2007). According to the research of Ravallion and Walle (2010), poor households often fall into the category of landless farmers, hired farmers, those unable to find stable jobs, or families facing risks and illnesses. Urbanization, industrialization, the expansion of the market economy, and the reclamation of agricultural land have contributed to the social differentiation of the peasantry, resulting in three primary tiers: the affluent, the self-sustaining, and the impoverished.

According to Le Tang (2010), the employment structure fluctuates in the direction of strongly developing export-oriented industries while replacing imports with effective domestic products. Industrialization and modernization are the nation's policies in the context of international integration.

According to Nguyen Dung Anh (2014), the demand for jobs of rural workers after resettlement was forecasted, and a synchronous policy framework was proposed, including a compensation policy, damage compensation policy, job creation policy, resettlement policy, policy on responsibilities and obligations of units receiving land recovery and using land to develop industrial parks, export processing zones, and related social policies to ensure jobs and income for rural workers whose land has been recovered. Difficulties in solving the employment problem for workers of households whose agricultural land has been recovered include difficult career transitions due to low qualifications, beyond the recruitment age of enterprises, workers' dependence on state support policies, and ineffective state support.

In the report *"Impact of Industrialization and Urbanization on Livelihoods. Vietnamese farmers: the case of a suburban village in Hanoi"*, Nguyen Van Suu (2010) analyzed the apparent changes in income and the occupational structure of many households. The direction of the shift did not meet the expectations of management agencies and households, and the apparent decline in income from the agricultural sector and the unsustainability of the new livelihoods are the most clearly identified consequences. In addition, other social implications

from the recovery of agricultural land from households are complicated, such as instability, risk, inequality, and polarization between the rich and the poor.

The trend of rural laborers' employment after land acquisition is precarious jobs from outsourcing activities, and a low proportion of people benefiting from the production activities of enterprises or services adjacent to enterprises. Difficulties in employment and income often go hand in hand with increased social evils and environmental pollution, making many hesitant about the current decisions to change land use purposes. When switching to non-agricultural occupations, farmers are not prepared to enter urban economic life, with professions that require cultural and technical qualifications and possibly significant capital.

The survey in Hanoi, Quang Nam, and Binh Duong by Hoang Ba Thinh (2010) and Nguyen Dung Anh (2014) established a positive correlation between higher educational attainment and employment prospects, showing that individuals with more education are more likely to secure employment, maintain stable jobs, and demonstrate proactivity in meeting evolving job demands. Among those with less than a high school education, only 8.2% of people study extra yearly to improve their professional skills or change careers. This contrasts sharply with individuals with a high school diploma, with a corresponding figure of 28.2%. Among those with college or university degrees, the rate rises to 49.7%. As agricultural employment declines, new occupations emerge, particularly in manual labor and small-scale entrepreneurship. This transition places workers within a competitive labor market governed by supply and demand, requiring them to adapt to these new pressures.

Work has covered concepts, reality, and the process of job structure transformation, influencing factors, difficulties and challenges, providing viewpoints and solutions for people, and minimizing emerging social problems, especially the current unemployment situation. They proposed solutions and recommendations to promote employment for rural workers whose land was acquired. The approach, research methods, scope, and scale of each research project have shown a diverse picture of the current situation as well as the issues arising related to the job transition process of rural workers after resettlement due to land acquisition, especially research on economic zones with many unique features such as Nghi Son Economic Zone.

The “gaps” from research works, as well as the experiences and lessons learned, will be the basis for the author’s more systematic research, designing a tight research framework, as well as applying multiple methods to conduct investigations on the current situation, influencing factors, difficulties and challenges that people encounter in the process of job transition. This study has two key aims: to analyze the occupational structure of rural workers before land acquisition, and to examine the process of occupational transition among these workers during the period before and after land acquisition. Based on these analyses, the study proposes strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of land acquisition on the lives and livelihoods of the affected population.

Theory and research methods

This study draws upon Clark and Fourastié’s labor structure theory and the rational choice theory framework that Homans, Blau, and Coleman developed (cited in Nguyen Thi Duyen, 2018). As discussed by Ha Thi Hang (2010), the latter posits that all social interactions and individual behaviors involve a calculation of rewards and costs, with rewards being defined by their ability to strengthen future behavior. Applying this theory to this study to explain the career transition of people after agricultural land is recovered is to calculate the benefits. Individuals will consider the behaviors most beneficial and suitable for themselves. For each age, gender, family situation, and different social relationships, each person will choose the most appropriate job after agricultural land is recovered. The study also uses livelihood theory

to prove that the industrialization and urbanization process is an inevitable part of development, and land acquisition is one of the essential conditions for the implementation of industrialization and modernization of the country. To make a living, people are constantly under pressure from all sides: natural resources, economy, society, and environment. The livelihood of rural workers is land, and when land is acquired, it will directly affect their livelihood.

The study collected and analyzed available documents such as policy documents, studies in scientific journals, books, and scientific research on the current status of occupational social structure, the transformation of occupational social structure, and the advantages and disadvantages of occupational social structure. The sociological investigation method is used in the research with the following process:

- The questionnaire design used the established social science discussion method, moving from theoretical and practical considerations to conceptualization, identifying relevant indicators, and developing appropriate scales. The final instrument consisted of three separate sections: (i) eight questions collecting demographic information about respondents (such as age, gender, education level) and other general information; (ii) six questions exploring the circumstances surrounding land acquisition; and (iii) eighteen questions focusing on employment status and career transition.

- Selection sample: A complete list of 1,990 households in Tinh Hai and Hai Yen communes that had their land acquired and resettled (314 households in Tinh Hai and 1,676 households in Hai Yen). From this list, a sample of 400 households was selected using a random sampling system with a sampling interval of five households, in a single-stage sampling procedure. The population chosen consisted of working-age people from 400 households whose land had been recovered and resettled in Tinh Hai and Hai Yen communes. The data collection work included conducting a structured questionnaire survey with a representative of working-age males or females from each selected household to collect information on social events.

Research results

Type of work	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Cultivation and animal husbandry	86	51.8	156	66.6	242	60.5
Small business and manufacturing services	6	3.6	7	3.0	13	3.2
Worker	29	17.4	28	12	57	14.2
State official	12	7.2	25	10.6	37	9.2
Other jobs (hired labor, housework, small industry)	13	7.8	4	1.7	17	4.2
No job	21	12.6	13	5.5	34	8.5
Total	166	100	234	100	400	100

Table 1. The main occupation of respondents before land acquisition by gender

Source: Research survey data

The main occupation is the activity in which the worker spends the most time and provides a stable income for himself and his household. The analysis shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between the type of main occupation (before land acquisition) and the gender of the respondent, as demonstrated by the Chi-square test (Sig.<0.05). This finding means that the distribution of main occupation types is not the same between males and females in the study sample; in other words, males and females tend to do

different kinds of work before the land acquisition event.

Before land acquisition, the occupational structure of rural workers in the sample was very diverse, including farming, livestock, small business services, wage workers, state employees, and a small proportion of other occupations. Despite this diversity, agriculture (a combination of farming and livestock) was the dominant sector, attracting the majority (60.5%) of respondents. The statistically significant Chi-square results (Sig.<0.05) show that, even in the context of a majority of agriculture, the division of labor or concentration in specific occupations (including both agricultural and non-agricultural jobs such as business, wage workers) also differed significantly between men and women.

Following agricultural workers, the next largest group (14.2%) consisted of laborers working in other cities throughout the country. This segment predominantly comprised young, unmarried individuals lacking local employment opportunities, prompting them to migrate for work. Small-scale local businesses, primarily grocery stores and fishmongers at the market, represented a smaller proportion (3.2%). Workers in fisheries, non-agricultural labor, and other occupations constituted a minor percentage of the sample. Unemployment before land acquisition was relatively low, accounting for only 8.5% of respondents. This result is similar to the research results on the social-occupational structure in other rural areas when land is acquired by Hoang Ba Thinh (2011), Tran Thi Minh Ngoc (2010), Do Thien Kinh (2004), Nguyen Tuan Anh (2004).

There is a gender difference in the type of work between the male (51.8%) and female (66.6%) labor groups in agriculture and livestock. The reason is that the land for agriculture and livestock is small, and the crop season is very short. Women must work at home and take care of their children. Meanwhile, men have to work elsewhere or do other jobs unrelated to agriculture in the locality.

Other main occupational groups include workers, small business services, hired labor, fishing, etc. There is no significant difference in gender between these occupational groups. The experimental results have verified the correctness of the initial theoretical explanation that there is a shift in the type of socio-occupational structure of rural labor in the Nghi Son economic zone, as well as the concept of labor structure of Clark and Fourastié (quoted from Bui Quang Dung, 2007), when dividing the labor structure into three main areas (agriculture; industry and services). Agriculture accounts for the vast majority, and the proportion of non-agricultural occupations is only a modest proportion before land acquisition.

Taking on additional work after land acquisition reflects both workers' adaptability to new employment realities and farmers' increasing occupational mobility in a developing society. The main reason for this secondary employment is to supplement household income to cover daily living costs.

Do extra work	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	24	14.5	20	8.5	44	11
No	142	85.5	214	91.5	356	89
Total	166	100	234	100	400	100

Table 2. Additional jobs before land acquisition by the gender of the respondent

Source: Research survey data

Survey data indicate that while 89% of respondents relied solely on farming as their primary occupation, 11% held an additional job. The low and unreliable income associated with

agriculture and its physically demanding nature necessitates supplemental employment for some households to increase their earnings.

According to respondents' gender, 14.5% of men and 8.5% of women have a side job besides their primary job, which means there is no significant difference.

Age Group	Frequency (Number of people)	Percentage (%)
20-30 years old	44	18,0
31-40 years old	83	34,0
41-50 years old	51	21,0
51-60 years old	49	20,0
Over 60 years old	17	7,0
Total	244	100,0

Table 3. Additional work before land acquisition according to the respondent's age
Source: Research survey data

Table 3 reveals age-related variations in engagement in supplementary employment. The 31-40 age group exhibits the highest participation rate (35%), followed by the 41-50 and 51-60 age groups (both at 20%). The 20-30 age group has a lower rate (18%), while those over 60 have the lowest participation (7%). This distribution can be attributed to several factors. Individuals aged 31-40, often heads of households, may face greater financial responsibilities and possess more experience, leading them to seek additional income. The 20-30 age group, usually still residing with or dependent on parents, may have less immediate financial pressure, even after marriage. Finally, the over-60 age group, likely experiencing declining health and physical capacity, may be less able or inclined to take on extra work beyond their primary agricultural activities.

Only a tiny fraction (11%) of workers engaged in secondary employment during the agricultural off-season. These supplementary jobs were typically characterized by low skill requirements, minimal capital investment, and modest income, often involving small-scale trading, street vending, or day labor. They were primarily taken up by individuals aged 31-40. The high rate of agricultural land acquisition (over 90%) in the Nghi Son Economic Zone raises significant concerns about the employment prospects of those entirely reliant on agriculture. This situation distinguishes land-lost farmers in Thanh Hoa from those in other rural areas, such as Hanoi, Bac Ninh, and Hai Duong, where alternative employment opportunities may be more readily available. Before land acquisition, residents of Nghi Son, similar to other rural communities, had limited access to local side jobs. These findings support the applicability of rational choice theory in situations of imposed occupational restructuring. Individuals, influenced by gender, age, personal circumstances, and social networks, select the most advantageous employment options.

Occupational structure of rural workers after land acquisition in the study area

The compensation payments received by rural households for land acquisition can act

as a catalyst for economic growth and a shift in the labor structure toward industrialization. Some displaced farmers may find employment in industrial zones, potentially earning higher and more stable incomes. This process typically leads to a rapid increase in non-agricultural employment and a corresponding decline in agricultural jobs, fundamentally altering the occupational landscape and labor distribution.

How is this occupational transition taking place? What do people do when they lose their traditional occupations and change their residence? This section will analyze these aspects.

Type of occupation	Before land acquisition		After land acquisition	
	N	%	N	%
Cultivation and animal husbandry	242	60.5	13	3.2
Small business and manufacturing services	13	3.2	47	11.8
Worker	57	14.2	102	25.5
State official	37	9.2	38	9.5
Other jobs (hired labor, housework, small-scale industry)	17	4.2	44	11.0
No job	34	8.5	156	39.0
Total	400	100	400	100

Table 4. Career changes of people before and after land acquisition

Source: Research survey data

Table 4 illustrates a dramatic shift in the occupational structure of rural laborers in the two main sectors, agriculture and non-agriculture, before and after land acquisition. Before the acquisition, agriculture (cultivation and animal husbandry) dominated, employing 60.5% of the workforce; this figure plummeted to just 3.2% afterward. This significant decline highlights the challenge of retraining and re-employing workers displaced from agriculture, a complex issue for local authorities and industrial development projects. Conversely, trade services and small-scale production experienced a marked increase, rising from 3.2% to 11.8%, as did the proportion of workers, which grew from 14.2% to 25.5%. These non-agricultural occupations, typically requiring less formal education, specialized expertise, and capital investment, represent viable alternatives for displaced rural workers in Thanh Hoa. The substantial changes in these occupational groups align with the broader trend of economic restructuring.

Other occupational categories represent a small and relatively unchanged proportion of the workforce compared to the pre-acquisition period. However, a striking finding is the significant increase in unemployment, rising from 8.5% before land acquisition to 39% afterward. This unemployed group includes primary household earners, young adults entering the workforce, and women previously employed in agriculture who have been unable to transition to new occupations. This high level of unemployment constitutes the most pressing challenge and unresolved issue for displaced workers and local authorities in Tinh Hai and Hai Yen six years after the land transfer and resettlement process began.

The survey findings indicate a significant shift in the labor structure of rural households under the current socio-economic transition (STDC): a substantial decline in households solely engaged in agriculture and a rise in those with multiple occupations. This aligns with a 2010 Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development survey, which found that only 16.3% of workers transitioned to new occupations. A relatively large proportion (approximately 22%)

were unemployed or held unstable jobs, hindering their ability to shift to new, particularly non-agricultural, employment. Furthermore, industrial parks recruited a tiny percentage of local workers (only 5-10%). The overall employment structure has changed markedly, with a sharp decrease in purely agricultural activities and a rapid increase in non-agricultural, semi-agricultural, and service-commercial sectors. This transformation supports Clark and Fourastié's labor structure theory, which posits a shift from agriculture as economies develop. However, the current proportion of agricultural workers may be insufficient to meet demand; consequently, some workers have resorted to renting land in other locations to continue their traditional farming practices.

A key distinction exists between the experiences of land-lost rural laborers in the Nghi Son Economic Zone and those in other rural areas. While partial land acquisition is typical elsewhere, allowing some households to continue farming on a reduced scale or affecting only a subset of the community, Nghi Son has experienced *complete* land acquisition. This eliminates agriculture as a livelihood option for affected households. Furthermore, unlike peri-urban areas, where proximity to cities and towns provides greater access to alternative employment, Nghi Son's more isolated location presents a significant barrier to finding new jobs. Consequently, occupational transition presents a particularly acute challenge for purely agricultural households in Nghi Son due to limited external opportunities.

The survey data indicate minimal change in the prevalence of secondary employment before and after land acquisition. The proportion of individuals holding secondary jobs remained relatively stable, at 15.6% pre-acquisition and 14% post-acquisition.

Types of occupations	Before land acquisition		After land acquisition	
	N	%	N	%
Farming, animal husbandry	19	4.8	4	1.0
Services, manufacturing, and small trade	10	2.5	16	4.0
Other jobs (hired worker, maid, small industry)	33	8.3	38	9.0
No side hustle	338	84.4	342	86.0
Total	400	100	400	100

Table 5. Secondary occupation structure of respondents before and after land acquisition

Source: Research survey data

Before land acquisition, secondary employment was categorized into three primary groups, with cultivation and animal husbandry accounting for 4.8% of the total. This is the group of households whose main occupation is a small business, workers, or civil servants. They have secondary occupations of cultivation and animal husbandry, which provide their families with rice, vegetables, meat, etc. Second are service jobs, production, and miniature trading (2.5%) to support the main occupation of cultivation and animal husbandry by doing additional trading during the off-season. The remaining category encompassed other occupations, primarily hiring labor, housekeepers, construction workers, tailors, small-scale craftsmen, etc., accounting for 8.3%, “whenever called,” going from porters to other jobs.

Following land acquisition, a modest increase in secondary employment was observed in two occupational categories: production services and small trade, which rose from 2.5% to 4.0%, and a diverse category of “other occupations,” including hired labor, domestic service,

and small-scale industry, which increased from 8.3 to 9.0%. Thus, to a greater or lesser extent, industrialization and urbanization have impacted and changed the secondary occupation structure of people before and after land acquisition.

Because the income from agriculture is relatively low, some people have to do additional jobs to increase their income to cover their living expenses. Each person and each family decides to choose additional employment suitable for their health and ability. The trend is that people often choose to do extra jobs that do not require much capital and skill level, temporary jobs, and are not stable in the long term. Some have changed jobs in their locality, while others have to migrate to find work in other regions (working as workers and small traders in different cities) for those who have not found suitable jobs due to inappropriate education, professional qualifications, gender, and age group.

Vocational training and job placement assistance provided by economic zones and government initiatives have proven ineffective, failing to adequately prepare workers to meet the hiring demands of businesses. A part of the population relies on policies, not proactively learning a trade and looking for a job. Some households receive significant compensation, ensuring family living expenses for a long time; these factors affect the job conversion of people who lose their land. Empirical research on the social structure of rural workers following resettlement has confirmed the initial hypothesis: a shift in occupational structure occurs before and after land acquisition, which is the increase of the non-agricultural sector, services, and the loss of almost the entire agricultural occupational structure.

The trend of job change among landless workers is based on the calculation of personal benefits and the points suitable for themselves and their households after resettlement. Individuals will make choices considered the most beneficial and ideal for their age, gender, and working capacity, confirming the correctness of the rational choice theory.

Solution

The solutions are mainly based on the analysis of the actual data from this study, with references and influences from the relevant studies that have been reviewed, and reflect general development principles. There is no clear evidence that they were produced directly by people, referring to surveys, or copied from some “good practice” tool.

- *Encourage the development of diverse types of production and business organizations to change jobs:* create conditions for the development and expansion of small and medium enterprises to attract labor so that rural areas can genuinely develop sustainably in the direction of industrialization and urbanization. First, it is necessary to expand the participation of the private economic sector and small and medium enterprises to create a high and stable income. Encourage production and business development in industrial zones and clusters to attract more local workers. Continue to promote vocational training to meet the needs of society and the locality, such as the following industries: mechanics, garment, and industrial cleaning, develop farm economy, tourism, services, and household economy according to local advantages.

- *Improve the level and initiative of farmers in job conversion:* after resettlement due to land acquisition, most rural workers have low education levels and no vocational training. On the other hand, agricultural workers face significant barriers after land acquisition in finding jobs, changing careers, and integrating into a new life. Continue to improve farmers' initiative in self-creation, finding jobs, and increasing income for themselves and their families after agricultural land acquisition. The mentality of waiting for state support has reduced the positivity and initiative of workers whose land has been acquired, in changing careers, and finding new jobs.

- *Continue to improve the effectiveness of State management in supporting job conversion:* local authorities need to coordinate with the Nghi Son Refinery and Petrochemical

Project to search solutions to help farmers use these funds effectively, help workers have the necessary professional skills to meet the needs of businesses, and have the opportunity to be recruited for long-term work.

- *Promote economic linkages to develop production and attract labor:* Farming households will establish close operational links with producing enterprises, serving as crucial raw materials and labor sources for the production process. In this linkage, enterprises invest capital and provide technical guidance and vocational training for farming households to meet the needs of the enterprises' direct employers.

Conclusions

The research findings demonstrate that land acquisition has profoundly transformed the socio-occupational structure of rural workers in Thanh Hoa's Nghi Son Economic Zone. This transformation is characterized by a decline in agricultural employment and a corresponding rise in non-agricultural jobs. There has been a shift in the farm sector from cultivation and animal husbandry towards a more significant proportion of workers engaged in rural services.

The shift in the socio-economic structure of rural labor has profoundly impacted the lives and livelihoods of the population. Many former agricultural workers, displaced by land acquisition, have been compelled to seek employment in non-agricultural sectors. However, due to a lack of relevant job skills and limited educational attainment, these workers often face significant challenges in securing stable and well-paying positions; the rate of agricultural workers switching to non-agricultural occupations and having stable jobs is not high. This leads to unemployment, underemployment, reduced income, complicated lives, etc.

Implementing these solutions requires the leading role of state management agencies for labor, employment, and vocational training at the provincial (Thanh Hoa) and town (Nghi Son) levels, along with the participation of grassroots authorities, training institutions, enterprises, and mass organizations. Synchronized coordination and adequate resources are necessary for these solutions to be effectively implemented and yield positive results for the workers affected by land acquisition.

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